



*Catholic Church Reform Int'l.*  
A global network seeking renewal of the Church

# CCRI SUMMARY REPORT

## *A Sensus Fidelium* Prepared for the Synod

Report summarizing the unique cultural experiences of Families from around the world sharing their views, joys, and challenges of living a Christian Family life in the context of Church Teachings

# Introduction

Referring to the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization, Pope Francis has said: “This important meeting must involve all the people of God.” Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) has taken his call seriously. We believe the Synod must be informed by the voices of the people living in those families in all their diversities. To bring the lived experience of the faithful to the Synod, CCRI conducted surveys and encouraged regional gatherings worldwide to give families of all cultures the opportunity to share their joys and challenges in living a Catholic Christian family life in the context of Church teachings.

With its Forum on the Family in Rome just prior to the opening of the Synod, CCRI will have its Summary Report of those survey and group meetings ready to deliver to the Synod and Vatican officials on Friday and Saturday, October 3-4. The summary will reinforce the Recommendations to the Synod that CCRI put forward last May.

CCRI is a global network of over a hundred organizations and individuals from more than 60 countries seeking reform of the Catholic Church through a united voice and collaborative action to effect that reform.

This report summarizes the findings through late August of those surveys and gatherings on four topics: Fulfilling Relationships, Openness to Life, Gender and Sexuality, and How the Church Learns and Teaches. Separate sections for each of these topics will begin with demographic information from individual survey respondents and group participants, then will summarize their responses with selected comments and personal stories that respondents shared. An addendum to the report shares the summary of a parish meeting in Australia on another important issue to families and the Church, the damage done to families by the clerical sexual abuse of children.

In all four surveys, the overwhelming majority of respondents described themselves as active and progressive Catholics, prepared for significant reform in the Church. CCRI believes that these are voices increasingly not heard in the Church, though they are representative of many—including many who looked for other sources of spiritual sustenance in recent years. These Catholics were eager to share their lived experiences about family life with Synod bishops, but had little or no opportunity to do so through official Church channels—despite Pope Francis’ expressed desire for grassroots input.

CCRI will continue the surveys and regional gatherings through mid-2015 and will provide the 2015 Synod the final Summary Report. Links to the individual surveys can be found at: <http://www.atholicchurchreform.com/gatheringReports.html>. More information on the regional gatherings is available at: <http://www.catholicchurchreform.com/gatheringResources.html>.

# Fulfilling Relationships

*Relationships have to be constantly nourished and nurtured. I've been married for 39 years and I know it's just by God's grace that I am able to stay married. I see the power of prayer and the need to be close to Him to live according to His teachings. (Survey respondent from the Philippines)*

*If a relationship is nurturing, it's good. If it's abusive, it's bad. And this goes for couples as well as for all of our relationships with the Church. (Survey respondent from the United States)*

A total of 376 Individuals from 16 countries responded to the Fulfilling Relationships Survey, answering questions on marriage, divorce and remarriage, cohabitation before marriage, same-sex relationships and other relationship issues. There were 255 female and 120 male respondents. Eighty percent of respondents indicated they were older than 60 years old—only in the Philippines was this age group not the largest; 17 percent were ages 40 to 60.

## Gender and Age of Survey Respondents

Country	Gender		Age Range		
	Male	Female	Younger than 40	40-60	Older than 60
Australia*	17	22	0	10	30
India	3	3	0	4	2
Philippines	0	9	1	3	5
United Kingdom	5	14	0	4	15
Canada	8	23	1	4	26
US - Northeast	8	23	0	3	28
US - Midwest	26	61	1	12	74
US - South	30	66	8	14	74
US - West	15	26	1	6	34
Other**	8	8	0	3	13
Total	120	255	12	63	301

\* One respondent from Australia did not indicate male or female.

\*\* In this report, "Other" includes Austria (1 response), Ireland (5), Mexico (2), the Netherlands (1), Papua New Guinea (1), Peru (1), Portugal (1), South Africa (2), Spain (1) and Taiwan (1).

Forty-eight percent of survey participants were in their first and only marriage; 14 percent were single and never married, 15 percent divorced and 12 percent widowed. Twelve percent were remarried and 7 percent had children from a previous marriage. Seven percent were in an interfaith marriage. Three percent were in a same-sex relationship; small numbers identified themselves as single parents, engaged, or cohabitating with another.

## Respondents' Relationships

Relationship Status	Number Of Respondents
In First and Only Marriage	179
Single, Never Married	51
Engaged	2
Widow/Widower	46
Divorced	58
Remarried	44
Children from Previous Marriage	26
Single Parent	8
In Same-Sex Relationship	11
Cohabiting with Someone	7
In an Interfaith Marriage	27

Half the respondents said they were retired, 23 percent that they were employed and 2 percent unemployed; the rest did not indicate an employment status.

Nearly all respondents were Catholic, 86 percent describing themselves as active Catholics and 12 percent as Catholics in name only and struggling—one Canadian commented: “I am Catholic in name only and not struggling at all.” The remaining respondents were other Christians or persons of other faiths. Eighty-four percent considered themselves progressives and 14 percent “middle-of-the-road” Catholics; the rest said they were conservatives. Eighty-seven percent said they were prepared for significant reform in the Church, including doctrine, and 12 percent were aware of the need for institutional change, but not change in doctrine. Only two respondents said they were satisfied with the Church as it is.

### Religious Status, Catholic Standing and Level of Satisfaction with the Church

Country	Religious Status			
	Active Catholic	Catholic In Name Only And Struggling	Other Christian	Other Faith
Australia	35	5	0	0
India	6	0	0	0
Philippines	8	1	0	0
United Kingdom	17	2	0	0
Canada	25	6	0	0
US - Northeast	27	4	0	0
US - Midwest	76	10	1	0
US - South	83	9	1	3
US - West	34	6	0	1
Other	13	3	0	0
Total	324	46	2	4

Country	Catholic Standing		
	Conservative	Middle-of-the-Road	Progressive
Australia	1	3	36
India	0	0	6
Philippines	0	3	6
United Kingdom	0	4	15
Canada	0	6	25
US - Northeast	0	6	25
US - Midwest	2	9	76
US - South	4	14	78
US - West	2	5	34
Other	0	3	13
Total	9	53	314

Country	Level of Satisfaction with the Church		
	Satisfied With The Church as It Is	Aware That Institutional Change (But Not Doctrine) Needs to Occur	Prepared for Significant Reform Change, Including Doctrine
Australia	0	1	39
India	0	0	6
Philippines	0	4	5
United Kingdom	0	3	16
Canada	0	2	29
US - Northeast	0	5	26
US - Midwest	0	13	74
US - South	1	13	82
US - West	1	3	37
Other	0	2	14
Total	2	46	328

Seventeen priests responded to the survey, including 2 who identified themselves as ordained women priest. There were also 15 former priests, 15 vowed religious and 47 former religious responding.

In addition, 209 persons participated in 23 small groups that met to discuss the Fulfilling Relationships topics in Australia, India, Ireland, the Philippines and the United States. These 23 groups included:

- 65 men and 144 women
- 143 persons 60 or older, 56 ages 40-60, and 10 younger than 40
- 187 active Catholics, 9 Catholics in name only and struggling, 5 other Christians and 3 persons of other faiths
- 142 progressives, 55 “middle-of-the-road” Catholics and 5 conservatives
- 136 respondents prepared for significant change including doctrine, 51 aware of the need for institutional change but not change in doctrine, and 6 satisfied with the way the Church is now
- 65 persons in their first and only marriage, 24 single and never married persons, 23 widows or widowers, 22 divorced persons, 16 remarried persons, 13 persons in a same-sex relationship and 11 in an interfaith marriage
- 59 retired and 44 employed persons
- 9 priests, 5 former priests, 6 religious and 12 former religious.

### Support for Reform

Respondents were asked to indicate, from a given list of topics, areas that they felt were in need of reform. Topping the list were divorce and remarriage, which 80 percent said needed reform, and withholding the Eucharist, which 78 percent said needed reform. Percentages for other topics were 72 percent for both annulments and same-sex relationships, 65 percent for interfaith marriages, and 57 percent for couples living together.

**Topics in Need of Reform**

Country	Couples Living Together	Divorce and Remarriage	Annulments	Same-sex relationships	Withholding Eucharist	Interfaith Marriages
Australia	25	37	36	32	37	32
India	4	6	6	4	6	6
Philippines	6	6	7	4	7	6
United Kingdom	15	18	16	15	19	12
Canada	25	28	23	29	28	24
US - Northeast	23	31	25	28	28	23
US - Midwest	54	83	79	75	81	70
US - South	21	38	32	36	40	27
US - West	26	37	34	32	34	33
Other	14	15	12	14	14	13
Total	213	299	270	269	294	246

Fifty-three respondents in the United States provided no response to this question; if they are excluded from the analysis, each of these percentages would be 10-12 percentage points higher—for example, 93 percent favoring reform in policies on divorce and remarriage, and 92 percent on withholding the Eucharist.

### Cohabitation and Preparation for Marriage

Provided the statement, “I believe that the Church should show compassion to couples who choose to live together in committed relationships prior to getting married,” 163 respondents agreed and 161 strongly agreed; only 27 disagreed or strongly disagreed. Vast majorities favored this statement in all countries and regions..

**Level of Agreement That the Church Should Show Compassion to Couples Who Choose to Live Together in Committed Relationships Before Marrying**

Country	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	18	16	1	1
India	1	3	1	0
Philippines	5	4	0	0
United Kingdom	11	6	1	1
Canada	17	9	2	3
US - Northeast	10	17	1	1
US - Midwest	33	40	2	4
US – South	38	46	1	5
US – West	20	15	0	2
Other	8	7	0	1
Total	161	163	9	18

Of the 23 small groups, ten strongly agreed and ten agreed with this statement, while 3 strongly disagreed.

Three respondents, the first from Canada, the next two from the United States, spoke from their personal experience in comments on this question:

*Living together for a period of time before marriage is a sensible way to introduce the everyday realities of married life to a couple. Far better to learn this way that you are/are not compatible! My husband and I lived together for four years prior to marriage (and were sexually involved for three years before deciding to cohabit). I believe that this careful and deliberate way of handling our relationship helped us to grow into the married state. We have been married for 31 years and at each stage of this relationship, our love has grown and deepened.*

*Although different than how I was raised, it is a trend I have seen become prevalent among my seven children. In all cases, except one, the couples eventually married. The one couple that did not marry found that they were unsuited for marriage to one another. It is something that works, so I do not see why, if we as parents are understanding, why can't the Church be also understanding? This rigid stance certainly drives most couples to disregard MANY of the church's teaching, and very few couples are being married in the church.*

*I did not consider living with my first husband before marriage. Had we lived together for over a month, I never would have married him. I married him 9 months after we met, so I really did not know him. Even though I knew I had made a mistake early on, I was totally committed to the marriage because of my Catholic upbringing. I made strenuous efforts to make the marriage a happy one. Nevertheless, after eight years and three children, my first husband abandoned me, our "marriage" and his family. I cannot really criticize the younger generation for living together for a while before marriage. They understand what a terrible gamble they are making when they marry in the Church before they really know the person they are marrying.*

A few additional comments (the home country of the respondent is indicated in parentheses):

*Because a couple has not gone through a formal ceremony does not mean they are not married. The couple marry each other. They are not married by the Church! The Church is simply the witness and may provide a building and a formal celebrant. A marriage is made in the hearts and the commitment of the couple to each other. Yes, the quality of every relationship has a big impact on the rest of us and we should support and encourage love and fidelity in couples. However, I don't believe it was ever our prerogative, or that of our unelected representatives, to pass judgments on whether, or not, marriages are valid in the sight of God. That should be left to Her to decide. I am in favour of a civil legal framework around marriage and separation/divorce to protect the rights of all parties as far as possible where a marriage has failed. I believe this is an area where separation of Church and state is*

*helpful to prevent a heavy overlay of moralising on what is already a painful and lasting experience for all involved. (Australia)*

*I don't personally agree that couples should be living together prior to getting married and I don't advocate that but yes, the Church can show compassion and more than compassion, maybe the Church can educate our people, especially the young in an inviting and non-threatening way about the beauty of the sacrament of marriage and the total giving of oneself to the other in that context. (Philippines)*

*I believe that people need time and space to get to know each other and to explore what the relationship means to them. I feel that there should be a sense of making committed relationships, but that this does not always mean that there needs to be life enforcing marital vows before living together. I am not a believer in the Catholic Church's stance on "complementarity" as I believe that every relationship needs to be worked on and worked through, but how this is supposed to happen without the opportunity, which may take years, to learn that the committed partner is able to formulate a relationship without being part of a household, is impossible. (United Kingdom)*

*I do not believe that this state of life should be cause for the Church to chastise. If couples are living together, which usually means they are testing the waters to see if the relationship is viable for the long term, the Church should be there to help them and encourage them to examine their relationship in the context of their faith and faith community. With support, they may marry in the Church and see it as a loving community which will be there for them when they encounter questions and difficulties. The present pastoral response, I hear, often turns couples away from the Church even when they were hoping to explore a sacramental marriage. (Canada)*

The survey asked what kind of pastoral care the Church might provide to people preparing to marry: 320 responded that it should assume an advisory rather than its traditional prescriptive role, 316 said it should provide realistic guidance to engaged couples, and 294 said it should honor those who make a genuine commitment in co-habitation before marriage.

Among the 23 small groups meeting on this topic, 19 supported an advisory rather than prescriptive role, 18 favored realistic guidance to engaged couples, and 21 supported honoring those making a genuine commitment in co-habitation.

## **Divorce and Annulment**

“When you're hurting the most, you need the Church to help you through it,” one person said responding to questions about divorce and annulment. Most respondents to the survey feel that such help is lacking.

Asked what pastoral roles the Church could play for persons facing difficulties in their marriages or other relationships, the vast majority of respondents supported all those listed. Drawing the most support—from 361 of the 376 respondents—was recognizing the reality that relationships break down, and not excluding from sacramental life those who have been unable to sustain their marriage. As one American woman commented: “(It is) difficult to have children in the Catholic Church and be divorced. They are preparing for sacraments that mother cannot participate in.”

More than 90 percent also favored supporting and blessing all efforts to develop genuine, loving and fulfilling relationships, welcoming children of divorced couples and treating them with respect, and providing resources for families facing relationship breakdown. More than 80 percent called for the Church to assume an advisory rather than prescriptive role and to simplify the annulment process—and many respondents suggested in comments that the annulment process be eliminated.

**Support for Roles for the Church in Providing Pastoral Care  
For People Facing Difficulties in Marriages and Other Relationships**

Country	Support And Bless All Efforts	Advisory Not Prescriptive Role	Recognize Reality Of Relationship Breakdown	Provide Resources For Families	Simplify Annulment	Ensure Children Are Welcomed
Australia	34	33	40	34	37	35
India	6	5	6	5	6	6
Philippines	9	7	9	9	8	9
United Kingdom	18	18	18	18	18	19
Canada	29	28	30	29	27	29
US - Northeast	29	28	31	31	27	29
US - Midwest	81	74	82	80	71	82
US – South	89	69	90	83	71	87
US – West	39	36	39	38	36	39
Other	16	15	16	15	14	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>351</b>

The full statements on the survey were:

- Support and bless all efforts by the faithful to develop genuine, loving and fulfilling relationships
- Assume an advisory role rather than a prescriptive role
- Recognize the reality of relationship breakdown and not exclude from sacramental life those who, in good faith, have been unable to sustain their marriage
- Provide resources for families experiencing relationship breakdown
- Simplify the Annulment process
- Ensure that children of divorced relationships are welcomed and treated respectfully

There was strong support among the 23 groups that met to discuss this topic, with between 19 and 21 of them supporting each of the proposals.

There was widespread dissatisfaction with the annulment process. One hundred forty-five strongly disagreed and 138 disagreed with the Church’s current annulment process; only 35 strongly agreed or agreed with that process. Among the group meetings, 13 strongly disagreed and six disagreed with the statement, while two strongly agreed and one agreed.

**Level of Agreement with Existing Annulment Process**

Country	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	1	1	15	18
India	0	0	3	1
Philippines	0	2	3	2
United Kingdom	0	0	10	5
Canada	0	2	14	8
US - Northeast	1	1	16	9
US - Midwest	5	2	23	46
US – South	8	6	31	35
US – West	3	1	14	17
Other	2	0	9	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>145</b>

In comments accompanying this question, respondents said the process was too legalistic when it should be pastoral, was emotionally stressful on people already going through the pain of civil divorce, and financially costly—and potentially unfair if some cannot get an annulment because they cannot afford it. Several suggested that the process needs to be a local one, perhaps at the parish level, and to involve professional counseling. A number of respondents thought the process should be eliminated entirely, and one, from the United States, suggested the following:

*I haven't checked "simplify the Annulment process" anywhere. That's because I think it should be MORE difficult to obtain an Annulment—and should only be granted in extreme circumstances. What I think the Church should do is recognize and accept divorce.*



One criticism was the characterization that a marriage was not valid, and the implications of that:

*My understanding is Annulment means the marriage was not a valid marriage—insulting to both parties and the children. The marriage existed, it just didn't work. Marriage is a sacrament or covenant between partners. Each gives to the other. When this ceases for whatever reason, the covenant has been broken. There needs to be an acknowledgement that the covenant no longer exists and therefore both parties are free to say that they were married but no longer therefore enjoy the rights of other singles. The Church could formalise this process. (Australia)*

Several respondents shared negative personal experiences with Annulment:

*I have a sister whose husband left her when he told her to get an abortion, "get rid of it or I am leaving." She said it was not an option and he left. A few years later she met someone and went to the parish priest and asked him about an annulment. His response was, "I will need \$500 up front before we can discuss!" She is now a Methodist. (United States)*

*I attended meetings regarding completing the Annulment process. At the time I could not afford either the time or the money to do so. I was working full-time, caring for my two children, and earning an advanced degree required for my job. The more I thought about the process, the more sure I became that the process would not be beneficial. I might feel vindicated by blaming my ex, but this would not help me heal. I had to determine what changes I needed to make so I would not marry the same kind of person again. Counseling was very beneficial. Spiritual direction with a Jesuit priest I highly respected was the most beneficial. I raised my two children in the Catholic faith. They are very successful and have families of their own. I will not go through the Annulment process. (United States)*

*The process was difficult and I can't imagine [someone] passing judgment on a 25-year marriage/Annulment and never meeting me! The after-care was non-existent and it was more troubling than the actual divorce. It takes a strong person to persist and complete the Annulment process. There was very little support. (United States)*

Some respondents, however, reported that they found the process helpful and healing, for example:

*In 1980 I was divorced from my first husband. In 1982 I was a single parent with four children and thinking about getting married again. Our pastor knew my financial circumstances and used parish money to pay the cost for the Annulment process. Filling out the paperwork was tedious but also valuable as it forced me to really think hard about what happened before I got married and what went wrong during the marriage. I have been married now for 31 years and I think the Annulment paperwork helped me grow and be able to make a better decision about getting married and staying married. A former pastor who knew my circumstances in the marriage had told me years ago that I would be eligible for an annulment if I divorced my husband. After my divorce I put off going for the annulment but then was glad I did. (United States)*

One final comment from a respondent very familiar with the process:

*I was a judge on the Tribunal for several years so I understand the process. It is far too focused on canon law and some sort of idealism. It judges people's past action rather than dealing with the present circumstances they find themselves in. I agree there needs to be a period of time to allow the human process of sincere effort at reconciliation, then separation, before entering into a new long term relationship. But where this happens let couples deal with the reality of life as it presents itself now and into the future. This is as important for the children as it is for the couple. The Tribunal only looks at the couple at the time of marriage and ignores the rest of life's experiences. My wife and I have also been involved with Restorative Justice in Africa, those concepts and processes are much closer to what the tribunal should be about. (United Kingdom)*

## Withholding the Eucharist

Denying the Eucharist has become controversial in the Catholic Church, and a practice that respondents to the survey overwhelmingly opposed. Offering a sentiment shared by many, a person from the United Kingdom suggested: “The Eucharist should only be withheld in situations where we can visualise Jesus turning someone away from the table empty-handed—i.e. never.”

Ninety-four percent of respondents opposed withholding the Eucharist for those who were divorced and remarried, and 90 percent each for those in an interfaith marriage and not married in the Church because they could not promise to baptize their children, for those living in a relationship without marriage and for being in a same-sex relationship. Eighty-five percent rejected withholding Eucharist for persons in another Christian denomination. One respondent chose not to answer these questions because “This topic is too complex to answer with the options given.” Large percentages opposed withholding the Eucharistic in these situations in all countries and regions.

### Should the Church Withhold the Eucharist from People Because They Are:

	Yes	No
Part of Another Christian Denomination	29	318
Living in a Relationship Without Marriage	11	339
Divorced and Remarried	3	355
In a Same-Sex Relationship	11	339
In an Interfaith Marriage but Not Married in the Church Because They Were Unable to Promise to Baptize Their Children	11	339

Most of the 23 groups meeting on Fulfilling Relationships also answered these questions negatively: 17 opposed withholding the Eucharist from members of another Christian denomination, 18 from persons living in a relationship without marriage, 21 from persons who are divorced and remarried, 19 from persons in a same-sex relationship, and 17 from persons in an interfaith marriage. Only two groups favored withholding the Eucharist from other Christian denominations and one for persons living in a relationship without marriage.

An American who supported withholding the Eucharist in all the situations described said:

*“It is important that people who receive the Eucharist believe it is the real body and blood and be in a state of grace to receive the Eucharist, as I was taught as a child. Greater emphasis has to be placed on this practice in the Church today.”*

An American who supported withholding the Eucharist from non-Catholic Christians but not in the other cases commented:

*“If we truly believe as Catholics that the Eucharist is the body of Christ, then we need to be sure that those who receive know this, so I said Yes for the first part [withholding the Eucharist from other Christians]. As to the other conditions, I would not want to see someone come up for communion and be turned away, but the Church still needs to teach this is wrong and let the parties be guided by that teaching and their conscience.*

Two Americans shared personal stories of situations in which the Eucharist was withheld:

*I especially am hurt by not being able to receive Eucharist if a person is part of another Christian faith. I have a daughter who is part of another Church. She lives her life more faithfully than many Catholics who receive but if she comes to the Catholic Church she cannot receive. That angers me. If I die I realize many of my children will not be able to receive communion at my funeral. The Church does not care how deeply that hurts.*

*I believe that Jesus invited all to receive His Body and Blood. To exclude people from partaking is very damaging. My father was divorced and married my mother. He went to Church every Sunday for 36 years without receiving communion. He finally received an annulment in 1986. My mother became Catholic and still supports the Church today. I still feel horrible about how this very devout*

*man had to stay in the pew while everyone went to communion. I felt alienated as his child watching this Sunday after Sunday.*

### Supporting Couples in “Irregular Relationships”

Asked how the Church can support persons who are in same-sex relationships, are divorced and remarried, are in interfaith marriages or are in other relationships the hierarchy calls “irregular,” 90 percent supported compassionate outreach, 88 percent favored affirming their personal right to make decisions on well-formed consciences, 85 percent said to welcome all who wish to receive the Eucharist, and 73 percent supported simplifying the annulment process.

**Ways the Church Can Support Persons in Relationships That Are Called “Irregular”**

Country	Welcome everyone who wishes to receive the Eucharist	Demonstrate compassionate outreach to family members in these relationships	Simplify the Annulment process	Affirm their personal right to make decisions based on a well-formed conscience
Australia	35	36	30	36
India	5	6	5	5
Philippines	8	9	8	9
United Kingdom	15	16	13	18
Canada	31	29	21	28
US - Northeast	25	30	23	26
US - Midwest	76	81	68	80
US - South	78	82	66	77
US - West	35	37	29	38
Other	12	14	11	12
Total	320	340	274	329

Responding to slightly different statements on “irregular” relationships, 20 or 21 of the 23 groups were in favor of openness on the part of the clergy, welcoming all who are well-motivated to receive the Eucharist, demonstrating compassionate outreach to family members in these relationship, and affirming the personal right of people in these relationships to make decisions based on well-formed consciences. Fourteen of the groups favored simplifying the annulment process; 6 favored abandoning it, and one suggested the use of pastoral counseling as an alternative.

Regarding these relationships, one American commented:

*The Church needs to recognize that these people are not out to hurt themselves or anyone else. They are just loving each other and wanting a world filled with supportive love for everyone. Mistakes are made. People change. Relationships break down. These are all parts of being human. That is who Jesus loves and wants to be a part of—not the perfect, self righteous, never made a mistake, judgmental people.*

But some reported that they have not found this kind of support in the Church—for example this woman from Africa:

*When my husband had an affair in 1988, I received no support or assistance from the Church. My then parish priest told me he did not know what to say, and that he would pray for me. I had to struggle through the affair and its aftermath alone and making my decisions from reading. I also received no support from the Church in previous years when I had to deal with infertility and tried to learn the exact teaching of the Church—again I made my decisions alone and from reading.*

And several respondents protested the label placed on these relationships; said one American: “A loving relationship cannot be ‘irregular.’”

And an Australian noted the difficulties that all people face living in relationships:

*All of us must make our decisions within the limitations of our personality, intelligence, spiritual development, upbringing and immediate and wider culture and environment. Certainly, as we look around us, we see some people making decisions which we regard as quite flawed. But what would I do if I were that person with all that person’s limitations of consciousness rather than my own? I*

*cannot possibly know and I believe it is certainly not for me (or my unelected Church representatives) to pass judgment on them. My role is to show respect, support and love to that person. It may also be to share the pain of the decision going badly and to help the person to pick up the pieces without condemnation. This is also what I would want from the Church.*

## **Personal Stories and Additional Comments**

Many survey respondents accepted the invitation to share personal stories or other comments. Here is just a sampling:

*I married a convert, who was receiving instruction when we met. Very early in our marriage he stopped going to Mass, mainly out of laziness, I believe. He said he had his own relationship with God. We remained married for 35.5 years and I finally got my divorce. It took me many years to realise that I was able to end the dead and intimidating marriage and live a separate life. I've always attended Mass and receive the Eucharist. I haven't met anyone and I haven't looked to meet anyone, so currently remarriage is not an issue for me but I would like those who've been in very difficult marriages and are able to extricate themselves from the marriage to be able to receive the Eucharist. (United Kingdom)*

*My husband and I have been happily married for 51 years. We have always practiced our faith and we live our beliefs daily but, sad to say, our three grown sons are very disillusioned by what has gone on in the Church and they do not attend mass or receive the sacraments. It is not the upbringing they had but we cannot live their lives for them. All of them are in relationships with divorced women and only the youngest is married after an Annulment. I have a nephew who is gay not by choice but by birth and it saddens me and my sister that he is not accepted as one of God's creations. (Canada)*

*As a religious sister I got pregnant—life was lonely, confusing, controlling, and I fell in love. I was unable to marry the father of the baby (from a foreign country and the communication issues were too difficult). I met a wonderful, divorced man who, by a crazy and lucky fluke of being baptized Catholic by a nun in the hospital as a baby even though his family was not Catholic and his first marriage was not a Catholic marriage, hence null in the Church, we were able to be married in the Church. This man went to Church with us, his family, for 20 years before he finally took the steps and became a full-fledged Catholic. He joins me in the frustration of the Catholic Church in recognizing the role of women, the view of same sex marriages, the issue of birth control (we used it), and other issues of the Church. (United States)*

*My early years of married life were an agony. There was no one I could turn to during years of his alcohol infused verbal, physical and mental abuse. I had been raised to see marriage as a forever thing—no matter how bad. But when I found out that he was sexually abusing our daughters I could no longer continue. What he had done trumped all Church teaching. When I first tried to find out about the annulment process, the priest just threw a few papers across his desk to me. Then he dismissed me and sent me home like a disobedient child. It took me another 10 years to approach the process again. This time (another priest) sat and typed while I talked and poured out my heart. It was so painful. And as I said above, I so often felt the need for a hug which he could not give me. (United States)*

*I lied to my archbishop that I was not living with my fiancé so that I could be married in the Church. We were poor students at the time. It simply made no sense to not live together. If the Church had refused to marry me, I would not be a Catholic today. Also, my mother and father divorced many years ago. She is remarried and has been with her second husband for 20 years. Her divorce and remarriage likely were a mistake. She is no happier now than before. Yet, what is she to do now? Should she now walk away from her responsibility to an aging second husband simply so the Church can give her communion? Although she still faithfully attends Church (and receives communion), she is not registered with a parish and feels unable to participate in community life. What a waste. (United States)*

*I was an active, practicing Catholic for the first 59 years of my life. I stepped away from the Church due to the inability of the church to welcome women to the table of the Lord, to welcome divorced and remarried Catholics to the table of the Lord, to welcome our brothers and sisters who are in same-sex relationships to the table of the Lord. I was also deeply disturbed by the ongoing inability of Church leadership to recognize and accept responsibility for the scandal of priests abusing children in our society, and not holding accountable bishops and cardinals who covered up this ungodly behavior. It was unbelievable to me that the Church could compare women and others who spoke of ordination of women to the same level as priest who abused children, and worse that some of those people were excommunicated while not one priest, bishop, or cardinal faced that same outcome. I have stepped away from the Church and I am now happily involved in an Inclusive Catholic community led by a woman who was ordained as part of the women's priest movement. This community welcomes all to the table of the Lord, recognizes and accepts the God-given gifts and talents of those present, and reaches out to those in need who have been ostracized by the church. (United States)*

*In my own relationship, my husband is agnostic and opposed to much that he perceives the Catholic Church stands for, and has refused the required pre-Cana. I am sure that one spouse being atheist or agnostic and against church is not an uncommon situation in many developed countries. (In the) eyes of the Church, we are not married--even though we have been together for 20 years! I am in every other respect a faithful Catholic who attends Mass as often as possible, Sundays a minimum but often weekdays as well. I try to live my faith on a daily basis, often failing, but always striving. We are in a loving and committed relationship, and despite my husband's disbelief, he is understanding and supportive of the role of religion in my life. (United States)*

*I married, young and ignorant, a man who has no faith/church affiliation. We have been married for 42 years and raised three children, now have almost 7 grandchildren. We have struggled, but persevered and our relationship is God centered and improving with every year. Given the circumstance, I long ago decided not to follow the Church teaching on the use of birth control. I baptized and faithfully took all three children to Church every week, but they are not interested in the Church, turned off instead. The Church teachings on birth control are archaic and show a total lack of responsibility toward the world as a whole. (United States)*

*I have had over 20 years of Catholic education from first grade through graduate programs. As a gay man, the negative perception and discrimination toward gay individuals throughout all of my education has only provided guilt and anger on my part. Catholic theory and theology is not related to human experiences. Most educators and religious provide an attitude that they are saints and that the lay people are ignorant and at a lower level themselves in their relationships with God. God and I have a very close relationship---no guilt, not demeaning. The emphasis for Catholic theology should be on love and commitment, not guilt. (United States)*

*I am 78 years old and knew I was a homosexual when I was very young. I hated myself for this 3/4 of my life because I was told it was sinful. What was I supposed to do? Marry a man and create a life of unhappiness for two people and maybe an entire family? (United States)*

*Church teaching on the value and beauty of loving relationships, the gift of children, the care of the elderly, is marvelous. In a world where porn, the sexualisation of girls, broken marriages, child abuse, and casual sex are so commonplace, we need it. It is an affirmation of the meaningfulness and value of human beings. Unfortunately all we seem to hear is the hierarchy attempting to control people by such force as is at their disposal (i.e., withholding sacraments). (United Kingdom)*

# Openness to Life

*“If I am pro-life (as I am), that means THE WHOLE of life, and everyone’s life, not just that of the pre-born. We gravely weaken our pro-life arguments by failing to centre them on this basis.  
(Survey respondent from the United Kingdom)*

The Openness to Life Survey asked questions on human life, creation, Pope Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae*, women’s roles in the Church, and families. A total of 365 Individuals from 15 countries responded to this survey, 248 females and 116 males. Eighty percent of respondents indicated they were older than 60 years old, and 16 percent were ages 40 to 60.

## Gender and Age of Survey Respondents

Country	Gender		Age Range		
	Male	Female	Younger than 40	40-60	Older than 60
Australia	17	29	0	10	36
India	4	4	0	4	4
Philippines	0	9	1	3	5
United Kingdom	9	16	0	2	23
Canada	6	23	1	3	25
US – Northeast*	8	27	1	0	35
US – Midwest	16	46	0	12	50
US – South	31	58	8	15	66
US – West	15	30	1	7	37
Other**	10	6	0	4	12
Total	116	248	12	60	293

\* One respondent from the U.S. Northeast did not indicate male or female.

\*\* In this report, “Other” includes Argentina (1 response), Brazil (1), Cyprus (1), France (1), Germany (1), Ireland (7), the Netherlands (1), Peru (1) and South Africa (2)

Forty-eight percent of survey participants were in their first and only marriage; 11 percent were single and never married, 16 percent divorced and 12 percent widowed. Ten percent were remarried and 6 percent had children from a previous marriage. Seven percent were in an interfaith marriage and 3 percent were single parents, while 5 percent were in a same-sex relationship, 2 percent were cohabitating with another, and one person was engaged.

## Respondents’ Relationships

Relationship Status	Number Of Respondents
In First and Only Marriage	177
Single, Never Married	39
Engaged	1
Widow/Widower	42
Divorced	57
Remarried	38
Children from Previous Marriage	23
Single Parent	10
In Same-Sex Relationship	17
Cohabiting with Someone	7
In an Interfaith Marriage	21

Fifty-two percent of the respondents said they were retired, 21 percent that they were employed and 1 percent unemployed; the rest did not indicate an employment status.

Nearly all respondents were Catholic: 83 percent identifying themselves as active Catholics and 15 percent as Catholics in name only. Eighty-four percent considered themselves progressives and 13 percent “middle-of-the-road” Catholics; the rest were conservatives. Eighty-seven percent said they were prepared for significant reform in the

Church, including doctrine, and 12 percent were aware of the need for institutional change, but not change in doctrine. Only two respondents said they were satisfied with the Church as it is.

### Religious Status, Catholic Standing and Level of Satisfaction with the Church

Country	Religious Status			
	Active Catholic	Catholic In Name Only And Struggling	Other Christian	Other Faith
Australia	36	9	1	0
India	8	0	0	0
Philippines	8	1	0	0
United Kingdom	21	4	0	0
Canada	23	6	0	0
US - Northeast	30	5	1	0
US - Midwest	51	10	1	0
US - South	76	9	1	3
US - West	39	6	0	0
Other	11	5	0	0
Total	303	55	4	3

Country	Catholic Standing		
	Conservative	Middle-of-the-Road	Progressive
Australia	2	7	37
India	0	0	8
Philippines	0	3	6
United Kingdom	0	3	22
Canada	0	4	25
US - Northeast	0	7	29
US - Midwest	2	6	54
US - South	5	10	74
US - West	3	5	37
Other	0	1	15
Total	12	46	307

Country	Level of Satisfaction with the Church		
	Satisfied With The Church as It Is	Aware That Institutional Change (But Not Doctrine) Needs to Occur	Prepared for Significant Reform Change, Including Doctrine
Australia	0	4	42
India	0	0	8
Philippines	0	3	6
United Kingdom	0	4	21
Canada	0	1	28
US - Northeast	0	7	29
US - Midwest	0	5	57
US - South	2	14	73
US - West	0	6	39
Other	0	1	15
Total	2	45	318

Survey respondents included 21 priests, four of whom are ordained women priests, 14 former priests, 14 vowed religious and 47 former religious.

In addition, 21 group meetings involving 219 persons, 66 men and 153 women, met to discuss Openness Life topics in Australia, India, Ireland, the Philippines and the United States. These 21 groups included:

- 152 persons 60 or older, 48 ages 40-60, and 19 younger than 40

- 204 active Catholics, 8 Catholics in name only and struggling, 4 other Christians and 3 persons of other faiths
- 155 progressives, 53 “middle-of-the-road” Catholics and 4 conservatives
- 139 respondents prepared for significant change including doctrine and 79 aware of the need for institutional change but not change in doctrine, but none satisfied with the way the Church is now
- 85 persons in their first and only marriage, 16 single and never married persons, 27 widows or widowers, 21 divorced persons, 16 remarried persons, 9 persons in an interfaith marriage, 4 single parents and 4 persons in a same-sex relationship
- 65 retired and 55 employed persons
- 8 priests, 4 former priests, 6 religious and 14 former religious.

**Support for Reform**

Respondents were asked to indicate, from a given list of topics, areas that they felt were in need of reform. Eighty-one percent called for a new focus on the giftedness of women and a just and equitable treatment of them; 80 percent favored shifting the culture of the Church from fear-based to a focus on love and joy, and 78 percent said supporting responsible parenthood (recognizing that when a couple makes love, they are making a marriage; not every act of love between husband and wife must be open to the possibility of procreation). Presenting a fuller definition of the blessings of all life (caring for the planet, just immigration laws, poverty, etc.) was favored by 73 percent of respondents, and emphasizing the life-giving nature of the marital relationship by 55 percent of them. Fifty-three respondents in the United States did not respond to this question; if they are excluded from the analysis, each of these percentages would be 10 or more percentage points higher—for example, 95 percent favoring a new focus on women’s gifts and their just and equitable treatment, and 94 percent for a Church culture based on love and joy rather than fear.

**Topics in Need of Reform**

Country	Fuller Definition Of Life’s Blessings	Life-giving Nature Of Marriage	Focus On Women’s Giftedness	Culture Of Love And Joy	Supporting Responsible Parenthood
Australia	40	28	44	43	40
India	6	7	8	8	8
Philippines	8	8	8	9	8
United Kingdom	19	14	25	24	23
Canada	27	19	27	27	29
US - Northeast	31	23	33	32	34
US - Midwest	55	41	62	62	57
US - South	30	20	33	32	30
US - West	38	32	42	42	42
Other	14	9	15	14	14
Total	268	201	297	293	285

The full statements on the survey for each column were:

--Presenting a fuller definition of the blessings of all life (caring for the planet, just immigration laws, poverty, etc.)

--Emphasizing the life-giving nature of the marital relationship

--A new focus on the giftedness of women and a just and equitable treatment of them

--Shifting the culture of the Church from fear-based to a focus on love and joy

--Supporting responsible parenthood (recognizing that when a couple makes love, they are making a marriage; not every act of love between husband and wife must be open to the possibility of procreation)

**Responsibility for All Aspects of Life**

Asked if the Church should educate Catholics to assume more responsibility for all aspects of life, rather than focusing on birth control and abortion, 80 percent of respondents agreed and 14 percent strongly agreed; only 5 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed (a few did not answer or indicated no opinion). Among the groups discussing this question, 17 strongly agreed and one agreed that the Church should teach Catholics to take more responsibility for all aspects of life, while three disagreed.



**Extent of Agreement That the Church Should Educate Catholics  
To Assume More Responsibility for All Aspects of Life Rather  
Than Focus Exclusively on Birth Control and Abortion**

Country	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	31	11	1	3
India	8	0	0	0
Philippines	7	2	0	0
United Kingdom	19	6	0	0
Canada	27	2	0	0
US – Northeast	28	5	0	3
US – Midwest	57	3	0	2
US – South	68	13	0	4
US – West	36	5	1	2
Other	11	3	0	1
Total	292	50	2	15

A respondent from India who agreed with the statement commented: “Especially to engage in building a more equitable social order where the poor and the marginalized will be treated with dignity.” Other responses included (nation of origin in parentheses):

*I see the need for Church leadership to be a more loving partner with her people in family life. “Family” is not just about marriage and procreation. It includes the role of child-to-aging-parents (many who now live past 90). The role of older retired “God’s children” supporting each other in networks that include other Christian groups or different faiths in promoting/ supporting God’s Love to all. (Australia)*

*The message in Genesis in the oldest version of the story is that God made men and women as equals and as companions for each other. This is the essential relationship that has to stay vibrant. As life is the key it is not possible for the Church to sanction war or the killing of others. The mistaken writings of Augustine on war were and are a devaluing of the message of Jesus and at the moment a total denial of the message of Jesus. (Australia)*

*What does the Church do to create Church community, friendships and support for young families financially struggling? When will the Church speak out on consumerism and rubbish processed food rather than encouraging organic community projects rather than selling pieces of Church property to large impersonal profit-motivated stores? (United Kingdom)*

### **Protectors of Creation**

The survey noted that, “In his inaugural Mass homily, Pope Francis called on everyone to be ‘protectors of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.’” And respondents were asked: “What world concerns would you suggest that the Church adopt to emphasize our responsibilities as co-creators of life on earth?”

From the list provided, 96 percent supported care about poverty, ignorance and disease, while 91 percent cited the critical water shortages in many countries. Seventy-eight percent of respondents indicated support for the other concerns that were listed—“All of these are matters of gospel justice,” an Australian commented. And a respondent from India said, “Anything that threatens life—like violence—should be a pro-life issue.”

**What World Concerns Should the Church Adopt to Emphasize  
Our Responsibilities as Co-creators of Life on Earth?**

Care about the impact of poverty and ignorance and disease in the world	349
Clean up of our rivers and lakes and oceans	303
Finding remedies for the erosion of our land	285
Concern for the near-extinction of so many species of plants and thousands of God's other creatures	299
Critical water shortages in many countries	333
Disappearance of our tropical rain forests	310
Creating new, pure water to offset waterborne diseases	308
Immigrant rights should, as Cardinal O'Malley suggests, also be "another pro-life issue"	323

“The growing environmental crisis is a real threat to the very existence of humans. For the Church to be silent on this issue is to display ignorance and a lack of love,” an American commented on this question. And a Canadian said, “All these issues are important but each requires a different approach. The Catholic Church has no particular expertise on any of them and needs to form alliances with social justice organizations that do have the expertise and appropriate outlook.”

A respondent from the United Kingdom suggested, “Worldwide the people who chiefly nurture life because of their social role are women. The Church needs to empower women if it is to emphasize responsibility for us to be co-creators of life on earth. This is the first and most essential step.”

And a comment from the United States: “The interconnectedness of all creation should be taught by the Church. Being stewards of the earth does not mean that human beings are the most important beings and everything we do is for our benefit. It means to me that we must recognize the gifts of this world that has been created for us to use and protect but not to use up and destroy. Every part do this earth is connected. We must do all that we can to protect and maintain the connections.”

**Dissatisfaction with *Humanae Vitae***

The vast majority of respondents disagreed with Pope Paul VI’s statement in *Humanae Vitae* that "every matrimonial act must be open to the transmission of life": 61 percent strongly disagreed and 27 percent disagreed. Seven percent agreed or strongly agreed with Pope Paul, while 5 percent indicated no opinion or did not answer the question. Among the small group meetings, 15 of these meetings strongly disagreed and 3 disagreed with Pope Paul’s statement, while 3 strongly agreed.

**Extent of Agreement with Pope Paul VI’s Declaration That  
“Every Matrimonial Act Must Be Open to the Transmission of Life”**

Country	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	0	3	13	26
India	1	0	4	3
Philippines	0	2	2	4
United Kingdom	2	0	8	15
Canada	0	1	11	17
US – Northeast	2	1	14	19
US – Midwest	1	0	13	42
US – South	4	4	21	54
US – West	1	2	10	31
Other	1	0	4	11
Total	12	13	100	222

“This is a most ambiguous document,” a respondent from Australia said. “It is best left in the archives as an example of faulty thinking and the abuse of power. As it is irrelevant to the living, it is best to be removed from any teaching regarding women, men, families or any other grouping. A masterpiece of drivel and the destruction of trust among people.”

From India came this comment: “Every act of married life and sex need not be for procreation. Did Pope Paul VI, who pronounced this, make provisions for the Church to look after the upbringing and education of every child born out of ‘every matrimonial act’? Has any Pope after him assured Catholics to go for large families without worrying about upbringing of their children? The answer is NO! If the Church agrees to support ‘large families’ (one of the questions in the Vatican Survey) as Germany does, then only Pope Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* can become a reality.”

And from Croatia came this story: “When I was a young Jesuit novice in 1963, my father came to visit me. We walked through the grounds of a beautiful orchard and, after an initial greeting and cordial exchanges, my father broke into tears, sobbing. I was shocked. I had never seen my father crying. In my amazement, the only thing I was able to say was: ‘What’s the matter? Why are you crying?’ I believe that my black Jesuit cassock gave him permission to cry. After a long pause, he said: ‘This morning I went to confession. I told the priest that I enjoyed sexual intercourse with your mother but I cannot permit another pregnancy. I am having a hard enough time supporting five of you. I know we are living in poverty already.’ At first I was shocked at his brutal honesty from my father at my tender age of 22. ‘The priest said he could not give me absolution because my sexual act was not intended for procreation and that was against the Church’s teaching. The priest closed the screen separating us and I was left with utter disgust with myself not knowing what to do. I knew there was something wrong here, not with me, but with the priest who handled my confession so cruelly in the name of the Church.’”

Respondents were asked to select from four choices the life-giving benefits of the marital relationship that could be alternatives to *Humanae Vitae*. Three choices drew support from more than 90 percent of respondents: “a unique expression of love between the couple” had the most, followed by “a committed and loving relationship provides stability for the family” and “strong love in the relationship extends to the life-giving benefits of the world.” The fourth choice, “a selfless and altruistic giving of self to the other,” was favored by 86 percent of respondents. A respondent from India added another suggestion: “a joyful completion of shared joys.”

**What Life-giving Benefits of the Marital Relationship,  
Beyond Procreation, Are Alternatives to Church Teaching**

Country	Unique Expression Of Love	Selfless And Altruistic Giving Of Self to Other	Relationship Providing Stability	Life-giving Benefits Of The World
Australia	33	24	35	34
India	7	6	7	7
Philippines	8	8	8	8
United Kingdom	24	22	25	22
Canada	28	28	27	29
US – Northeast	35	34	34	32
US – Midwest	58	57	57	59
US – South	84	80	82	81
US – West	43	40	44	43
Other	14	14	12	12
Total	334	313	331	327

Full statements of the options were:

- A unique expression of love between the couple
- A selfless and altruistic giving of self to the other
- A committed and loving relationship provides stability for the family
- Strong love in the relationship extends to the life-giving benefits of the world

“In a marriage, when there is authentic love between the partners, their love very naturally overflows into a desire to have children. That is human nature so there is no need for an encyclical to be written about this,” said a respondent from the Philippines.

Two Americans spoke from personal experience:

*Marriage is the outward sign of a loving God and the Church has not stressed enough the vocation aspect of the Sacrament of Marriage. As a former team member of Marriage Encounter, I know firsthand that couples’ expectation of marriage were raised when they heard that they had a vocation different than but in my estimation as important as the priestly vocation.*

*The most sacramental couples I've ever known were one couple who had nine kids and still extended their love to their kids' friends, their neighbors, their parish community—indeed, everyone who crossed their paths, and another couple who were childless and extended their love to their friends, their neighbors, their parish community—indeed, everyone who crossed their paths. Common denominator: love freely given.*

### **Valuing Women’s Gifts**

Respondents universally supported the concept of greater inclusion of women in the ministries of the Church. Ninety-three percent indicated they agreed, including 76 percent who strongly agreed, with the statement, “Women have proven in contemporary society that they are gifted and deserve consideration based upon their skills. However, in the Roman Catholic Church, women remain second class citizens.” Only 5 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Support was similar in all countries and regions. Also, 19 of the group meetings strongly agreed and 2 agreed with the statement.

#### **Extent of Agreement That Women Have Gifts and Deserve Consideration Based On Their Skills, But Remain Second Class Citizens in the Roman Catholic Church**

Country	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	35	8	0	2
India	6	0	0	0
Philippines	3	3	0	2
United Kingdom	16	9	0	0
Canada	22	6	1	0
US – Northeast	27	7	1	0
US – Midwest	54	6	1	1
US – South	65	16	4	3
US – West	38	4	2	1
Other	13	0	0	1
Total	279	59	9	10

Another question asked, “Respecting our baptismal rights as equal members of the Body of Christ and in acknowledgement of the status of women, what changes do you suggest need to be made in Church policies?” “Respect the works of women theologians” won almost everyone’s endorsement, with 96 percent supporting, and all other suggestions but one were supported by more than 90 percent of respondents. The least votes went to the most radical proposition, ordain women as priests, but even that choice garnered 87 percent support from respondents.

### Support for Changes in Church Policies Regarding Women's Roles

Country	Appointment To the Curia	Appointment To Diocesan Positions	Respect For Women Theologians	Preaching In Local Communities	Women Deacons	Women Priests
Australia	42	44	43	43	42	38
India	7	7	8	7	6	7
Philippines	8	8	9	9	7	7
United Kingdom	25	25	25	25	24	21
Canada	29	29	29	28	27	25
US – Northeast	34	35	35	34	33	30
US – Midwest	62	62	62	61	60	59
US – South	80	81	81	79	79	76
US – West	43	44	45	44	43	39
Other	14	13	12	12	14	14
Total	344	348	349	342	335	316

Full statements of the listed alternatives were:

- Appoint women to decision-making positions in the Curia
- Appoint women to diocesan decision-making positions
- Respect the works of women theologians
- Allow women to preach in their local communities
- Allow women to become deacons
- Allow women to be ordained as priests

In the comments to these questions, poignant stories underlined that the issue of women's gifts touches several areas: power (and male fear of women's power), justice, false images of women and their roles, and failure to respect God's bestowing of gifts.

"Denying ordination to women keeps them forever in a subservient role regardless of the words spoken in appreciation of women's role in the Church," said one person from North America. "I cannot help but see this denial as a power issue, with men fearful of ceding any of their power to women ... I can only think that the male priests are afraid of the reality and integrity that women bring with them."

Another respondent declared, "This is a justice issue. Faiths that do not model respect and value for women are major contributors to the attitudes of violence against women." And a voice from a different continent reiterated, "As long as the institutional Church considers women second class citizens, the secular world will continue to consider women inferior and property. If inferior, then women may be sold/purchased, used in sex trades, killed in order to have more males on the earth, etc."

Another contributor considered the subtle but vital issue of the "image" of women that the Church projects: "Every time I hear that women are powerful and Mary's humility is given as an example, I get so discouraged. Never is there the same said about men. Women are strong and powerful. Think of some of the women saints: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna, Hildegard von Bingen. Think of how Jesus spoke to women like the Samaritan woman at the well. Not the least bit condescending. Imitate Jesus! Do not insult my intelligence or my strength anymore."

Many were firm in claiming a vocational call that is unbiased, as with this respondent: "When a woman with such abilities feels called to priesthood, she should be welcomed and given the same accord as men. The restriction against women priests is a sin against the Holy Spirit. All arguments against women's ordination are bogus."

However, another pointed out, "This is not about priesthood, which would just result in an increasing clericalisation of the church. It's about acknowledging the expertise of women in many spheres (not just the family and the domestic arenas) and in general giving appropriate lay people access to decision-making structures."

Overall, respondents spoke with one voice in their rejection of the institutional Church's current position in regard to women, "a scandal for all the world to see" and their hopes for a change which would give full participation and decision-making voice to women.

Groups were asked an open-ended question in this area: “In recognition of our baptismal rights as equal members of the Body of Christ and in acknowledgement of the societal changes in the status of women, please offer your group’s proposal for how the Church should address the role of women in the Church today.” Here are some of their answers:

*Ordain them, respect them, listen to them.*

*Begin by acknowledging the giftedness of women in all capacities, including leadership roles in the Church. Many Catholic women have theology degrees and have much to offer the Church. They need to be invited into the conversation as equals and in equal numbers—men and women, ordained and lay. Just in the fact that we have to ask how the Church should address the role of women in the Church today indicates the problem. We should be asking how the Church should address the role of all the baptized in the Church today. But since baptized males have been given a dominant status in the Church, then we have to ask how the Church needs to address the role of women. So another answer is that no gender shall dominate any roles in the Church.*

*Ordain women and open every rank and position in the Church to women. Use inclusive language.*

*Appoint more women to positions in the Church, particularly in the decision-making bodies. In this context, it was also pointed out that disabled people should be given significant roles in the Church. An example was given of a young man with Down’s Syndrome serving on the altar and giving out Holy Communion very competently and very reverently.*

*Simply make them equal in every way.*

## **Decisions Relating to Family Size**

When asked to respond to the statement, “In support of official Church’s teaching regarding primacy of conscience, I believe that decisions regarding the size and spacing of families should be left up to the discernment of the couple,” 69 percent strongly agreed and 12 percent agreed, but 17 percent strongly disagreed.

### **Extent of Agreement That Decisions Regarding the Size and Spacing Of Families Should Be Left to the Couple**

Country	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	24	5	0	15
India	6	1	0	1
Philippines	6	2	0	1
United Kingdom	19	2	0	4
Canada	19	5	0	5
US – Northeast	22	7	0	6
US – Midwest	44	3	0	14
US – South	69	9	0	9
US – West	33	6	0	6
Other	11	2	0	2
Total	253	42	0	63

Two respondents from India offered comments on this question. “Followed NFP (natural family planning): 3 children in 5 years,” one said, and the other noted: “I cannot understand how NFP is not the same as a ‘contraceptive mentality’. One chooses days which one believes will not result in conception.”

A respondent from Australia said, “This is a secondary consideration for the establishment of the relationship. It is a fundamental one that the people involved are caring companions for each other. There is no other decision to be made other than the community could support them.”

Groups were asked an open-ended question: “Recognizing that Catholic families must begin to make conscience-driven decisions on the size of their families and the necessary care and support of them, please summarize your group's opinions of how Church teaching should be on this topic.”

*Church teaching on responsible family planning should not persist in making a meaningless distinction between natural and artificial methods of birth control. Love-making is sacred and telling couples to refrain from sex when hormones are at their peak is not natural but sadistic. The majority of Catholic couples, as well as theologians, agreed. The sensus fidelium prompted them to reject Pope Paul's position on contraception, which was a political (not moral) judgment based on his fear that changing the teaching proclaimed by previous popes would diminish the authority of the papacy. Pastors should support the couple's decision about the size of their family and the best method of birth control for them.*

*We see that responsible parenthood requires parents as primary carers to provide modelling and mentoring to children, giving financial, moral and environmental protection and security, assisting to grow a value system. This is in the context of their own judgment on how many children they can so care for. The role of the Church is secondary—advisory, not prescriptive.*

*Recognise that the biggest problem facing the world today is the increase in population. Also if you cannot provide for and educate a child, do not have one. Ensure you have birth control procedures in place in your relationship.*

*Marriage has to be life-giving in broad sense. Children need to be supported and nurtured as well as can be. The couples need the ability for many reasons to regulate size of family.*

“The married couple have received the grace of the sacrament of matrimony and are the ones responsible together to discern the size and spacing of their children based on their own strengths, weaknesses, and burdens,” an American respondent commented, and one from Canada said:

*I do believe in the primacy of an individual's conscience. However, a couple in marriage have committed themselves to each other and so should strive for harmony of conscience in their life together. Moreover, no individual or couple lives in isolation from the other communities to which they belong, such as their Church, their wider ethnic family, their nation, etc. The Church and its teaching can help us develop and attune our consciences to the life of Christ, to understand the role of our human experience in the revelation of God's presence and purpose in our lives. But the Church is presumptuous if it forecloses on the moral choices of its members.*

## **Other Comments**

Asked to share personal stories or other comments, respondents provided the following:

*“Augustine's great gift was the importance of reflection of one's actions. His writings and insights show his flawed understandings, particular cultural influences of the time and personal idiosyncratic experiences. His writings about his mother show a very disturbed individual who could be seen in today's understandings as needing extensive psychiatric care. He is also no role model or advisor on human relationships or marriage or most anything else. Try to use Hildegard or others (mainly women theologians) as guides.” (Australia)*

*My husband and I struggled for years to live within the Church's teaching on birth control. We have 5 children for which I am very grateful, but I can't help thinking that the tension and strife of those years contributed to our marriage breakdown. My ex-husband has now been 20 years happily remarried. I am single. (Australia)*

*My husband and I felt forced to use our conscience when making decisions about the creation of life and tried to constantly review these in the light of changing circumstances and be scrupulous about*

*this. As a result, we have known difficult times but believe God has guided us and we have relied on his mercy and understanding rather than Church doctrine which does not always have a compassionate face. (United Kingdom)*

*I felt, and with discernment with my spouse, decided that a family of three children was the best for all of our sakes emotionally, mentally, financially the most mutually beneficial. I feel and believe that having a vasectomy was NOT against God's laws or desires for me, our marriage or our children. My spouse and I can and have had and do have a mutually loving, strong and beneficial sexual relationship. We would never reject a child that might subsequently come to us and would love and cherish that child just as strongly as our other three but it doesn't make sense that a couple would not have some control over their choices, decisions about their bodies, their family lives and how they express their love for each other. (Canada)*

*We used NFP [natural family planning] to space our two children. It worked well and put us in touch with our cooperation with God to procreate—a spiritual experience. However to do this for a lifetime was impractical. It's not the abstinence required that is the problem, it's needing to take one's temperature, not getting up to use the bathroom because it will throw off the temperature, not having a glass of wine at night because it would alter the temperature reading etc. How do you do NFP and take care of a sick child during the night? How do you cope with business trips? It's too much to ask. Plus, our current knowledge of sexuality based on scientific research makes Thomas Aquinas's philosophical views on the purpose of sex in marriage irrelevant and archaic. (United States)*

*Prior to the live birth of our first child, my wife had four complicated miscarriages (spontaneous abortions) and came close to bleeding to death. Subsequently, the use of artificial birth control probably prevented her death. Eventually, we had three children. In no way do I consider the use of artificial birth control to be a sin. Rather it is the use of God-given human reason and a use of modern medicine. (United States)*

*My mother, a devout Catholic and mother of eight children, finally dragged her tired body into the confessional to get permission to use birth control. I'm not sure if the permission was given, but she had no further children, but she died with a guilty conscience, not because she believed it was wrong to use birth control, but because the Church told her she was wrong. This decision is sacred and personal and should not be dictated by church teaching, but after careful examination of conscience, while taking full responsibility for the choices made. (United States)*



# Gender and Sexuality

*Sex is a human desire that enhances intimacy in relationships and is a beautiful and spiritual experience. (Survey respondent)*

*“Loving relationships are loving relationship—it does not matter the gender of the people involved.”(Survey respondent)*

A total of 168 individuals from 9 countries responded to the Gender and Sexuality Survey; there were 111 female and 57 male respondents. This survey asked for responses about Church teaching on sexuality, same-sex relationships, the role of women and related issues. Seventy-nine percent of respondents indicated they were older than 60 years old; 16 percent were ages 40 to 60 and 5 percent were younger than 40.

**Gender and Age of Survey Respondents**

Country/ Continent	Gender		Age Range		
	Male	Female	Younger than 40	40-60	Older than 60
Asia	3	8	1	5	5
Australia*	4	6	0	1	9
Canada	6	10	1	1	14
Europe*	5	6	1	2	8
US - Northeast	1	9	0	0	10
US - Midwest	8	20	0	6	22
US - South	21	40	4	8	49
US - West	9	12	1	4	16
Total	57	111	8	27	133

\* Asia includes four respondents from India and seven from the Philippines; European respondents were from Ireland (3 respondents), the Netherlands (2), Spain (1) and United Kingdom (5).

Forty percent of survey participants were in their first and only marriage; 14 percent were single and never married, 18 percent divorced and 9 percent widowed. Seven percent were remarried and 4 percent had children from a previous marriage; six percent were in an interfaith marriage. Four percent were single parents, four percent were in a same-sex relationship and 1 percent were cohabitating with another.

**Respondents’ Relationships**

Relationship Status	Number Of Respondents
In First and Only Marriage	68
Single, Never Married	23
Widow/Widower	15
Divorced	31
Remarried	23
Children from Previous Marriage	11
Single Parent	6
In Same-Sex Relationship	6
Cohabiting with Someone	2
In an Interfaith Marriage	10

Forty-eight percent of the respondents said they were retired and 29 percent that they were employed. Three persons were unemployed, and the rest did not indicate an employment status.

Nearly all respondents were Catholic, 83 percent describing themselves as active Catholics and 13 percent as Catholics in name only; 3 persons were other Christians and 3 were persons of other faiths. Eighty-six percent considered themselves progressives and 12 percent “middle-of-the-road” Catholics; the rest identified as conservatives. Eighty-eight percent said they were prepared for significant reform in the Church, including doctrine, and 11 percent were aware of the need for institutional change, but not change in doctrine; only two respondents were satisfied with the Church as it is.

### Religious Status, Catholic Standing and Level of Satisfaction with the Church

Country/ Continent	Religious Status			
	Active Catholic	Catholic In Name Only And Struggling	Other Christian	Other Faith
Asia	10	1	0	0
Australia	9	1	0	0
Canada	14	2	0	0
Europe	8	2	1	0
US - Northeast	10	0	0	0
US - Midwest	20	7	1	0
US - South	53	4	1	3
US - West	16	5	0	0
Total	140	22	3	3

Country/ Continent	Catholic Standing		
	Conservative	Middle-of-the- Road	Progressive
Asia	0	2	9
Australia	0	2	8
Canada	0	1	15
Europe	0	1	10
US - Northeast	0	2	8
US - Midwest	0	2	26
US - South	4	7	50
US - West	0	3	18
Total	4	20	144

Country/ Continent	Level of Satisfaction with the Church		
	Satisfied With The Church as It Is	Aware That Institutional Change (But Not Doctrine) Needs to Occur	Prepared for Significant Reform Change, Including Doctrine
Asia	0	3	8
Australia	0	0	10
Canada	0	1	15
Europe	1	1	9
US - Northeast	0	2	8
US - Midwest	0	1	27
US - South	1	8	52
US - West	0	2	19
Total	2	18	148

Ten survey respondents were priests, one an ordained woman priest; 7 were former priests, 15 were vowed religious and 21 were former religious.

In addition, 114 persons participated in 17 small groups that met to discuss Gender and Sexuality topics in Australia, India, Ireland, the Philippines and the United States. These groups included:

- 26 men and 88 women
- 88 persons age 60 or older, 21 ages 40-60, and 3 younger than 40
- 103 active Catholics, 4 Catholics in name only and struggling, 2 other Christians and 3 persons of other faiths
- 86 progressives, 21 “middle-of-the-road” Catholics and 3 conservatives
- 86 respondents prepared for significant change including doctrine and 19 aware of the need for institutional change but not change in doctrine; none said they were satisfied with the way the Church is now
- 59 persons in their first and only marriage, 9 single and never married persons, 18 widows or widowers, 15 divorced persons, 8 remarried persons, 3 persons in a same-sex relationship and 11 in an interfaith marriage

- 53 retired and 30 employed persons
- 1 priests, 1 former priest, 5 religious and 7 former religious.

### Support for Reform

Asked to indicate whether a set of listed topics were areas in need of reform, 67 percent favored a new approach to Church teaching regarding gender and sexuality. On this question, 50 respondents from the U.S. South did not indicate a response; excluding them from the analysis, 96 percent favor this as a topic of reform. Percentages for other topics were (the percentage after excluding the non-responses from the U.S. South are in parentheses): 63 percent (90 percent) for equal treatment regardless of sexual orientation and for equal treatment regardless of gender; 57 percent (81 percent) for the place of sex in relationships; 54 percent (76 percent) for same-sex relationships; and 50 percent (71 percent) for roles defined by gender.

#### Topics in Need of Reform

Country/ Continent	Place of Sex In Relationships	Equality Regardless Of Sexual Orientation*	Equality Regardless Of Gender*	Roles Defined By Gender	Same-Sex Relationships	New Approach On Gender And Sexuality*
Asia	9	9	11	10	8	11
Australia	9	8	7	5	8	10
Canada	13	14	13	12	13	16
Europe	8	9	8	5	6	10
US - Northeast	7	9	9	6	7	10
US - Midwest	23	27	28	25	25	27
US - South**	9	10	10	7	7	8
US - West	17	20	20	14	16	21
Total	95	106	106	84	90	113

\* The full statements in these categories were:

--Equal Treatment Regardless of Sexual Orientation

--Equal Treatment Regardless of Gender

--Call for a New Approach to Church Teaching Regarding Gender and Sexuality

\*\* 50 respondents from the U.S. South did not respond to this question.

### Depiction of Sex

Respondents were asked about the degree to which they agreed with Church teaching that depicts sex as a necessary means of continuing the species but otherwise considered it a guilty pleasure wrapped in sinfulness. Seventy-four percent strongly disagreed with the teaching and 13 percent disagreed, while 6 percent strongly agreed and 3 percent disagreed; the remaining responses either said no opinion or did not answer.

#### Level of Agreement with Church Teachings That Sex Is Necessary for Reproduction but Otherwise a Sinful Pleasure

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Asia	0	1	1	9
Australia	1	0	2	7
Canada	1	0	2	13
Europe	0	1	2	8
US - Northeast	2	1	2	4
US - Midwest	1	0	2	25
US - South	4	1	6	44
US - West	1	1	4	15
Total	10	5	21	125

Groups were asked a different question: not whether they agreed or disagreed with this teaching, but whether that was the teaching, specifically whether: “Most Church teaching depicts sex as a necessary means of continuing the species but, in every other sense, it is a guilty pleasure wrapped in sinfulness.” Five strongly agreed and six agreed that this was Church teaching, while 5 strongly disagreed. One group commented:

*We consider that the historical Church has long displayed an immature, even abominable, curiosity about sexual relationships, despite claiming to be on a higher asexual plane. This is ludicrous in the face of revelations of sexual abuse and promiscuity by the very clergy who presume to lay down guidelines for the lives of a predominantly faithful, heterosexual laity. The only sexual activity that can be deemed sinful is that which is uninvited, intrusive, offensive, forced or otherwise unwelcome. The most heinous is that forced on victims by proclaimed celibates.*

Asked to select from which descriptions indicate how Church teachings should recognize and respect sexual expression in loving relationships, around 90 percent supported all four, with the statement, “as a unique expression of love that brings the couples closer than anything else,” drawing the most votes. Seventeen groups supported the statements relating to a unique expression of love and a committed and loving relationship providing stability to the family, and 16 supported the other two statements.

**How Should Church Teaching Recognize and Respect Sexual Expression in Loving Relationships**

Country/ Continent	As a Unique Expression of Love That Brings The Couple Closer Than Anything Else	As a Selfless And Altruistic Giving Of Self to the Other	As the Love Relationship Strengthens, It Models a Profound Example of Love To Children	As a Committed And Loving Relationship That Provides Stability For the Family
Asia	11	9	10	10
Australia	9	7	9	9
Canada	14	12	11	14
Europe	10	9	9	9
US – Northeast	10	10	9	9
US – Midwest	25	28	24	24
US – South	58	55	56	57
US - West	21	20	20	21
Total	158	150	148	153

Several persons, both in the survey for individuals and in groups, said they did not feel the statement was an accurate representation of Church teaching, and one suggested, “The Theology of the Body moves toward a better teaching on sexuality, but there is a long history to overcome.” A sampling of other comments:

*In all fairness to the Church and some theologians, religious sisters whose retreats I have had the privilege of attending, there is already a healthier way of looking at sex and sexuality in general that it is a gift from God and, therefore, holy, good and beautiful.*

*Why would God have created something inherently sinful? Some sexual behavior is sinful: rape, aggressive sex, non-mutual sex ... But sex was created by God for many reasons the Church doesn't even acknowledge and it's time the Church had a more mature, nuanced outlook on sex in general*

*I believe God made sex for two reasons. For continuing the species, but also to give a man and woman a special bond through which they can also enjoy being together in such a close and wonderful way. It must be seen as an expression of love towards each other, in a marriage. Otherwise there would be no specific difference between men and animals at this point.*

*Sex, when engaged in with proper respect for the other individual's rights, is a gift from God with no negative meaning involved.*

**Women’s Roles**

More than 90 percent of respondents favored a more inclusive role for women at all levels of Church management and administration. The category with the lowest number of respondents in support, ordination to priesthood, was favored by 92 percent. The most favored roles, supported by 161 of the 168 respondents, were: election to decision-making positions on local parish councils, election to decision-making position in diocesan pastoral councils, and reflective

preaching at liturgies. Among the groups, 15 or 16 supported all these roles, except for ordination to the priesthood, which was supported by 14.

### Support for Women’s Involvement in Church Roles

Election to decision-making positions on local parish councils	161
Election to decision-making positions in diocesan pastoral councils	161
Reflective preaching at liturgies	161
Accepting female deacons	156
Appointment to decision-making positions in the Curia	158
Appointment to decision-making positions in the Vatican Bank	157
Ordination to the priesthood	154

Pointing out that stereotypical gender roles for men and women are no longer valid, the survey asked respondents how the Church should modify its teaching on gender issues. All but a handful supported the three modifications suggested: that women and men must be treated equally, that all roles currently held by men can potentially be occupied by qualified women, and that gender neither defines the roles nor the task that people are capable of assuming. All 17 groups also supported each of these changes.

### How Should Church Teaching Modify Its Position on Gender Roles

Country/ Continent	Women and men must be treated equally.	All roles currently held by men have the potential to be occupied by qualified women.	Gender neither defines the roles nor the tasks that people are capable of taking on either in the Church or in society.
Asia	11	11	11
Australia	9	9	8
Canada	16	16	16
Europe	10	10	10
US – Northeast	9	9	10
US – Midwest	27	26	27
US – South	58	58	59
US – West	19	20	21
Total	159	159	162

“To even be mentioning these things shows how far behind we are,” one respondent commented, and another said, “Women are more than 50 percent of those who attend church ... don't eliminate all this talent.” A third suggested, “Let women decide what roles they want to fill and respect their choices.” One also commented:

*It is so difficult to be a woman in ministry in the Catholic Church. It is not only the old priests that are resistant to change, but the new ones coming into the priesthood are fundamental and highly conservative with little compassion for their human beings. They want power and position, which many of them otherwise would not have in the secular world. There is a deep fear of women among many career priests where the message of Jesus means nothing in their lived lives, as an example on how to live. The Church is preoccupied with gender and sex and are in denial of what is normal, unless people choose otherwise.*

### Synod Preparatory Document

The survey asked respondents whether they were disappointed that the preparatory document for the Synod did not raise the need for equality of women, and 82 percent strongly agreed they were disappointed and 9 percent agreed. Four percent strongly disagreed

**Level of Agreement That It Was Disappointing the Synod  
Preparatory Document Omitted the Need for Equality of Women**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Asia	10	1	0	0
Australia	8	2	0	0
Canada	13	2	0	0
Europe	9	0	0	1
US - Northeast	8	2	0	0
US - Midwest	25	3	0	0
US - South	48	2	0	5
US - West	16	3	0	1
Total	137	15	0	7

“There is a difference between man and woman. But, in some ways, woman can also play an important role in Church life. That should be recognized,” one respondent said, while another commented: “Women are created by God in His own image and likeness, the same as men and LGBT are. It is time the Church recognized this and stopped fearing us because we are the transmitters of life, physical or other.” Other comments:

*Why weren't married and lay people part of preparatory document? Maybe we would have gotten a whole set of different questions to ask.*

*We are willingly closing our ears to the Spirit as she speaks through women. Sooner or later the boys are going to figure it out.*

*Women have so long been second class citizens in the Church—that needs to change.*

**Same-Sex Relationships**

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement, “In order to become a sensitive, loving pastoral presence in the world, the Church has a responsibility to recognize the signs of the times, particularly as it relates to same-sex relationships, and to implement changes based on the contemporary developments in science, psychology, biology, and the humanities.” Seventy percent strongly agreed and 21 percent agreed with this statement, only 6 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Twelve groups strongly agreed and 4 agreed with the statement; 1 disagreed.

**Level of Agreement That the Church Needs to Implement  
Changes Related to Teaching on Same-Sex Relationships**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Asia	5	4	0	1
Australia	4	6	0	0
Canada	11	2	1	0
Europe	8	2	0	1
US - Northeast	6	3	0	0
US - Midwest	23	4	0	0
US - South	45	9	1	2
US - West	16	5	0	0
Total	118	35	2	4

Respondents were unfavorable to the Church’s characterization of same-sex relationships as a “disordered state:” Sixty-five percent strongly disagreed and 18 percent disagreed with this teaching. Six percent strongly agreed with it and 4 percent agreed. Fourteen groups strongly disagreed with the statement, 1 disagreed and 2 agreed.

**Level of Agreement with Church Teaching That Same-Sex Relationships Are a “Disordered State”**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Asia	1	1	4	5
Australia	0	0	3	6
Canada	4	1	2	7
Europe	1	1	2	7
US - Northeast	1	0	3	5
US - Midwest	1	1	2	24
US - South	2	3	10	41
US - West	0	0	4	14
Total	10	7	30	109

Ninety percent agreed, including 67 percent strongly, that love for another is a gift from God that needs to be recognized as a call to a loving relationship regardless of sexual orientation. Three respondents disagreed and four strongly disagreed. Fourteen groups strongly agreed, 2 agreed and 1 disagreed with this statement.

**Level of Agreement That Love for Another Is a Gift from God and It Deserves to Be Recognized As a Call to a Loving Relationships Regardless of Sexual Orientation**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Asia	7	3	0	0
Australia	5	4	0	0
Canada	11	2	1	0
Europe	7	3	1	0
US - Northeast	5	3	0	1
US - Midwest	22	6	0	0
US - South	41	13	1	3
US - West	15	5	0	0
Total	113	39	3	4

One respondent warned against changing Church teaching regarding same-sex relationships:

*If same sex relationships, in particular same sex marriage, are recognized by the Church, then it will be spreading an incurable disease in the society. It will also put marriage as an institution under threat or make it irrelevant. However, the Church can show compassion for them and have counselling sessions with them.*

Two others shared personal stories informing their views:

*Long ago I once worked in a position where my supervisor was in a same-sex relationship. At one point her partner became ill with a degenerative disease and could no longer work. Since my supervisor could not cover her insurance-wise, they were forced to separate. The ill woman's family came from another state and took her "back home" to care for her and this meant cutting off the relationship. The "healthy" partner was left behind because she needed to continue her working life and was not accepted by the family anyway—so two lives were destroyed. This was not a Church-related incident as neither was Catholic—only an example of unnecessary destruction of lives which the Church supports at all levels. Even now, 35 years later, it still breaks my heart along with all the other stories I've known along the way.*

*I remain deeply hurt (and angry) that I am JUDGED to be disordered as a lesbian in a loving relationship. Nothing but hypocrisy to be blunt about it! What would Jesus be saying and doing regarding this blatant injustice to us, children of God who clearly are treated as members of the Catholic Church's caste systems ... women and not heterosexual!*

And one person suggested, “If God continues to create people with homosexual orientations, we need to look to what God intends us to learn from these PERSONS.”

The survey referred to Pope Francis’ oft-quoted statement regarding homosexuality, and several respondents commented on it in their responses; for instance:

*“Who am I to judge?” seems the appropriate response. Since it is a fairly recent historical development that individuals are (more or less) free to acknowledge their sexuality, it doesn't appear to be a “disordered” state—simply one that has been hidden for the sake of survival. If we allow this “third way” to develop, who knows what can happen? At the very least we can find ourselves open to a wider understanding of sexuality.*

*Pope Francis needs to go beyond his statement and apologize for the hurt and discrimination the Church has perpetuated against same-sex couples and reverse its theology against same-sex relationships.*

### **New Ways of Expressing Tradition about Gender and Sexuality**

Respondents also believe that the Church must seek new ways of expressing tradition regarding gender and sexuality compatible with the Gospel and with the norms of society: 64 percent strongly and 23 percent agreed with that proposal. Four persons strongly disagreed and four disagreed. Results from groups were similar: 13 strongly agreed, 2 agreed and 1 disagreed.

**Level of Agreement That the Church Must Seek New Ways Of Expressing Tradition Regarding Gender and Sexuality**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Asia	7	3	0	0
Australia	5	4	0	0
Canada	11	2	1	0
Europe	7	3	1	0
US - Northeast	5	3	0	1
US - Midwest	22	6	0	0
US - South	41	13	1	3
US - West	15	5	0	0
Total	113	39	3	4

“It is sad to think that religions are the main source of hate against same-sex couples,” said one respondent. “Jesus came to say the opposite and everyone seems to have gotten it except those in the Church.” Others shared personal stories:

*1. I watched my cousin wither from childhood to adulthood as a closeted gay man, feeling rejected and unwelcome. 2. My beautiful, smart daughter effectively “left” the Church when her teacher told her she could not serve on the altar or ever be a priest.*

*Brother who lived in solitude and shame for years because of his homosexuality. He has been married many years. The family had an opportunity and rose to the occasion to support his marriage.*

*My wife and I attend a Jesuit parish that supports our relationship. We started a LGBTQ group in our parish. We meet monthly for potlucks, have a faith sharing group, and do outreach at Pride events. People are amazed and moved to hear that some Catholics are supportive. Our priest gave our group a blessing during mass. We long for the day that we can also get married in the Church.*

Respondents also agreed that it was difficult for families to teach their children not to discriminate when the Church often acts in discriminatory and prejudicial way—though disagreement here was stronger than in most questions.



Sixty-four percent strongly agreed and 18 percent agreed with that proposition, while 5 percent disagreed and 9 percent strongly disagreed. Groups too were more split on this question: 9 strongly agreed, 2 agreed and 5 strongly disagreed.

**Level of Agreement That It Is Difficult for a Family to “Preach” Non-Discrimination  
To Its Children When the Church Is Discriminator and Prejudicial**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Asia	6	5	0	0
Australia	6	3	0	0
Canada	12	3	0	1
Europe	5	2	0	3
US - Northeast	7	3	0	0
US - Midwest	20	3	0	5
US - South	38	7	6	5
US - West	13	5	2	1
Total	107	31	8	15

**Additional Comments**

Among the additional comments offered by respondents were the following:

*I am not “At Home” to an all-male clerical world. This has to change in the Church as women make up 50 percent of the total population. I stayed away from the Church for decades because of this. But then I was left with nothing, a void. I am back in the Church but do not believe in a lot of its teachings. I take what I want and leave the rest; it is the only way to survive in the Church.*

*Why are so many leaving behind the Catholic Church? Too many judgments about people who have had enough of this institution and its unjust teachings which negate the dignity of ALL and the subsequent condemnations of those who don't measure up to the non-Gospel-oriented standards!*

# Church Teaches and Learns

*Life experience is a great teacher and should be valued rather than discounted. (Survey respondent from the United States)*

*We learn from each other. There needs to be a dialogue. (Survey respondent from the United States)*

The survey on the Church Teaches and Learns sought reaction on the role of the laity in the Church’s teaching ministry—what it is and what it can be. Two hundred fifty individuals from 13 countries responded to this survey, 166 of them women and 84 men. Eighty-one percent were older than 60 years old—only in India was this age group not the largest; 16 percent were ages 40 to 60.

**Gender and Age of Survey Respondents**

Country/ Continent	Gender		Age Range		
	Male	Female	Younger than 40	40-60	Older than 60
Australia	11	11	0	5	17
India	4	3	0	4	3
Philippines	0	8	1	2	5
United Kingdom	5	13	0	2	16
Canada	3	13	0	2	14
US - Northeast	2	19	0	1	20
US - Midwest	16	31	1	6	40
US - South	24	47	5	11	55
US - West	10	17	1	5	21
Other*	9	4	0	2	11
Total	84	166	8	40	202

\* In this report, “Other” includes Argentina (1 response), Cyprus (1), Germany (1), Ireland (6), the Netherlands (1), Peru (1), and South Africa (2).

Forty-five percent of survey participants, were in their first and only marriage; 12 percent were single and never married, 13 percent divorced and 10 percent widowed. Twelve percent were remarried and 7 percent had children from a previous marriage. Six percent were in an interfaith marriage. Four percent were in a same-sex relationship and 3 percent were single parents; small numbers identified themselves as engaged or as cohabitating with another.

**Respondents’ Relationships**

Relationship Status	Number Of Respondents
In First and Only Marriage	112
Single, Never Married	29
Engaged	2
Widow/Widower	26
Divorced	33
Remarried	30
Children from Previous Marriage	18
Single Parent	7
In Same-Sex Relationship	9
Cohabiting with Someone	3
In an Interfaith Marriage	15

Fifty-two percent of the respondents said they were retired, 22 percent that they were employed and 1 percent unemployed; the rest did not indicate an employment status.

Nearly all respondents were Catholic, 86 percent describing themselves as active Catholics and 12 percent as Catholics in name only; the rest were other Christians or persons of other faiths. Eighty-four percent considered themselves progressives and 14 percent “middle-of-the-road” Catholics; the rest said they were conservatives. Ninety-one percent

said they were prepared for significant reform in the Church, including doctrine, and 9 percent were aware of the need for institutional change, but not change in doctrine. Only one respondent indicated satisfaction with the Church as it is.

### Religious Status, Catholic Standing and Level of Satisfaction with the Church

Country/ Continent	Religious Status			
	Active Catholic	Catholic In Name Only And Struggling	Other Christian	Other Faith
Australia	20	2	0	0
India	7	0	0	0
Philippines	7	1	0	0
United Kingdom	17	1	0	0
Canada	14	2	0	0
US - Northeast	20	1	0	0
US - Midwest	38	8	1	0
US - South	60	7	1	3
US - West	23	4	0	0
Other	8	5	0	0
Total	214	31	2	3

Country/ Continent	Catholic Standing		
	Conservative	Middle-of-the- Road	Progressive
Australia	0	4	18
India	0	0	7
Philippines	0	3	5
United Kingdom	0	4	14
Canada	0	3	12
US - Northeast	0	3	18
US - Midwest	1	5	41
US - South	4	5	62
US - West	0	4	23
Other	0	3	10
Total	5	34	210

Country/ Continent	Level of Satisfaction with the Church		
	Satisfied With The Church as It Is	Aware That Institutional Change (But Not Doctrine) Needs to Occur	Prepared for Significant Reform Change, Including Doctrine
Australia	0	0	22
India	0	0	7
Philippines	0	4	4
United Kingdom	0	4	14
Canada	0	1	15
US - Northeast	0	2	19
US - Midwest	0	2	45
US - South	1	7	63
US - West	0	2	25
Other	0	0	13
Total	1	22	227

Survey respondents included 15 priests including one identifying herself as an ordained woman priest, 10 former priests, 15 vowed religious and 31 former religious.

In addition, 144 persons participated in 17 small groups that met to discuss the Church Teaches and Learns topics in Australia, India, the Philippines and the United States. These groups included:

- 37 men and 107 women
- 81 persons 60 or older, 50 ages 40-60, and 11 younger than 40
- 109 active Catholics, 7 Catholics in name only and struggling, 15 other Christians and 4 persons of other faiths
- 91 progressives, 27 “middle-of-the-road” Catholics and 9 conservatives
- 84 respondents prepared for significant change including doctrine, 27 aware of the need for institutional change but not change in doctrine, and 4 satisfied with the way the Church is now
- 67 persons in their first and only marriage, 19 single and never married persons, 22 widows or widowers, 21 divorced persons, 13 remarried persons, 7 persons in an interfaith marriage, 7 single parents and 4 persons in a same-sex relationship and 11 in an interfaith marriage
- 47 retired and 31 employed persons
- 9 priests, 4 former priests, 11 religious and 6 former religious.

### Support for Reform

Respondents were asked to indicate, from a given list of topics, areas that they felt were in need of reform. Seventy percent identified the necessity for dialogue, 64 percent that all were part of both the learning and teaching church, 63 percent the need for exchanges between bishops and the faithful, 61 percent synod participation by the laity and 60 percent the dualism of the teaching and learning Church. Fifty-four percent cited the existence of diocesan councils and 45 percent the non-acceptance of Church teaching. Forty-nine respondents in the United States provided no response to this question. If they are excluded from the analysis, each of these percentages would be 11-17 percentage points higher—for example, 87 percent citing the necessity for dialogue and 56 percent the non-acceptance of teaching.

**Topics in Need of Reform**

Country/ Continent	Dualism Of Teaching, Learning Church	Non- acceptance Of Teaching	Need For Dialogue	Existence Of Diocesan Councils	Synod Participation	All Both Learning, Teaching Church	Need For Exchange Between Bishops, The Faithful
Australia	18	11	21	14	17	16	21
India	7	3	7	4	7	5	7
Philippines	8	4	8	5	7	8	8
United Kingdom	16	11	17	13	14	17	16
Canada	13	11	16	13	12	13	16
US - Northeast	8	20	12	16	16	19	0
US - Midwest	35	23	40	30	35	37	40
US - South	16	12	21	15	17	14	19
US – West	22	13	22	18	19	21	22
Other	8	5	11	8	9	9	9
Total	151	113	175	136	153	159	158

### Participation in Teaching and Governing

“We are far too gifted and talented just to remain seated in the pews,” a respondent from the Philippines said in commenting on the statement regarding the Church’s current practice when it comes to the role of the laity in Church teaching. Most survey respondents shared her sentiments. Asked their opinions on the statement that, despite Pope Francis’ suggestion that all the faithful are called to active participation in teaching and governing, in mission and ministry, current Church practice assumes that the faithful’s only role is to listen while only the Church can teach, 80 percent strongly disagreed and 14 percent disagreed with this stance. Only 5 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

**Extent of Agreement with Current Church Practice That Assumes  
That the Faithful's Only Role Is to Listen While Only the Church Can Teach**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	3	0	5	14
India	1	0	0	6
Philippines	1	0	1	6
United Kingdom	0	0	3	15
Canada	0	0	3	13
US - Northeast	1	0	3	16
US - Midwest	1	1	3	42
US – South	3	1	13	52
US – West	1	0	3	22
Other	0	0	0	13
Total	11	2	34	199

Nine of the 17 groups strongly agreed and two agreed with a similar statement; 1 group disagreed and 5 strongly disagreed.

Three respondents from the United Kingdom warned of the dangers of current practice as described in the survey:

*I believe that the Catholic Church needs to listen to what the laity on the ground experience. How can the Vatican, which is a male dominated institution, know what are the struggles of the faithful who are trying to work within society to create a better world where the next generation can grow up and have the opportunity to accept people regardless of the differences that may distinguish them from other people, i.e. people of other faiths, ethnic origins, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, transgender, etc.? How can the Church learn and grow and make the world a better place without listening to those people within the world who are working in the world? There is so much conflict in the world which is sparked by differences between people, and this needs to be addressed. Surely it is better to build bridges between people with different characteristics, than by pointing out their differences. The world needs peace and harmony and accord. The only way that the Church can help with this is to listen to its members on the ground who are living in this world and are seeking to make it a better place.*

*Current practice (unilateral and one-way communication) undermines development of mature and responsible discipleship among the faithful and reinforces bad behaviour by Church leaders (and thus weakens their credibility in promoting the Gospel).*

*The current practice of “telling” people what to think and do can easily lead to abusive relationships where individuals are not valued as made in God's image and being channels of the Holy Spirit.*

Two other respondents, the first from Australia and the second from Canada, said:

*The Vatican Council stressed the importance of the share of all the baptised in the priesthood of Christ. Events since have tended to suppress the pastoral instincts in the laity. This is a great pity on its own terms, but all the more tragic when viewed against the background of plummeting vocations to the ministerial priesthood. Centrally, it appears to one distinctly on the periphery, the Church seems bent on its own extinction.*

*We Catholics have been infantilized by the Church—so much so that a surprising number of Catholics of my acquaintance can't even articulate what dissatisfies—or satisfies—them about the Church. This deformity is an embarrassment and a distortion of the intellectual gifts that God has given us.*

Several respondents were critical of the way the question was worded, using “Church” to describe the hierarchy when all the faithful are the Church. And one from the United States said: “Current Church practice does include a lot of lay

leadership in teaching roles. Your description is very stereotypical.” Two other comments, both from the United States, along these lines:

*If what is meant by Church is the hierarchy, then I disagree. But there is more than one teaching voice in the Church—our theologians, our spiritual directors, our wise community members. The problem we have is the huge rift between traditionalists and progressives. The hierarchy tends to walk the middle line, frustrating everyone. We must have the kind of dialog between these two groups proposed by Cardinal Bernardin, otherwise much Church teaching will fall on deaf ears.*

*I believe that we are called to be active participants in teaching and governing, mission and ministry ... yet, I also believe there is a need for a certain level of hierarchal structure to maintain the sanctity of the Catholic Church ... if “anything goes” then who are we?*

Asked whether all of the People of God—bishops, clergy, religious, lay men and women—by virtue of their baptism should become part of a learning and teaching Church, discerning together what we have to do to bring the Gospel up to date and make Church teachings relevant for our times, 85 percent strongly agreed and 11 percent agreed; only 6 persons disagreed or strongly disagreed. All 17 groups agreed with this statement, 15 of them strongly.

**Extent of Agreement That All the People of God Should Discern Together How to Make Church Teachings Relevant for Our Times**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	18	3	0	1
India	7	0	0	0
Philippines	8	0	0	0
United Kingdom	15	3	0	0
Canada	14	2	0	0
US - Northeast	17	3	0	1
US - Midwest	40	6	0	1
US - South	60	5	2	1
US - West	23	4	0	0
Other	11	2	0	0
Total	213	28	2	4

Comments from respondents included the following (country of origin in parentheses):

*The days when the only educated people were to be found within monastery walls are far behind us and the Church has, today, access to intellectual resources undreamed of in earlier eras. It's really inexcusable to bury the talents. (Australia)*

*We are all part of God's Body and all have links with the Holy Spirit and have experiences to share and reflect upon. At the moment, the lived world of so many is not taken into account and so many voices, particularly those of the poor and vulnerable are never heard. This is a scandal and contrary to the wishes of a Jesus who sought out the poor and listened to their stories. (United Kingdom)*

A respondent from India complained, “the Church authorities still believe only they have better discerning power and direct contact with God!” And one from the Philippines noted a potential benefit of engaging all the faithful in the teaching and learning Church: “This will allow people to own the Church teachings that came from them.”

Several respondents raised concerns with a specific clause in the question, “what we have to do to bring the Gospel up to date.” One American said, “The Gospel is the Gospel! No need to bring it up to date.” Another, also from the United States, commented, “Our gospels were written 2000 years ago with a world view that is very different from today. It stands to reason that they must be interpreted in the light of our current knowledge.”

And two respondents, the first from Australia, the second from the United Kingdom, spoke of the attitude with which we must discern the Gospel and Church teaching:

*Any "teaching" we provide for each other should look a lot like personal sharing (not pontificating) and should be done with humility and an awareness of personal limitations.*

*Co-discernment and collaboration can only succeed if we truly love each other!*

### **Priority of Conscience**

Presented with the statement, "If the teaching of the Church does not fit my values and experience, such as the Church's teaching on birth control, I believe I have a responsibility to allow my conscience to take precedence over the teaching," 73 percent strongly agreed and 21 percent agreed. Only four disagreed, and none strongly disagreed.

#### **Extent of Agreement with Precedence of Conscience over Teaching**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	16	4	0	0
India	4	3	0	0
Philippines	5	2	1	0
United Kingdom	12	4	1	0
Canada	12	3	0	0
US - Northeast	13	6	1	0
US - Midwest	41	4	0	0
US - South	53	15	1	0
US - West	19	7	0	0
Other	7	5	0	0
Total	182	53	4	0

Sixteen of the groups agreed with the statement on the priority of conscience, 11 of them strongly; none disagreed, but one offered no opinion.

### **The Role of Dialogue and Listening to the Faithful**

Asked whether dialogue should become an institutional tool for building relationships to solve problems—the survey question suggested that, while Pope Francis is seeking dialogue, many bishops are blocking it—74 percent strongly agreed and 10 percent agreed, while 13 percent strongly disagreed. Thirteen of the groups strongly agreed with the statement, while 4 strongly disagreed.

#### **Extent of Support for Dialogue as a Tool to Build Relationships and Solve Problems in the Church**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	16	3	0	3
India	5	0	0	1
Philippines	7	0	0	1
United Kingdom	18	0	0	0
Canada	12	4	0	0
US - Northeast	15	2	0	4
US - Midwest	37	2	0	6
US - South	45	9	0	12
US - West	19	3	0	5
Other	12	1	0	0
Total	186	24	0	32

"Disregarding the opinions of lay people is a terrible loss to the Church," one respondent from the United States said, and another commented, "No problems can be solved without meaningful communication."

Several respondents had kind words for the pope for his efforts to encourage dialogue. “Pope Francis is an excellent model of this, I believe. Everyone must follow his lead,” said a person from the Philippines. And a United Kingdom respondent stated: “Pope Francis is inspired, and he rightly wants contact with all the faithful.” One American found reason for optimism: “I believe that bishops will begin to follow his example as they see it working.”

Others, however, were critical of the lack of dialogue in the Church:

*How can a few individuals with limited experience and limited openness to contrary ideas be able to guide others with compassion as Jesus would have them do? How can anyone truly know the heart of another? We MUST learn to listen with open minds and hearts to the concerns and experiences of all.* (Canada)

*I believe that often the voices of the bishops have done more harm to the standing of the Church and have been a barrier to building relationships. I believe that the clergy working on the ground of the Church are much more sympathetic and empathetic to people’s issues than the bishops of the Church.* (United Kingdom)

*Bishops need training and guidance and counseling to put aside fear and defensive attitudes and to understand more fully their pastoral role today in 2014. They need support to garner the skills required to manage their tasks effectively and to see the value of gathering teams around them of people who have the mix of skills to listen, see, judge and act. Such teams must be carefully and transparently appointed and structured.* (United Kingdom)

Several suggested that the lack of dialogue is causing people to drift away, including this person from the United States: “What is the real alternative? On present course the Church will become smaller and smaller. I believe Jesus’ message is meant to be bigger and bigger, meaning more inclusive, the message of love and grace available to all.”

On the survey statement, “to formulate valid Church teachings, the Church must responsibly listen to the faithful and honor their lived experiences,” 77 percent strongly agreed and 12 percent agreed, while 8 percent strongly disagreed. Twelve groups strongly agreed and 2 agreed, while 3 strongly disagreed that the Church needs to listen to and honor the faithful’s lived experience.

**Level of Agreement with the Need to Listen  
To the Faithful and Honor Their Lived Experience**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	17	5	0	0
India	7	0	0	0
Philippines	7	0	0	1
United Kingdom	16	2	0	0
Canada	14	2	0	0
US - Northeast	16	3	0	2
US - Midwest	37	5	0	5
US - South	43	11	0	11
US - West	24	1	0	2
Other	11	2	0	0
Total	192	31	0	21

“How can you administer effectively to people if you know nothing of their lives,” a respondent from Canada asked. “The reason the Catholic Church is in crisis today is because the hierarchy does not listen to the people,” a respondent from the United States commented. Another American said, “We have so much to bring to the table. It has always been dismissed.”

Listening to the faithful and honoring their lived experience “will definitely keep the Church grounded and the teachings relevant,” a respondent from the Philippines said.



Large numbers also agreed with the statement, “If the Church of the 21st century truly wants to understand the challenges and lived experiences facing families today, going along with Francis' call for dialogue, bishops must create opportunities for dialogue with all forms of families—divorced and remarried couples, same sex couples and families, couples in interfaith marriages, couples living together, and the like.” Eighty-three percent strongly agreed and 12 percent agreed, while 4 percent strongly disagreed.

**Level of Agreement with the Need for Bishops to Create Opportunities for Dialogue with All Forms of Families**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	19	1	0	2
India	6	1	0	0
Philippines	8	0	0	0
United Kingdom	15	3	0	0
Canada	13	3	0	0
US - Northeast	16	4	0	1
US - Midwest	43	3	0	1
US - South	57	7	0	5
US - West	21	4	0	1
Other	10	3	0	0
Total	208	29	0	10

Sixteen of the small groups discussing this question also agreed, 13 of them strongly, on the need for dialogue between bishops and all forms of families; one group disagreed.

“I agree that those currently who do not feel that they are able to be within the Church must have a right to be heard as well. There are many people within the Church who see their friends and family excluded from the Church because their beliefs are not compatible with the Church, and they feel excluded and pushed out by the very organisation that should be embracing them,” a person from the United Kingdom said.

Another respondent from the United Kingdom said, “Before they make rules on how others should live, they should seek the opinions of those who have experience of the situation.” One from the United States commented: “In order to remain relevant and to continue to lead people down the right path, we must meet people where they are.”

There was also strong support for systems and structures of dialogue within dioceses for discussing relevant social teachings that meet contemporary needs: 78 percent strongly agreed and 15 percent agreed with the need for such structures, and only 6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Ten groups strongly agreed and 4 agreed with the need for such structures, while 2 disagreed.

**Support for Diocesan Systems and Structures of Dialogue On Social Teaching That Meets Contemporary Needs**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	17	5	0	0
India	6	1	0	0
Philippines	7	1	0	0
United Kingdom	14	4	0	0
Canada	11	5	0	0
US - Northeast	12	5	1	3
US - Midwest	39	4	0	4
US - South	57	7	0	5
US - West	22	3	0	2
Other	10	2	0	1
Total	195	37	1	15

“The bishops must listen to the people, and be accepting of their lived experiences,” according to a respondent from the United Kingdom. “Many of the priests are empathetic to people’s struggles, but often they are put under pressure by the bishops and this needs to change. There is so much that the bishops can learn by listening to the laity.”

“This will be really effective especially if the bishops will involve the laity in formulating these systems and structures; these should not be imposed on the people,” said a respondent from the Philippines, but others wondered if that would happen. One person from the United States commented: “I have practically no faith that the bishops are capable of doing this! Maybe the progressive priests and laity must take the lead.” One from Canada said, “It may be too late for any of this to include the many who are convinced the bishops will hear only what they want to hear.”

A respondent from the United States suggested, “If the bishops do not create such systems and structures, we laity must do so, and use whatever means possible, in charity, to bring them about. Bishops must be educated to the reality that they, like us, are the Church; not THEY alone are the Church. When we put forth what the "Church" teaches, it must truly be the whole Church, not just the hierarchical branch.”

Asked whether certain dialogue venues—synods, and pastoral and financial councils with decision-making authority—exist in their diocese, 63 percent answered, “to my knowledge, none of the above.” Seventeen percent said there were elected parish pastoral councils with decision-making authority, and 10 percent or fewer said there were diocesan pastoral or financial councils with decision-making authority, or mandatory synods.

### Extent of Diocesan and Parish Venues for Dialogue

Country/ Continent	Mandatory Representative Diocesan Synods	Representative Diocesan Pastoral Council With Decision-making Authority	Representative Diocesan Financial Council With Decision-making Authority	Elected Pastoral Councils With Decision-making Authority	To My Knowledge, None Of the Above
Australia	2	2	3	6	9
India	1	1	0	1	4
Philippines	0	1	1	3	3
United Kingdom	0	0	0	0	15
Canada	1	1	1	5	9
US - Northeast	1	0	1	2	17
US - Midwest	4	5	4	8	35
US - South	10	11	9	15	42
US - West	0	1	2	1	19
Other	2	2	2	2	4
Total	21	24	23	43	157

“We have a parish council which works well with the parish priest,” one Australian commented, but many noted that pastoral and financial councils, where they exist, are advisory only with no real decision-making authority, and consist of persons hand-picked by the bishop or pastor. Two representative comments, the first from Canada, the second from Ireland:

*The pastors and bishop consult the councils for advice, but do not normally follow that advice and instead do what they had already planned to do, regardless of the opinions and suggestions of the various councils.*

*The parish priest makes the final decision—somewhat like a dictator—and the same people are brought onto Parish Councils. The status quo remains and the silent voice is never heard nor wanted to ruffle the feathers of those in authority.*

These existing venues may be limited in their discussions. An American said, “I’m deeply involved in my parish, serve on the Regional Pastoral Council, and serve on the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. There is no dialogue venue on the issues.”

And their existence always rests on the will of the bishop or pastor. “We had a wonderful Vatican II-centered parish,” a respondent from the U.S. said. “Then, when our pastor retired, the bishop sent in a power-driven traditionalist young

priest without consulting us. Many of us left and now belong to no parish community. This sort of thing needs to stop unless they want us all to join the Episcopal Church.”

Many respondents simply did not know if there even were such venues; they had not heard. “If they exist, they are not communicating very well,” an American commented.

A respondent from Australia made the case for a greater role by the laity in decision-making:

*The economic wealth of the Church has not been the result of the work of the hierarchy and the clergy but is the result of the contribution of the laity, who are the real and true “shareholders” in the greatest international corporation—the 21st century structure demands that these “shareholders” must be allowed to make decisions.*

In any other corporation, the shareholders, those who put up the money, are given decision-making powers. Only in the Catholic Church is this not the case.

In rare situations, some bishops and priests are making the effort to create such structures. In New Orleans in the United States, “Archbishop Aymond has recently opened an archdiocesan synod. He is now holding listening sessions in every deanery and all Catholics are urged to participate,” a Catholic there said.

### **Family Participation at the Synod on the Family**

Two questions asked specifically about the role that families should play at the Synod on the Family. The first stated, “to acknowledge the lived reality of families today, the Church must include a broad spectrum of families (not just bishops and clerics) in the 2014 and 2015 Synod gatherings.” Eighty-four percent strongly agreed with the statement and 9 percent agreed, while 6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Fourteen of the 17 small groups strongly agreed with family participation at the synod and 2 agreed, while 1 strongly disagreed.

**Broad Representation of Families at the Synod**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	19	2	0	1
India	7	0	0	0
Philippines	7	1	0	0
United Kingdom	17	1	0	0
Canada	14	2	0	0
US - Northeast	15	3	0	3
US - Midwest	40	4	0	3
US - South	58	5	1	5
US - West	23	3	0	0
Other	9	2	0	1
Total	209	23	1	13

On the second statement, “the invitation for families to participate in the Synod should be the first stage of an ongoing exchange between bishops and the faithful on a wide range of contemporary issues,” 79 percent agreed and 12 percent agreed, while 5 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Eleven groups strongly agreed and 4 agreed with this statement, while 1 strongly disagreed.

**Support for Ongoing Dialogue Between Bishops  
And the Faithful on Contemporary Issues**

Country/ Continent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Australia	17	2	1	2
India	6	0	0	1
Philippines	7	1	0	0
United Kingdom	15	2	0	0
Canada	14	2	0	0
US - Northeast	15	3	1	2
US - Midwest	38	6	0	2
US - South	53	10	1	0
US - West	23	2	0	1
Other	9	2	0	2
Total	197	30	3	10

“We cannot discuss families without family input,” a respondent from Canada said, and others felt the same:

*Bishops should try living family life in today's world before they set teachings in stone. (Australia)*

*Bishops and clerics making pronouncements about family life without consulting a broad spectrum of families is both insulting and a waste of their time. (United States)*

*Without lay family representation, the synod has no credibility. (United States)*

According to a respondent from the United Kingdom, “This seems so obvious. We need to stress to clerics the enrichment and support and enhanced love for them which would come if families could be allowed to exercise their ministries more fully in the area of discernment in their own Church, the Church within which they build up their bodies and whole lives each week as surely as clerics do.”

One American commented, “Having the same old systems provide the same old results—the reason people are so disgusted with the Church as it is. Patriarchy is not relevant in today's culture—in fact I believe it to be one of the most sinful structures in our society and culture.” Another noted: “It is a synod of bishops. However, they are free to bring in expert representatives and should do so to enhance the value of their discussions.”

Many respondents cited the need for representative input, from all kinds of families (married, divorced, single parents, single, same-sex) with a broad spectrum of views (from conservative to moderate to progressive). Several, like this person from India, felt that this input should already be underway: “Actually regional consultations with families should be the first step. Families should set the agenda for the bishops' synod.”

A respondent from Australia remained optimistic: “I want to hear results. I err on the side that there may be a chance that the ‘enlightened by the Spirit’ may JUST outweigh the ‘unenlightened’. The results will contribute to determine my future faith journey.”

### **Additional Comments**

The survey invited personal stories and other comments, and one respondent from the United States, was critical of the survey itself: “The survey is biased, stating things as facts which may not be, then asking if we approve of the surrealistic affirmation.” Some shared positive experiences; others expressed frustration—a sampling of their responses:

*In general, on the one hand, my wife has been patronised, or worse, on a number of occasions because she had the courage to speak out about what she saw as an injustice. On the other hand we have had the most uplifting experiences working with some priests and a few religious working in Marriage Encounter and various other lay movements within the Church. Our current parish priest is an*

*absolute gift to our parish, not least because of his constant ability to raise our spiritual awareness. (Australia)*

*I am a transgender women living in a married same-sex relationship. My priest is aware of my situation and has been very supportive of me. He adopted the same attitude as Pope Frances some years ago and said to me: who am I to judge. I believe that the Church needs to listen to these voices, and get the message out that the Church is not there to judge. However, I would not at this moment in time be optimistic that the bishops would have the same attitude. (United Kingdom)*

*My experience as a psychologist in the area of sexual abuse passed over in favour of inexperienced deacon whom I personally believe was incompetent to fulfil the tasks required. I resigned in protest from the Diocesan Safeguarding commission. (United Kingdom)*

*I have served on the pastoral council. Our bishop never missed a meeting and was always interested in us and what we had to offer. We were very fortunate. (United States)*

*Meetings with pastor are futile, no matter how nice we try to present the issues. He just blames the bishop and says he will be fired and our parish will close down. We have tried to meet with bishop, a few people, 2 or 3 to represent a grass-roots group of over 100 people. This group formed from Future Church national initiative to try to dialogue with our individual bishops of our diocese about lack of Eucharist because of priest shortage—the need to change the rules re: celibate priesthood and woman deacons. He would not meet with us at all—over at least a half dozen letters. (United States)*

*I was invited to take the survey for the Bishop's use at the 2014 synod. I was surprised that instructions before taking the survey included a recommendation to familiarize myself with Church teaching in the Catechism. Is that dialogue or test prep? (United States)*

*I am blessed to be in a long-time progressive faith community and Church. I know there are some others. I also suspect that I would not attend/be part of most of the churches in our diocese due to the traditional teachings/climate promoted by the pastor. (United States)*

*I was on a diocesan women's committee ... We were to report to the bishop what we thought were important issues to women. After several hours very little of substance was sent to the bishop. Recommendations for the diocese to work on increasing wages for women, offering child care at a reasonable cost, etc were NOT even on the list sent to the bishop even though they were agreed upon issues from the committee for women in our diocese. (United States)*

*Our local pastor called the police on us when we held a prayer vigil outside of church. I pray daily for change but am not holding my breath. (United States)*

*Our bishop is wonderful and so is his office. There is real understanding of people and what they need and want. Unfortunately, it is not so in the individual parishes and in order to stay Catholic, people are shopping around to find one that is welcoming to all and pronounces the Gospel and preaches on it. The Church needs to stay out of my bedroom and my politics. (United States)*

*Wrote a letter. Got a response that he was the boss. End of discussion. (United States)*

*I am an 80 year-old lifelong Catholic. Now, non-practicing. The liturgy is not relevant. The Doctrine of the Faith is not relevant in the 21st century. (United States)*

*The Mass is what brings people to Catholic Churches. What induces them to come back week after week is Mass celebrated with great care and true piety. Such true piety inevitably challenges and inspires each of us to live as followers of Christ. Those who do not respond to the challenge will fall away. (United States)*

# **Addendum: The Damage Done to Families By the Clerical Sexual Abuse of Children**

The Parish Pastoral Council of St. Leonard's Parish, Glen Waverley, Australia, in collaboration with Catholics for Renewal, conducted a "Discussion Forum on Challenges Facing Catholic Families Today" on September 9. Discussion at the forum focused on four challenges: 1) Cohabitation before and outside of marriage; 2) Openness to Life: Birth control and contraceptive practices; 3) Reception of the Eucharist for Catholics who have divorced and remarried; and 4) the damage done to all families by clerical sexual abuse.

The following is the summary of the discussion on the fourth challenge, on clerical sexual abuse of children, an issue not explicitly covered by the CCRI surveys, but extremely important because of the pain and suffering caused to families and the resulting loss of trust in and credibility of the Church, particularly the hierarchy.

## **KEY ISSUES DISCUSSED**

There was agreement in the group discussions that the child sexual abuse crisis within the Church is a worldwide phenomenon that has devastated the lives of thousands of innocent children, the victims of such abuse, their families and the wider church family. This issue should be discussed openly and compassionately at the Extraordinary Synod on the Family. Family members shared how clerical abuse of children had groomed and disempowered children, their parents and siblings, all of whom can properly be regarded as secondary victims of child sexual abuse. The wider Church family has been divided, with families pointing to teachers and outspoken parishioners being marginalized and labeled troublemakers solely for having the courage to raise the issues of child abuse and reporting their concerns to the police.

The Church leadership's denial and cover up of child abuse, coupled with the reactive and slow response to abuse, was regarded universally by members of the groups as a massive betrayal of trust and a failure of leadership. There was no dissenting view from the finding that the protection of the institutional reputation of the Church was placed ahead of the protection of vulnerable children in the care and oversight of the Church. There was a strongly held view that members of the Church hierarchy found to be culpable in the cover up and moving on of paedophile priests should be removed from office. Some family members believed that only when Pope Francis took such strong action would the Church begin to regain the respect and trust it has lost in the wider community.

Group members noted that there seemed to be no sense of urgency within the Church to understand the global nature of the abuse scandal or to commence an investigation of the causes of such abuse. Any such investigation needed to be global, examine the requirement of compulsory celibacy in the Latin rite Church, the lack of accountability and transparency in the governance of the Church, the absence of women in key senior positions within the Church and the quality of formation programs for priests and religious. Members identified the grave inadequacies in the governance of the Church founded by Jesus Christ and the clerical child sexual abuse crisis as one shocking illustration of the results of failing to govern the Church in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. These inadequacies have damaged Church decision-making and adversely affected the Church's ability to proclaim the Good News. The inadequacies have been particularly exposed in the response of the Church as an institution to the clerical sexual abuse scandal, its decision-making effectively disavowing Jesus' specific condemnation of those who harm children.

Family members shared their anger at how "good priests" and pastors were stained by the child abuse crisis. Such priests needed prayerful support and care as they ministered to their congregations. The scale of the betrayal by abusers meant that families had real difficulties both within their families and with others they engaged with at work and in their local community being agents of effective evangelization; outreach could only be effective once victims had received justice and the whole Church had undergone a period of atonement for this scandal.

The first priority of Catholic families must always be the welfare of survivors of abuse and their families. Justice for victims meant supporting programs for victims both financially and in giving time and talents as required. Practical grass roots programs were the key focus of the conversation, with many citing the "Life Boat" program of Fr Kevin

Dillon in the Melbourne Archdiocese as a practical and pastoral means of bringing hope, help and recognition to victims of abuse and their families.

There was an overwhelming sense of ill ease about the Church leadership use of the legal system to defend itself and its assets against abuse claims, often at the expense of a more pastoral and compassionate response to victims' claims. Mandatory criminal reporting of child abuse to the police was a welcome initiative but only provided mandatory reporting obligations in two Australian States, Victorian and New South Wales, rather than a national scheme of criminal reporting. Some also expressed a concern that without major changes to the Code of Canon Law, Church leaders were fettered in how they responded to abuse allegations, which often frustrated justice for victims and unconsciously delayed the prosecution and laicization of paedophile priests.

## **PROPOSALS**

This discussion forum calls on the Synod on the Family to:

- 1) **Acknowledge** that the clerical sexual abuse scandal is a worldwide phenomenon which has devastated the lives of thousands of children, the victims of such abuse, their families, and the wider church family.
- 2) **Recognize** that justice for abuse victims and their families requires the Church's leadership to recognize their culpability in the scandal through failure to place the safety of children ahead of the Church's reputation, and the accompanying cover-up which enabled abusers to remain in ministry and continue their predatory activities against children in the Church's care or oversight.
- 3) **Implement** effective governance structures, as well as a new culture of transparency, to confront and remove child sexual abuse wherever it exists in the Church.
- 4) **Commit** to a global review of the systemic causes of the abuse scandal and the swift implementation of reforms to rid the Church of predators, and establish world best practice child protections standards in all its works and processes.
- 5) **Recognize** that the Church's own laws are a barrier to progress in the elimination of clerical child abuse, and take all necessary steps, in consultation with the laity, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, to urgently reform the canons, decrees, instructions and processes applying to the investigation and prevention of clergy abuse of children.
- 6) **Reconcile** with the survivors of clerical sexual abuse and their families through a public synodal apology for the cover-ups by bishops, together with acts of penance.

*##End##*