

The document below is an unofficial rendering into plain English of the Vatican's global consultation on Catholic sexual teaching and family life. The original text, and introductory document, can be found at: tinyurl.com/VaticanSurvey2013

The questionnaire is addressed to your diocese as a whole. Some questions, by their nature, are mainly directed at clergy. Nevertheless, this document summarises in plain English what all the questions are asking.

The Christian idea of family is rooted in the Bible. In Genesis we are told that God created human beings as male and female, and that it was God's plan that a man should leave his parents and be faithful to his wife. They were to "be fruitful and multiply".

When Jesus was asked his opinion on divorce, he said that Genesis made God's plan very plain: husband and wife become "one flesh" and are to remain faithful to each other for the rest of their natural lives. Although Moses had allowed divorce, this was only because the Israelites were unready to understand God's true plan.

By attending a wedding at Cana, Jesus indicated his support for marriage. In several of his parables, he spoke of himself as "bridegroom" to the faithful members of the Church. Some other New Testament letters explore the idea that the relationship between Jesus and the Church is like that of a husband and wife – so Christian spouses must be faithful for life because their marriage is meant to be a living sign that Jesus is always faithful to His bride, the church.

During the last 50 years, the Catholic Church has set out its teaching on marriage in documents such as [Gaudium et Spes](#) (from the Second Vatican Council in 1965), [Familiaris Consortio](#) (by Blessed John Paul II, 1981) and the [Catechism](#).

You can respond directly to the questions as [described here](#) by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

1. The Diffusion of the Teachings on the Family in Sacred Scripture and the Church's Magisterium

- a) How well do people in general understand the Catholic Church's teachings on the family? How are Catholics in particular helped to understand the Church's teaching on family life?
- b) When Catholics do understand the Church's vision of family, is this teaching accepted fully? Insofar as people do accept it, what are the difficulties of putting it into practice?
- c) How is the Church's teaching on family life set forth within your parish, within your diocese, and at national levels?
- d) How well do non-Catholics understand the Catholic position on the family? What aspects of the teaching are usually accepted or rejected? How is this influenced by the local cultural understanding of what a family could or should be?

Catholic Teaching draws not only on the Bible but also on what is often called “Natural Law”. This starts from the basis that there is such a thing as “human nature” (the way human beings tend to behave) and that we can deduce that certain things which work against our human nature are immoral. Aspects of human nature include the facts that eating food gives us nourishment, and a sexual act between two fertile human beings is likely to result in conception. Bulimia and contraception are therefore both immoral because they work against the good acts of nourishing the body and creating human life.

2. Marriage according to the Natural Law

- a) How do people in general and scholars in particular understand the concept of “natural law”? What philosophical starting points are used by those to talk about the nature of “family”?
- b) Do baptised Christians in general accept the idea that there is a moral message in the simple fact that a sexual act between a man and a woman often produces a human child?
- c) How do actual families which exist conform or challenge this idea of Natural Law? How do civil and Church institutions teach the idea of Natural Law?
- d) What do church representatives do when a Catholic who rarely attends Mass requests a church wedding, or such a wedding involves someone who declares themselves to have no faith?

Evangelisation is the work of sharing the news about Jesus and inviting all to become His followers.

Every Christian family is called to be a “domestic Church” – a household which spends time worshipping God and serving others.

3. The Pastoral Care of the Family in Evangelization

- a) What kind of marriage preparation activities are offered locally? How are couples helped to understand that they are called to be followers of Jesus? How are couples helped to pass on this message to their family? What can be done to help every Christian household realise they are a “domestic church” and to act accordingly?
- b) Has the local church been successful in suggesting ways families can pray together which work in the midst of modern life?
- c) What have Christian families been able to do, in practice, to pass on faith from one generation to the next?
- d) Give examples of good ways in which your local diocese or any church organisation have enabled families to take on spiritual activities.
- e) How can Catholic couples or families themselves spread the Church’s vision of what a Christian family should be?
- f) What formal help has the Church provided to help couples understand teaching on the family, or for families in crisis situations?

4. Pastoral Care in Certain Difficult Marital Situations

- a) Do couples in your diocese tend to live together as a way of seeing if a relationship is workable before committing to marriage? If so, what percentage of couples do this rather than choosing to live separately until their wedding day?
- b) In your nation, does it happen that people form “family units” without registering the relationship as a civil marriage or by a religious ceremony? If so, are reliable statistics available?
- c) In your diocese, is it common for Catholics to separate, or to civilly remarry following divorce? Can you estimate a percentage? How do you deal with this situation in pastoral activities?
- d) When (in any of the above cases) baptized Christians live with partners to whom they are not married, are they aware of the fact they are not in accord with the Church’s teaching? Do they care? Does this make them feel marginalized? Do they long to receive the sacraments while refraining from approaching them?
- e) What issues arise from the fact that so many Catholics are divorced and remarried people who cannot receive the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation? How many such people actually ask for these sacraments?
- f) Would a simplifying the process for an annulment of marriage help solve the problems of the parties involved? If so, how?
- g) What, if anything, is done to specifically support those engaging with the annulment process - locally or more widely? How is God’s mercy proclaimed to separated couples and those divorced and remarried?

5. On Unions of Persons of the Same Sex

- a) Is there a law in your country recognizing civil unions or same-sex marriage?
- b) How does your diocese, and its members, relate to the legislators who seek to recognise same-sex relationships, and to individuals who promote such relationships?
- c) What pastoral help can be given to such people?
- d) If a same-sex couple have adopted children, what can be done to help them transmit the Catholic faith to the adoptees?

An “irregular marriage” is any living arrangement where adult Catholics regard themselves as “married” or forming a family unit, but have not entered marriage according to the rules of the Catholic Church.

6. The Education of Children in Irregular Marriages

- a) What is the number of children/teenagers in such “irregular” families compared to the number of children/teenagers in properly married Catholic families?
- b) How do parents in these irregular situations approach the Church? What do they ask? Are they only asking for baptism/First Communion/confirmation or do they want their children to be taught how to live as followers of Jesus?
- c) How does your diocese attempt to provide parents and children in such cases with a Christian education?
- d) How are children and parents in such cases prepared to receive baptism/First Communion/confirmation? How are the ceremonies carried out? Who works with the children and parents before, during and afterwards?

Pope Paul VI's document *Humanae Vitae* taught that it was always wrong to deliberately block the fertility of human sexual intercourse (this goes against the Natural Law principle that a fertile human sexual act naturally produces new life). Since circumstances occur when it would be imprudent for a married couple to beget a child immediately, the document acknowledged that it was moral for a married couple to selectively refrain from sexual intercourse except at times when the wife was naturally infertile. However, this could only be done as a temporary response to adverse circumstances; every Christian married couple physically capable of having children should intend to bear children, since this is part of God's purpose for marriage.

Some methods of contraception, such as those using intra-uterine devices or oral tablets, risk destroying human life by preventing fertilised embryos from implanting in the womb. Other methods of contraception merely prevent the sexual act from being fertile in the first place. Even natural methods (which may be based on simply counting days between periods or on awareness of factors in the woman's body such as cervical mucus or temperature variations) may be immoral if used with the intention of permanently avoiding conception within a married relationship.

7. The Openness of the Married Couple to Life

- a) Do Christians today understand the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*? Do they understand how to rate the moral factors involved in different methods of family planning? What can pastors and their collaborators do about this?
- b) Do most couples accept this moral teaching? If not, what are the main objections?
- c) What methods of Natural Family Planning are actively promoted by your diocese?
- d) Do you find that spouses mention these matters in Confession? Does it affect whether they receive Holy Communion or attend Mass at all?
- e) How do education materials promoted by the state, whether in schools or in public health campaigns, differ from Catholic teaching?
- f) How can couples be helped to feel more positive about having children at all? How can they be encouraged to have larger families?

8. The Relationship Between the Family and the Person

- a) In Jesus, we find the best model of what it is to be truly human. How can families best help their members to be truly human?
- b) What problems in family life can block a person's relationship with Jesus?
- c) How far does the weakness of a person's religious faith affect their family life?

9. Other Challenges and Proposals

What other questions should Catholic bishops be asking about the topics above? Are there other challenges in Catholic family life? Are there any other ideas or ways forward?