

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

III EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY PASTORAL CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY IN THE CONTEXT OF EVANGELIZATION

PREPARATORY DOCUMENT

VATICAN CITY

2013

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

a) Describe how the Catholic Church's teachings on the value of the family contained in the Bible, *Gaudium et spes*, *Familiaris consortio* and other documents of the post-conciliar Magisterium is understood by people today? What formation is given to our people on the Church's teaching on family life?

The vast majority of Catholics are not regular Mass attendants and it can be presumed that that they have little interest or understanding. Mass attendants would have some understanding, varying from minimal to having studied the documents. Formation would be mainly via homily and the congregations in this Parish are pre-dominately elderly.

b) In those cases where the Church's teaching is known, is it accepted fully or are there difficulties in putting it into practice? If so, what are they?

They are regarded by many as aspirational, and hopefully are matters for regard before decision making, but it would appear they have no great acceptance. Most knowledge is on the negative aspects.

c) How widespread is the Church's teaching in pastoral programmes at the national, diocesan and parish levels? What catechesis is done on the family?

At Parish level in an older congregations it is homily based except where part of a sacramental programme.

d) To what extent — and what aspects in particular — is this teaching actually known, accepted, rejected and/or criticized in areas outside the Church? What are the cultural factors which hinder the full reception of the Church's teaching on the family?

Many of the positive messages in Church documents and teachings are ignored or unknown but there is wider criticism of birth control,

re-marriage and even same sex relationships. This is common outside and inside the Church. Compliance is often more culturally driven, eg within migrant groups, but dissipates fairly quickly, often within one generation. Higher education particularly of women is probably the major factor.

2. Marriage according to the Natural Law

a) What place does the idea of the natural law have in the cultural areas of society: in institutions, education, academic circles and among the people at large? What anthropological ideas underlie the discussion on the natural basis of the family?

A concept given little thought by the majority of people in the community.

b) Is the idea of the natural law in the union between a man and a woman commonly accepted as such by the baptized in general?

Probably accepted by the majority but most are not willing to impose this on the wider community. In practice there is little evidence of different rates of co-habitation before marriage, or after marriage break up, marriage outside the Church etc. Many Parishes would have high acceptance of moves to legalise same-sex unions though there is little discussion of wanting a change in Church tradition.

c) How is the theory and practice of natural law in the union between man and woman challenged in light of the formation of a family? How is it proposed and developed in civil and Church institutions?

It would appear the on-going Abuse scandals have left the Church with little credibility in matters such as this. Marriage preparation would be the main area of opportunity but Church weddings are greatly reduced within the baptised as in the general community. Some migrant groups providing some greater compliance.

d) In cases where non-practicing Catholics or declared non-believers request the celebration of marriage, describe how this pastoral challenge is dealt with?

Unless one partner was strongly committed this is a rare challenge.

3. The Pastoral Care of the Family in Evangelization

a) What experiences have emerged in recent decades regarding marriage preparation? What efforts are there to stimulate the task

of evangelization of the couple and of the family? How can an awareness of the family as the "domestic Church" be promoted?

Attendance is normally a requirement before sacramental marriage. When the majority of young couples are unchurched even when sacramentally married this is difficult. Again homilies or perhaps a quick mention in a Priest's contact with school parents.

b) How successful have you been in proposing a manner of praying within the family which can withstand life's complexities and today's culture?

While it is impossible to tell with certainty, probably not very successfully even with the under 10% Church attending.

c) In the current generational crisis, how have Christian families been able to fulfil their vocation of transmitting the faith?

With Mass attendances down even in the 55 to 65 age group talk of a generational crisis is inaccurate as the drift is massive and across generations.

Our Parish schools system is the main conduit and support for families, but in many cases responsibility is handed to the schools with minimal family commitment. A small number of families are able to work well with the available supports.

d) In what way have the local Churches and movements on family spirituality been able to create ways of acting which are exemplary?

There are few obvious examples of exemplary family spirituality, but many courageous families and individuals.

e) What specific contribution can couples and families make to spreading a credible and holistic idea of the couple and the Christian family today?

While the media pushes such a materialistic and individualistic culture it is through the quiet example of living faith filled grounded lives.

f) What pastoral care has the Church provided in supporting couples in formation and couples in crisis situations?

Through Diocesan services and in our case a Deanery level counselling unit.

4. Pastoral Care in Certain Difficult Marital Situations

a) Is cohabitation *ad experimentum* a pastoral reality in your particular Church? Can you approximate a percentage?

Yes, with some variation between nationality groups particularly in recent migrant groups, but around 70% at a minimum.

b) Do unions which are not recognized either religiously or civilly exist? Are reliable statistics available?

Yes these unions exist, no statistics at Parish level are available but they are common at even Parish school level. Many cases involve re-partnering post marriage break up and may be recognised (at least civilly) later.

c) Are separated couples and those divorced and remarried a pastoral reality in your particular Church? Can you approximate a percentage? How do you deal with this situation in appropriate pastoral programmes?

Yes they are a reality.

In the suburban setting there is little knowledge of the status of relationships within the community therefore percentages are hard to approximate. Even within for example the community of parents of Catholic primary school attenders one may not be, and often are not aware of marital status, existing re-marriages etc let alone have any idea of whether there is any consideration of using natural family planning.

In a society where many shift around between communities many "new" couples move after coming together so their relationship history is un-known.

No programmes at Parish or Deanery level.

d) In all the above cases, how do the baptized live in this irregular situation? Are aware of it? Are they simply indifferent? Do they feel marginalized or suffer from the impossibility of receiving the sacraments?

Most are probably indifferent or facing what are considered more pressing practical problems. Awareness is often not the case unless issues arise, often with ex-partners or in the Parish school environment.

The lack of awareness means most could receive the sacraments but some do feel marginalised and suffer with it. Many drift away but come back following other contact with the Church.

d) What questions do divorced and remarried people pose to the Church concerning the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation? Among those persons who find themselves in these situations, how many ask for these sacraments?

The question is perceived as a dilemma, with some concern that loosening of rules encourages inappropriate "practices". The other concern is the pastoral care of individuals and families. Most of our Parishioners seem to come down strongly on a pastoral approach.

Many priests will provide the sacraments even when aware of irregularities. With Australian participation in reconciliation so low the issue is mainly re receipt of the Eucharist.

As per (d) above there is a low level of awareness and if a priest is considered unsympathetic the person can just go to another Parish for a more pastoral priest or because they are unknown.

f) Could a simplification of canonical practice in recognizing a declaration of nullity of the marriage bond provide a positive contribution to solving the problems of the persons involved? If yes, what form would it take?

Some simplification and reduction in process time and cost would assist. Making things more difficult can just make people feel they need to make other arrangements.

g) Does a ministry exist to attend to these cases? Describe this pastoral ministry? Do such programmes exist on the national and diocesan levels? How is God's mercy proclaimed to separated couples and those divorced and remarried and how does the Church put into practice her support for them in their journey of faith?

Parish awareness is of the Marriage Tribunal, CatholicCare and locally the Priest or Pastoral worker.

5. On Unions of Persons of the Same Sex

a) Is there a law in your country recognizing civil unions for people of the same-sex and equating it in some way to marriage?

National issue.

b) What is the attitude of the local and particular Churches towards both the State as the promoter of civil unions between persons of the same sex and the people involved in this type of union?

The Church policy of opposition is well known but attitudes of the baptised are varied.

It is presumed the "unchurched" would have views similar to the wider community. Possibly a 50 – 50 divide. Within the "churched" community the main determinants would be cultural and education. The majority of tertiary educated and professional Catholics would not oppose state legislated changes.

Regardless the vast majority would expect a pastoral approach to the "people involved in this type of union". Very few people would not work with or have family contact with homosexuals.

c) What pastoral attention can be given to people who have chosen to live in these types of union?

Pastoral care is based on an acceptance of people where they are and offering support to all when they experience difficult times. While like any person they may choose to enter a relationship most Catholics believe they do not choose to be homo-sexual.

d) In the case of unions of persons of the same sex who have adopted children, what can be done pastorally in light of transmitting the faith?

Offer same services and support offered to other children.

6. The Education of Children in Irregular Marriages

a) What is the estimated proportion of children and adolescents in these cases, as regards children who are born and raised in regularly constituted families?

If "Irregular" includes marriage outside the Catholic Church it is a growing proportion and if not already, will soon make up a majority. If civilly recognised re-marriages are excluded it would be considerably lower.

Many couples marry in the "gardens" with a civil celebrant and then send children to Catholic schools.

b) How do parents in these situations approach the Church? What do they ask? Do they request the sacraments only or do they also want catechesis and the general teaching of religion?

Most would just enrol in the Local Catholic Primary School. If they attend a Government or Independent School, often Catholic order owned they would normally enrol for a sacramental program.

c) How do the particular Churches attempt to meet the needs of the parents of these children to provide them with a Christian education?

No differentiation from other children.

d) What is the sacramental practice in these cases: preparation, administration of the sacrament and the accompaniment?

As per other children. No effort is made to check out families before the education of the children.

7. The Openness of the Married Couple to Life

a) What knowledge do Christians have today of the teachings of *Humanae vitae* on responsible parenthood? Are they aware of how morally to evaluate the different methods of family planning? Could any insights be suggested in this regard pastorally?

Much of their knowledge would be historical, stories of the reaction at the time to the decision of the Pope and the views of the expert panel. The many positive statements of the document are not understood and it is thought of as the no family planning rules. Most would regard it as negative not responsible.

With the low Mass attendance and the destruction of trust post clerical abuse publicity we are on the backfoot with these moral issues.

b) Is this moral teaching accepted? What aspects pose the most difficulties in a large majority of couple's accepting this teaching?

Overall it is not accepted by a majority, not even as a policy by Mass goers. As regards the wider and younger baptised majority it would be surprising if 20% gave the Policy any serious consideration. Most would not take it seriously enough to regard it as causing difficulties.

Community expectations are to limit families to 2 or 3 children and the financial costs of Catholic schooling do not reduce this expectation.

Decisions to use natural methods of family planning are as likely to be made for health concerns by a well educated left leaning, progressive group as by strict religious adherents.

c) What natural methods are promoted by the particular Churches to help spouses put into practice the teachings of *Humanae vitae*?

Billings Method and Natural Family Planning.

d) What is your experience on this subject in the practice of the Sacrament of Penance and participation at the Eucharist?

Little attendance at Reconciliation and most Catholics, particularly in an area like this would not see say, being on the Pill as an impediment to receiving the Eucharist.

e) What differences are seen in this regard between the Church's teaching and civic education?

A huge gap, with minimal regard taken by a large majority of the baptised towards Church teaching.

f) How can a more open attitude towards having children be fostered? How can an increase in births be promoted?

When most families have both parents working, high expectations and high Catholic school fees it would be very difficult. With a highly educated female workforce a change in attitude is unlikely and many would consider undesirable.

8. The Relationship Between the Family and the Person

a) Jesus Christ reveals the mystery and vocation of the human person. How can the family be a privileged place for this to happen?

In a busy, materialistic society with little room for a quiet moment let alone the spiritual this is very difficult. The perception by many that the Church is dis-interested in its average members but more concerned re discipline and regulations is a barrier even when the local priests provide high level pastoral care. People vote with their feet and try another Parish or just cease practising. Growing faith thru the family is very difficult once the connection is lost.

b) What critical situations in the family today can obstruct a person's encounter with Christ?

While critical situations, death, ill health etc can be a barrier sometimes it is the critical situations that sees the return to the Church after experience the love of God thru good pastoral care.

c) To what extent do the many crisis of faith which people can experience affect family life?

Any loss of faith will have a negative effect on a balanced family life would be our expectation. But in our prosperous society there often appears little acknowledgement of this, or even of spiritual needs.

For many nominal Catholics there does not appear to be a crisis but a loss of faith. Many state this is a loss of faith in the institution not in God.

9. Other Challenges and Proposals

What other challenges or proposals related to the topics in the above questions do you consider urgent and useful to treat?

How do we treat people as Church pastorally?

Schools parents as an evangelized vineyard