
Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelisation

Archdiocese of Armagh Report

10 January 2014



Introduction

Methodology

- The Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry was asked to organise the distribution, the collection, the collation, the overview of the feedback and to compile a plenary report to Cardinal Sean Brady before Christmas 2013.
- In speaking to a number of priests and lay people who had the opportunity to look at the preparatory document that emerged from the Vatican there was a view that the



language and some of the technical terms were more than a little problematic for the ordinary parishioner.

- In order to simplify the process but with a view to remaining faithful to the intent of the questions a small group (Dympna Mallon, Fr Gerry Campbell and Dr. Tony Hanna) created an alternative document which we hoped would prove more accessible for the average parishioner.
- Almost 100% of the responses came from the simplified questionnaire, although both options were made available to people.
- We received responses from approximately three hundred people from across the Archdiocese, most of them individual respondents but we also had a significant number of group responses, typically from Parish gatherings, Parish Pastoral Councils or couples who chose to engage collegially with the questionnaire
- Aware of the human tendency to see things from the perspective of our own paradigm, we created a team of four readers (male & female, cleric and lay) who examined the material and individually summarised the salient points that were emerging.
- We then pooled our findings and agreed the key, recurring responses to each question. In this way we hoped to have a balanced perspective of the relevant data.

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- Where statistics were invited by the question we took the mean of the responses.

Welcome and Critique

- The opportunity for the faithful to engage in this process was widely welcomed. Many of the respondents expressed their delight at being consulted. As one older woman put it, *"This is the first time I have been asked for my views and it is really important that we let Rome know what we think about these issues."*
- The quality and impressive detail in many of the responses bore eloquent witness to the desire of the faithful to be involved in this discernment
- Other voices criticised the language of the official document and many were of the view that the use of the terminology involved in the questions showed just *"how much the Vatican is out of touch with ordinary Catholics."*
- *"This questionnaire is very poorly thought out. the questions are not easily answerable by members of the laity. Getting reliable statistics from the answers will not be possible. Sorry to be so negative about such a great idea. But if the Church is serious it must do it better."*
- Many respondents felt that the time frame for completion was very short and the promotion and distribution of the material was haphazard and in some cases it appeared not to be supported by the local clergy who did not promote it nor make it readily available.

Profile of Respondents

Approximately 300 people responded to the invitation to complete the survey. The breakdown of returns was as follows:

- 102 individual responses
- 8 Parish Pastoral Councils' Responses
- Reports from four open group meetings
- 12 couples made joint returns

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

1A Diffusion

- Although a minority voice articulated confidence in the knowledge basis of the general Catholic population, most respondents believed that there was very little familiarity with Church teaching. The dominant view was that most lay Catholics were largely ignorant about official documents. The minority that were aware of the teachings felt they got the information from religious education in schools, homilies, family and pre-marriage courses. It was also noted that the older generation was more aware of the teachings. Many feel the Church isn't up to date with current family life and their teachings are old fashioned. There are difficulties with regard to: divorce, abortion, homosexuality, contraception, chastity and adultery. People seem to be more liberal about these issues.
- *"The only preparation is before marriage."*
- *"Only preparation was as a child, or from the media."*
- *"Are given information, but there is no formation."*
- *"Teaching is poor, for example, the recent tragic death of a pregnant woman in Galway revealed the total lack of awareness of the Church's position."*
- *"What I was told at school did not match what my parents were teaching me, with what they had learned at school, so there was always confusion."*
- One respondent went further and questioned the knowledge of the clergy about such documents.
- *"Many of our priests do not understand the meaning of church teaching. Like so many of us, they too have a shallow understanding of it... It should be made compulsory that any priest working within the universal church should have to attend seminars for a few weeks every two or three years to bring them up to date."*

1B Where the Teaching is known what are the difficulties?

Apart from pre marriage courses run by Accord and pre-baptismal programmes, there would be very little formation beyond what was taught in school. There might be an occasional reference in a sermon and some input by older parents and

grandparents. Some voices spoke about the struggle to be faithful to Church teaching.

- *My husband and I are the only ones we know who believe and trust in divine providence, and who welcome children as God sends them, not as we intend.*
- *We get a backlash from our friends for living our Catholic faith.*

The dominant view was that Church teaching is more likely to be accepted by an older cohort but it is widely ignored by younger people. The Church's teaching on family planning is ignored. Contraception is a personal decision and *"widespread use of condoms etc is regarded as being responsible."*

- *Some believe that the formation offered is "skewed and distorted by those with alternative motives— the majority are not fully or honestly informed by those in adult education."*
- *"Teaching on artificial contraception is ignored."*
- *"Condoms are seen as the 'responsible' way."*
- *"In modern society, a high value is placed on personal liberty, and teaching on family planning is not accepted. Irregular unions are the norm."*

1C Comprehensive Teaching Programme?

As to a comprehensive teaching programme on family life the perception is that there is nothing substantive at either parish or diocesan level but there is evidence of some national initiatives. 95% ticked for no comprehensive teaching programme at national level, 90% ticked none at diocesan level, and 95% ticked none at parish level. Of the few who ticked yes, most added comments on its inadequacy.

1D Reception of Teaching outside the Church?

To those outside the Church, most *"won't even know of its existence"* and to those who would be aware, their view is that such teachings are irrelevant and outmoded.

- *"Roman Catholicism is not particularly cultural— that is probably one of the crises facing it. The liturgical dimension is often practised without reference to particular way of life. One can see for example how Islam and the life of cultural Muslims permeate every area of life— religious and otherwise. Roman catholicism has lost this, by and large..."*
- *The dominant, authoritative voice of the media has drowned out the moral teaching of the Church. "There is a prevailing culture of false compassion resulting in a 'whatever you are having yourself attitude'."*

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- *“This has been exacerbated by the clerical abuse in this country where many feel let down and humiliated leaving the priest with no authority to preach on these issues.”*

Other difficulties include:

- *Modern society and pressures such as TV content, music videos, individualism with no responsibility, lack of role models*

Marriage according to the Natural Law

2A Do People understand the Concept of Natural Law?

The returns indicated that 80% felt that people do not understand the concept of Natural Law. At least 50% of respondents indicated that they had never heard of it, and many left this section entirely blank.

“People who write and teach about Church law and Natural law are educated to third level and more. Many ordinary people do not have this level of education and in many cases are illiterate. They would never understand.”

“Life commitments are no longer the norm.”

“I do not see much evidence of the Natural law having a significant influence on the life of Man.”

Some saw the intrinsic value in promoting Natural law.

“A Natural Law understanding of marriage leads to cohesion of the family, and to society upholding the ideal of marriage”.

One articulate respondent reflected deeply on this issue:

“ The concept of natural law appears to wield little influence in government or academic circles. There is a dominant outlook that emphasises the will of the civil legislator rather than objective truth. Changes in laws and policies relating to family and marriage are often predicated on appeals of certain notions of equality, non discrimination and pluralism. Where human rights might be expected to restrain legal positivism, an all pervasive rights discourse seems instead to be grounded in a vision of the human person as an autonomous individual whose freedom is linked to his own conception of the good rather than being at the service of the common good. People may not associate such moral relativism with a repudiation of the natural law but they can perceive a departure from the classical aim of inculcating virtue in society and distinguishing right from wrong.”

2B Acceptance of Union of Man & Woman?

Most respondents believe that the union of man and woman is the accepted norm but there is a mixed opinion on the interaction of non traditional forms of family life and Natural Law.

- *“ Arguably most Catholics would accept marriage between a man and a woman as normative albeit without attributing it to natural law reasoning. Nevertheless, the cultural climate increasingly leaves some Catholics susceptible to accepting that marriage can be distorted to facilitate other claims. A defective understanding of human dignity that decouples it from the plan of the Creator could lead Catholics to acquiesce in or positively embrace the legal recognition of non-marital relationships and to be oblivious to the deleterious effect of other lifestyles and practices on marriage. this reasoning is sometimes encouraged by voices within the Church.”*

2C Challenges to Natural Law?

There were mixed view on the challenges to Natural Law. Some saw significant threat merging from new lifestyles and proposed legislation. Others were more neutral

- *“Natural law on family is not being challenged by non traditional forms of family life. Even, ‘normal’ families have serious problems (incest, violence). Non traditional families can show and provide good moral teaching. The church must be open to accepting diversity of family forms. It’s not a perfect world.”*

Other voices hold a very different view.

- *“Natural law is undermined when love is emptied of its sacrificial character and sex is sundered from its procreative capacity. reticence in some quarters in the Church to stress that there is a truth and meaning to human sexuality coupled with opposition to this view among certain avowedly Catholic figures and publications undermines confidence among the faithful. Legal recognition of non-marital unions;divorce laws; and cohabitation all imbue a culture that derides the notion of a permanent life-giving union between an man and a woman.”*

2D Marriage Requests from non practicing and unbelievers

Many respondents acknowledged that were ill informed on the frequency of such requests from unbelievers and knew little about the procedures involved. *“I know nothing about this subject.”* would capture the response of many.

In the case of non practicing Catholics there was a widespread view that the Church turns a blind eye and merely accedes to the request.

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- *“Discussion with the priest, permission from the Bishop, explanation and a raising of awareness of what they are requesting and what it means.”*
 - *“Priests are generally non-judgemental, and accede to requests.”*
 - *“Refusal of a church marriage simply means a trip to the registry office instead.”*
 - *“A large percentage of church marriages today are non-practicing, they see it as their right to have a church wedding.”*

The Pastoral Care of the Family in Evangelisation

3A Marriage Preparation, Evangelisation, Domestic Church

All couples are expected to attend a pre marriage course and there is a growing availability of pre-baptismal programmes that seek to do some initial pre-evangelisation. Some felt these programmes were minimalistic in their approach and there was an urgent need for a new catechesis. Others felt that these courses, especially those run by Accord were excellent in preparing people for marriage.

- *“Many see a church wedding as a tradition. Others see it as fundamental to what their faith means to them. We are dealing with many who are baptised but may not have attended Church since Confirmation day. Facilitators see their role as helping the couple prepare each other for marriage and often do not feel equipped to undertake the evangelisation bit – it may make them appear preachy.”*
- *“Our pre-marriage course was awful – there was nothing Catholic about it.”*
- *“Some think the parish priest deals with it in a compassionate way while others feel that the priest just gives the couple what they want without question.”*

There is a danger that Catholics see evangelisation as a purely external exercise to them and overlook the importance of commencing and sustaining it within the family structure.

- *“Let’s face it. there is little or no evangelisation in the Irish Church.”*
- *“People think the church is about one hour a week at mass. Our church has failed in that the preaching doesn’t have an impact on people’s lives.”*

3B Success in promoting Family Prayer?

Although, there were occasional references to families praying together at night time, the dominant view was that family prayer had mostly disappeared, except perhaps in a crisis. “Non-existent” was the view of one respondent. Perhaps a third of respondents were personally open to it, but expressed reluctance, lack of confidence and shyness as their reasons for not promoting it. Many explained that prayer was a private matter, not something to be shared with the family. Several wrote of the role Grandparents play in promoting family prayer. Since so many families no longer eat together the practice of prayer before/ after meals has disappeared.

In many cases there was a sadness about acknowledging this reality but there appeared to be a resignation that nothing could be done to reinvigorate this. Some felt that people were “not open to family prayer because they have not been catechised — people do not know that they need God at the centre of their lives.”

One commentator made the following observation, “Family prayer is done with very small children and dropped when they reach 6/7 years of age and they begin to object. This is an observation from my own family circle — even among parents who are practising Catholics along with those who are à la carte Catholics.”

Others felt that there was an openness to do it but they didn’t know how. The difficulty of competing with so many outside attractions was raised.

“People are open in theory but in practice it is difficult to gather family for prayer with so many counter attractions — T.V. Sports, Computers etc.”

3C Family in the transmission of Faith

Asked how successful Christian families have been in passing on the faith, the respondents ticked as follows:

Very successful	4%
Reasonably successful	26%
Limited success	50%
Failed	20%

Parents lacked an appropriate methodology to engage their children. Respondents spoke of being “uncomfortable” in suggesting prayer, others spoke of a “shyness” in this regard.

3D Exemplars?

People acknowledged that there were models of good practice Some cited such groups as Mother & Toddlers Groups as positive examples but most who spoke positively

referred to their family of origin or grandparents as the source of good example. Others spoke of children touching them by their faith.

“A child voluntarily lighting a candle for someone sick.”

“My grandchild, who takes the light out of my eyes, kisses the statue of Mary.”

““The ways that I meet God in others, in a smile or in their goodness, are too numerous to mention.”

It is because of my rich family faith that I never gave up on God and continued to search. I'm lucky with how faithful my grandparents were and how faithful my family were in taking us to mass and novenas/ missions

Many respondents felt that family spirituality needed to be promoted more by the priests and bishops in their homilies and resources should be provided. Some concrete suggestions were to create a suitable booklet that would help parents to re-introduce prayer or to have parish evenings dedicated to communal family prayer and to have more family friendly masses. Others spoke of the urgent need to develop parents with an adult faith.

- *“The faith cannot be handed on properly by those who have not been taught properly themselves. the greater number of people aged 55 downwards are very unsure of Church teaching and doctrine — possibly as a result of uncertainty after Vatican II.”*

Others spoke of the

- *“big mistake parents make when they handed over the right and duty of passing on the faith to their children, to schools — parents have to receive an adult faith first before they can pass faith on to their children afterwards.”*

The abandonment of the faith by the young is especially worrisome when there is parish, school and familial support.

- *“Many wonderfully committed parents have had no success in ‘converting’ their own children.”*
- *“Competing societal influences are undoubtedly a factor but there must also be a critical assessment of the manner in which the Catholic Faith has been presented. The quality of catechesis is especially important and has been subject to criticism. Where catholic teaching is transmitted in a lukewarm or attenuated fashion it is unlikely to adequately equip young people for the challenges of a culture saturated by secular thought. The negative impact of non-practising Catholic parents at home cannot be underestimated.”*

3E Specific Contributions?

Responses to this question were quite limited.

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- *“Need to strengthen personal belief”*
 - *“Feel the Church is not interested in pastoral needs”*
 - *“Need for better celebration of Family Masses.”*

3F Pastoral Care of The Church to Couples

Two thirds of respondents mentioned the work of Accord. Several mentioned “Rainbows” and “New Beginning” in Dundalk..

There are significant issue arising in relation to those *“who suffer on the periphery of societies, globally and in existential situations”*. Often they are trapped in situations where evangelisation collides with doctrine and dogma. One commentator made the following observation,

- *“If the starting point of evangelisation is pastoral rather than dogmatic or doctrinal, then the latter is subordinate to the pastoral proclamation of the Gospel. To set aside doctrine and dogma, albeit temporarily, so that one can engage in a pastoral approach, raises challenging issues for the Church. However, as Schillebeeckx, reflecting on the work of Thomas Aquinas pointed out, the Christian faith did not begin with doctrine or dogma but with an experience of the Risen Christ and dogma’s ultimate purpose is to lead people to the mystery of God before whom we are reduced to silence.*
- *Revelation is complete in Jesus Christ but our understanding of this is ongoing so “the evangelisation that is so ‘urgent and necessary’ must hold out the possibility of doctrinal and dogmatic development. Otherwise, many of those ‘on the periphery of societies’ will be excluded forever from the process by virtue of their ‘existential situations’ — the divorced, the remarried, couples cohabiting, couples in gay relationships etc.”*

Other recurring themes were.

- *“It’s morally wrong that they are excluded.”*
- *“It’s another sweeping rule with no regard for personal circumstances.”*
- *“Parents in irregular unions do not feel wanted within the Church and this impacts on the children because the parents send them to integrated or Protestant schools and they do not get the benefit of a Church education.”*

An issue that exercised a number of people was the availability of the two recurring sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, which are essential to sustain Catholics on their pilgrim journey. Effectively, these are denied to the very people who possibly need them the most.

- *“Yes, all of the people I know in these situations feel excluded.”*

Some quoted Pope Francis who said that

- *“communion is not a reward for the good but medicine for the sick.”(Evangelii Gaudium §47)*

Some felt that

- *“the church is not equipped to deal with family issues and many feel it is not even on the ‘pecking order’. Family support agencies would be the first that most people would approach.”*
- *“Couples turn to the church at the last moment, hoping for a miracle to solve their problems.”*

Several felt that the *‘sheltered lives’ of priests made them irrelevant.”*

- *“We should be offering courses for married couples who are not yet in crisis situations.”*
- *“45 years ago, we had no pre-marriage course, but we had family experience that has stood us in good stead.”*

Pastoral Care in Certain Difficult Marital Situations

4A Cohabitation?

There was a wide range of estimates about the percentage of couple who cohabit. Some put it at a low of 5%, others as high as 98%. The most common view is that the majority of couples live together before marriage and as an alternative to marriage. The mean would suggest 60-70% cohabit.

- *“In my neighbourhood and family circle it is quite widespread.”*

Asked the percentage of children in irregular parental situations, many could not answer, and those who did ranged from 5% to 40% with a mean of 15%.

There was genuine appreciation for the good work of ACCORD both in its preparation courses for marriage and in its counselling service.

There was virtually universal agreement about access to the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation for those in irregular situations. Most felt that

- *“if individuals wish to continue to practice their faith and receive Holy communion they should have a right to do so. It is important for children to see their parents receive Holy Communion. — ‘The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.’” (§ 47, Evangelii Gaudium)*

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4B Existence of Such Unions

Nearly everyone felt that it is very widespread that couples are living together and the number is increasing all the time. The majority felt that there were no reliable statistics

with regard to the unrecognised unions. Only a small number felt that there were reliable statistics for the unrecognised unions.

4C Divorced and Separated

Most felt that there was a sizeable cohort of people in such situations but few could offer reliable statistics other than anecdotal or local awareness of individual situations. Counselling is provided mostly by individual priests and by Accord and programmes such as Rainbows.

4D How do the baptised live in these irregular situations?

- Some are indifferent but many feel hurt and excluded and judged. They ask would *“Jesus have excluded them to such a degree.”*
- *“People do not go to communion because of sin. What sin have they committed if they are living together? A lot of Church teaching bars people from the most important thing which is the Mass and Communion.”*

Others take a different approach

- *“The Catholic Church will have to stick to its principles. Otherwise it will end up like the Anglican and other Churches and no one will respect you. Everyone’s looking a way out.”*
- *“It is difficult to conceive that most Catholics do not appreciate the objective immorality of living together outside marriage. with that in mind, one is confronted with the possibility that Catholics in these situations simply disregard the Church’s teachings...”*

4E Divorced/ Remarried and the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation

As regards reception of Holy Communion, for most prior reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not an issue. For many respondents the irregularity of the union is not an impediment. They just present themselves.

- *“The baptised are largely indifferent to these situations. A large number of divorced or remarried people still receive the sacraments.”*
- *“I know many couples in irregular marital situations. Most don’t seem to realise that there is any obstacle to their receiving Holy Communion. Some have had a blessing from a sympathetic priest and feel that they aren’t in any way excluded from full participation in the sacramental life of the Church.”*

For others it is a matter of indifference

- *“Most accept that they cannot receive Communion, and are not unduly worried.”*

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- *“There’s a general attitude these days that you don’t take the church too seriously – look at all the things they got wrong.”*

One respondent spoke of

- *“witnessing a person being refused Holy Communion and found it very humiliating.”*

Other voices would argue for a more traditional perspective to be upheld.

- *“They are living in sin and should not attend the sacraments.”*

4F Annulment

On the question on annulment, perhaps half expressed no view. Among those who did, many felt the process was far too long, too inflexible, and very expensive. There is a perception of inconsistent access to annulment throughout the world church, and of financial status or connections to persons of influence having an impact in the process. Some felt that it should be a more public affair, and some wrote of the process as being very intrusive into the intimate lives of applicants. Several felt it would be appropriate to include violence within relationships as grounds for annulling a union. There was a general appetite for more information. There was a clear division between those advocating greater availability and others staunchly against such a move.

There were voices that spoke personally of *“a pastoral and compassionate experience of the annulment process”* and there were those that recognised the gravity of what was being requested.

- *“As far as I am aware, it is accessible. The Sacrament of Marriage requires it to be a comprehensive process which by necessity will take time and be rare in its granting.”*

However, with the majority of the responses, there was significant anger and dissatisfaction expressed about the process with most advocating a significant review. For many the process is much too long and too expensive.

- *“It should be more accessible at parish level where the couple were originally married. A group of professional advisers should be set up in each diocese.”*
- *“All people should be treated the same. It should not be easier to obtain an annulment in one diocese than another.”*
- *“Often there is no sensitivity shown to people they often come out of the process very broken and shattered, deprived of their personal dignity and respect, mostly the women.”*

4G Ministry to those involved in Annulment

There was very little awareness of this ministry within the community.

- *“Frankly I have never heard of such a ministry on any level, ever.”*
- *“Local ministry is not available.”*
- *“... Assisting spouses who have been unjustly abandoned can be particularly important. Greater sensitivity may be required when dealing with situations in which a person has opted to enter a new relationship. the message of mercy ought not to be confused with approving or of conferring*

validity on irregular unions. This would run the risk of obscuring the need for conversion and repentance as necessary elements in opening up the treasury of God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation..."

On Unions of Persons of the Same Sex

5A Legal Status of Same Sex Unions?

There was competent awareness of the current legal reality both in N. Ireland and in the Irish Republic.

- *"The Civil Partnership Act 2004 extends to Northern Ireland and grants to same-sex unions legal rights virtually identical to marriage. recent court decisions have made possible joint adoption by homosexual couples. Legislative attempts to formally redefine marriage in law have thus far failed.*
- *In the Republic of Ireland a 2010 Act established a legal framework for persons of the same sex and accorded rights and duties to such couples very similar to marriage. Efforts are currently underway to provide joint adoption rights to homosexual unions. A constitutional referendum to redefine marriage to include persons of the same sex is scheduled to take place in 2015 with Government support."*

5B Attitude of Church to the State and to the persons involved

Church authorities are formally opposed to both of the above mentioned partnership schemes However,

- *"Catholic politicians have voted in large numbers for such legislation and there is no concerted effort to have these laws repealed."*
- *"Attention is now focused on the formal redefinition of marriage and in the debate the Church has taken a somewhat higher profile role in opposing this development. Nevertheless many Catholic politicians have indicated strong support for this proposal."*

5C Pastoral Response?

There was a spectrum of views on this topic. The common denominator was that all with such an orientation should be welcomed and treated with dignity by the Church.

- *"The church must recognise the love of the person(s), the union of same sex couples is the ultimate responsibility of the people involved. Even if we do not count this as natural we must always recognise the love of persons for each other. It is a sexual union that must be put secondary to love. This act itself is always only secondary to the loving union of nay two people."*

How the Church should reach out to those in same sex unions largely received a sympathetic response.

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- *“ People who have chosen to live in these unions may still want a relationship with the Church, but often feel alienated. It’s important that they are invited to attend Mass. Although they may not receive the sacraments, they should still feel that they deserve God’s love.”*

Some felt that such unions were sinful, against biblical teaching and in clear contravention of God’s law and the Natural law. They were opposed to such unions whether they were recognised civilly or not.

- *“Priest who are good confessors and who can accurately articulate the fullness of the Church’s teaching in this area can be indispensable in such a situation. as to persons who experience same-sex attraction more generally, the important work of an apostolate such as ‘Courage’ should be promoted and supported. Like-minded organisations that seek to assist people to live in fidelity to Church teaching are relatively little known in the Catholic community. For those who encounter homosexual temptations it is important to realise that the Church can offer a support system to help them live chastely as an alternative to the widespread pressure to give expression to such sexual desires.”*

Some respondents, although opposed to same sex unions, felt such people should not be banned from reception of the sacraments. This view was captured by this respondent:

- *“I do not have any problem with people’s orientation but I do if they are active, because I think that is a perversion of the truth. A man and woman fit together but gays and lesbians do not... I don’t know if I would bar them from the sacraments. I don’t think Jesus would turn away anyone who came for help, and when we go to the sacraments we look for help.”*

Most felt that this was a human rights issue and cited scientific research that suggested such an orientation is part of our genetic make-up. Many knew of loving faithful same sex unions. One commentator said:

- *“Some of the most loving relationships I have read about involved gay people nursing their partners dying of Aids. I felt humbled by this.”*

Another said,

- *“If one of my children came in and said they were gay I would not stop loving them. It doesn’t make them a bad person. God will not stop loving them.”*

5D What about the Children of such unions?

Concern for equality of treatment to all children was the dominant response.

- *“The adopted children should be treated in the same ways children from traditional families. Baptism, First Communion and other sacraments must be offered to these children. their parents should always be included in the preparation of these sacraments so that they are aware of their responsibilities in handing on the faith.”*

The Education of Children in Irregular Marriages

6A Comparative Statistics

Most people confessed that they had no accurate figures but those who hazarded approximations for the numbers of children reared in non-traditional families ranged widely from 0% to 60%, with a mean about 33%.

6B How do such Parents approach the Church and What do they ask for?

Most felt that parents wanted their children catechised and sacramentalised. They presented their children mostly through the schools for the respective sacramental moments but beyond such pivotal moments there was little engagement

- *“Parents should be involved in the formation of children – this only happens for First Holy Communion.”*
- *“Children should not be denied because of parents.”*

6C Response of the Local Church

- *“The church relies on the schools and teachers to do it.”*
- *“This raises the broader issue of the importance of parents supporting the faith education of children and doing so in part by the witness of their own lives.”*
- *“Efforts are made to make everyone feel welcome in the church.”*
- *“People want to receive the sacraments, not from any religious convictions, but from a desire to be in cultural conformity with their friends.”*

6D Sacramental Practice

Outside of the schools provision the general view is that the Church does not offer any other support

The Openness of the Married Couple to Life

7A Knowledge of *Humanae vitae*

Most have little knowledge of its existence and those who have heard of it would only know that it refers to contraception.

7 B Acceptance of the Teaching

The overwhelming view is that while it may have some currency in the lives of an older cohort it is rejected by the vast majority of Catholics. A small minority would continue to advocate its principles.

- *“Humanae vitae is dead in the water.”*
- *“In the 1980s, Humanae vitae caused people to leave the church; today people stay and just ignore it.”*
- *“It is an archaic document from an archaic church.”*
- *“A teaching made without the input of women is an unsound teaching.”*

7C Promotion of Natural Methods by Church?

As regards the Church’s promotion of natural family planning the views were generally dismissive although a minority were very much in favour of holding the current standards.

- *“I agree with the Church’s teachings that artificial contraception is always wrong.”*
- *“It has always been the Church’s teaching that you have to practise self-denial in marriage. That is correct. Modern society thinks you can have sex whenever you want. Modern technology would support safe period methods.”*
- *“The church seems to think that marriage is only about procreation. The issue of sex and the interpretation of how it is limited within married life is more a reflection on the control that the church wanted to have on so many aspects of people’s lives.”*
- *“People are not prepared to have a celibate clergy dictate to them on matters of sexual morality.”*

7D Penitential & Eucharistic Experience

The clear view from the responses was that it is not considered a penitential issue. It rarely presents.

- *“I wouldn’t have thought that many people would bother to mention it in Confession.”*
- *“People have no difficulty receiving the Sacraments and ignoring Humanae vitae.”*
- *“Haven’t heard it mentioned in Confession for decades.”*
- *“I cannot remember the last time any penitent raised the issue.”*

7E Variation between Church and State

There is clear water between what the State advocates and the Church proposes. The view of many respondents was that the state has been much more persuasive in its argumentation than the Church. For many the debate is over.

“Contraception enjoys much positive publicity and promotion. Government campaigns and initiatives at places of formation such as universities encourage recourse to contraception..... In short, the Church’s emphasis on chastity and life-giving marital love has been widely disregarded and replaced by a culture that assumes sexual licence and with it contraception.”

7F Birth Increase?

Overall there was a very negative response to this question, ranging from disbelief that it would be posed in the first place to profound anger and upset at the Church for *“meddling in family matters”*. There were many expressions of surprise made at this question of fostering an more open attitude to having children. Many felt it was inappropriate, or expressed surprise that such was actually the church’s position. A couple considered this question *“disgusting.”*

- *“This is a very strange question.”*
- *“The decision about having more children should be totally the couple’s own.”*
- *“We need to have respect for the dignity of women; it’s not always about having more children.”*
- *Knowing how many children you can afford is not “playing God.”*

Some spoke about the sacrificial element in being open to life.

“I am a Doctor of Philosophy on a good wage. Three children later, I need to take a career break to be with my children. This will mean a reduction of £20,000 in income to our family home. As a believer in divine providence I am willing to take that leap of faith in recognition of my vocation as a mother. None of my friends are of the same belief.”

The Relationship between the Family and the Person

8A Family Privileged Place to meet Christ

- *“It is the environment in which mutual support is best to be found.”*
- *“We must reinforce the vocational element of marriage.”*
- *“In the family, we learn complete personal and individual love.”*
- *“Where there is prayer in the family, it is easier to identify yourself as a follower of Christ.”*
- *“Parents must become role models for their children by practising their faith.”*

8B Obstructions

The most common obstruction to a person's encounter with Christ within the family was given as domestic violence, closely followed by alcohol addiction and drug use. Smaller numbers listed financial problems, weakness of faith, poor communication, TV/Media and the practice of forcing unwilling children into church attendance. Vocation was commonly identified as exclusively clerical vocation.

- *"Careers/ time/ financial constraints"*
- *"Parents 'spent' at work going home 'empty'"*
- *"Children brought up in child care."*
- *"TV/ Media and the attendant noise distracts from silence and attentivity."*

8C Effect of Faith Crisis

From the responses, it would appear that crises of faith can be both detrimental and positive moments among the journey

- *"Crisis of faith is accompanied by an increase in selfishness, the biggest enemy of the family."*
- *"Crisis of faith will lead to isolation, aloneness and doubt."*
- *"Faith only becomes an issue in a family when there is a crisis."*
- *"Crises bring opportunities, e.g. ministering to families who have experienced suicide."*
- *"Crises of faith are good as they result in exploration but parents in crisis with the Church will naturally pour that on to their children."*

Other Challenges and Proposals

9 Other Issues

A wide range of other issues were raised and we list the most popular below.

- *"In official documents the Church has already authoritatively addressed many contemporary issues challenging the family(e.g. assisted reproduction including IVF; euthanasia; same-sex union). The wisdom of these truths needs to be communicated more effectively to the faithful because otherwise Catholic families are exposed to simply absorbing the pervasive secular culture that rejects much of the Natural law. In the face of competing outlooks on marriage and family Catholics need to be reminded of the need to be faithful to God rather than men."*

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- *Increasingly, laws and in particular non-discrimination statutes have the effect of inhibiting Church entities and individual Christians from proclaiming and acting coherently with the Church's teachings on life and marriage. The Church must ensure that she is free in society to propose these truths."*
 - *"Need wider use of general absolution."*
 - *"The challenge of not being able to have children."*
 - *"The church is far removed from where family life is today."*
 - *"Alienation of young people."*
 - *"Trust is gone."*
 - *"Adult formation is necessary."*
 - *"The role of women, who are isolated and treated as a lower class, and they are a potential army of available and willing evangelists."*
 - *"The destruction of creation by human greed."*
 - *"What a pity the opportunity to consult with the laity was wasted with this convoluted document."*
 - *"The church will be transformed should the face of mercy rather than authority be shone onto the world."*