

**Voices of the People:**  
responses to the Vatican Survey  
in preparation  
for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family

Conducted by

Member groups of Catholic Organizations for Renewal

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# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

## THE SURVEY

## THE RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY

- Characteristics
- Age groups
- U.S. Census Regions

## RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE

- Church's teaching on family life
- Natural Law
- Praying within the family
- Cohabitation
- Separated, Divorced and Remarried Couples
- Marriage equality for same-sex couples
- Responsible parenthood and family planning

## RESULTS: QUALITATIVE: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- Random sampling of responses
- The Responses: Voices of the People

## IMPRESSIONS and COMMENTS

- Pastoral care urgently needed
- Pedagogical/evangelism challenge
- Separated, divorced and remarried
- Same sex marriage
- Women in the Church
- Sexual abuse scandal
- Skepticism and hope

## LIMITATIONS OF THE REPORT

## FINAL REMARK

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## Introduction

In late October 2013, the Vatican asked the Catholic bishops of the world to prepare for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family using a survey containing detailed questions about the life of families in their faith communities and the acceptance and understanding of official teachings on family life. Catholics worldwide eagerly embraced this initiative and quickly began asking how they could fill the survey out themselves. In the United States, a partnership among 15 lay-led Catholic groups, Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR), responded to this desire for participation in the Synod planning by making the survey available online. Member organizations of COR are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Sponsoring and co-sponsoring organizations of the COR Survey project.

American Catholic Council	Roman Catholic Womenpriests
Call To Action	Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference
CORPUS	Voice of the Faithful
DignityUSA	Women's Ordination Conference
Federation of Christian Ministries/Roman Catholic Faith Community Council in the Church	Catholic Church Reform (Co-sponsor)
FutureChurch	Fortunate Families (Co-sponsor)
New Ways Ministry	WATER: Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (Co-sponsor)
RAPPORT	

## The COR Survey

The Survey consisted of 49 items that adapted the questions of the Vatican's Preparatory Document, *Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization* that had been distributed to the dioceses throughout the world so that the churches might "participate actively in the Extraordinary Synod" to be held in October 2014. As did many, if not most dioceses and national councils of bishops, the COR workgroup made alterations in the language to make it more accessible to a general lay population. Three items (#33\*, 37\* and 42\*) were added by the COR workgroup. In November 2013, COR made the Survey accessible to the public on the Survey Monkey™ website and the access was possible until December 15, 2013, at which time the Survey was closed to new respondents. Twenty-one questions were free text only responses; the remaining 28 were combination of free text comment response box and quantitative choices (Likert scale, binary, multiple choices). A copy of the COR Survey is available at <http://mycatholicfamily.org>.

The fifteen COR organizations distributed the hyperlink to the Survey via email to individuals on membership emailing lists. Based on the numbers in their own emailing lists, the leaderships of the COR organization estimated distribution of the hyperlink to be 85,000. This aggregated number of 85,000 must be considered an extremely “soft” estimation of the survey’s internet distribution as there is no way of measuring duplicate memberships in COR organizations or subsequent forwarding of the hyperlink to others not on the original emailings. To be noted is that while the COR organizations might be considered church reform organizations in at least part of their individual missions, only 13 percent of respondents to the Survey described themselves as a “member of a church reform organization”.

### **The Respondent Population**

The Survey was submitted by 16,514 respondents. A second survey in Spanish was submitted to COR by 68 respondents. The total number of respondents to both surveys was 16,582. The quantitative results reported subsequently in this Report pertain to the Survey distributed in English. The free text comments were randomly selected from respondents in a procedure to be described below.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the population was: 83 percent lay persons, 27 percent parents, 11 percent professed religious, priests, deacons, seminarians. For some these categories were not mutually exclusive, e.g. a professed religious priest, a layperson (non-cleric) who was a professed religious. Fifty three percent of the respondents are weekly Mass-goers. This is a higher Mass attendance among the Survey respondents than the overall U.S. Catholic average of weekly Mass attendance of 31 percent in 2011 (D’Antonio et al., 2013). This may be accounted for, in large part, by the (older) age of the Survey respondents and the higher proportion of clergy and religious among the respondents.

Ages were reported in nine range categories in the Survey. To make the ages more understandable and applicable to this report, the nine categories were collapsed into the four age groups’ birth years relative to time of the Vatican II Council (1962-65) suggested by D’Antonio (2013). They are (age ranges): Pre-Vatican II (born before 1941), Vatican II (b. 1941-60), Post Vatican II (b. 1961-78) and Millenials (b. 1978- ). These four Vatican II cohort groupings plus an “under 18 years” group was employed in this study, approximating as much as the categorical age ranges in the Survey permitted: Pre-Vatican II (ages 76 +), Vatican II (ages 56-75), Post-Vatican II (ages 36-55), Millenials (ages 19-35), Under 18 years. Ninety six percent of the respondents (N=15,903) supplied age data.

Table. 2. Respondent Vatican II Age Groups and Proportion of Age Groups in U.S. Catholic Population

<b>Vatican II Age Groups</b>	<b>Number in Survey Respondent Population</b>	<b>Proportions of Age Groups in U.S Catholic Population<sup>1</sup></b>
Pre-Vatican II (ages 76 +)	2422 (15%)	10%
Vatican II (ages 56-75)	8788 (55%)	31%
Post-Vatican II (ages 36-55)	3181 (20%)	37%
Millenials (ages 19-35)	1452 (9%)	23%
Under 18 years	60 (<1%)	N/A

<sup>1</sup>(D’Antonio, Dillon and Gauthier, 2013)

Respondents were asked to indicate their residence by city, state and diocese. Residence was attributed from these data and assignment made into the four U.S. census regions (Northeast, South, Midwest, West) (Table 3). Eighty nine percent of respondents provided residence data sufficient compare with regional proportions the total U.S. Catholic population. There were 88 labeled “Other” respondents. These were mainly residents of other countries and respondents in the U.S. Military Service serving abroad.

Table 3. Residence of U.S. respondents by U.S. Census regions and regional proportions of U.S. Catholic population

<b>U.S. Census Region</b>	<b>Number in Survey Respondent Population</b>	<b>Regional Proportions of U.S. Catholics<sup>2</sup></b>
Midwest	4769 (32%)	22%
Northeast	4115 (28%)	27%
South	3102 (21%)	27%
West	2729 (19%)	24%

<sup>2</sup> D’Antonio, Dillon and Gauthier, 2013

In summary, when comparing the regional distribution of the respondent population of the Survey with the U.S. Catholic population, the proportion of Survey respondents is higher in the Midwest and lower in the West and South. The Northeast and South are comparable in both populations. The Survey respondent population is notably older than the U.S. population. This fact of aging respondents in the survey and a younger current church population will be addressed later in the description of the stratification and random selection of respondents to the 21 free text only questions.

## **Results: quantitative**

The Survey Monkey™ service provides tabulation of the responses to questions that have a quantitative measure, e.g. multiple choices, Likert ratings, dichotomous “yes/no” answers. There were 28 such questions on the Survey and we report here the respondents’ summary results for the 28 quantitative questions. The complete quantitative results of each question can be accessed at <http://mycatholicfamily.org>.

A cautionary note is that many of the questions ask for the respondents’ views of the sociological state of the church and not their own personal view of a topic. It attempts to measure not subjective opinions but estimations about a population. Many would regard this as a major limitation in the Survey because of lack of access to population data on the part of respondents.

### **Church’s teaching on family life**

The respondents view the Church teaching on the value of the family is poorly understood by 58 percent of Catholics and not understood by 8 percent (Q6). When the teaching is known, they judge it is poorly accepted by 58 percent and not accepted by 18 percent (Q8). When asked to judge how widespread the teaching is in pastoral programs at the national, diocesan and parish level, the respondents stated that they were at least moderately widespread at the national (32%), diocesan (45%) and parish (51%) levels (Q9).

### **Natural Law**

When asked to judge the influence of natural law as defined by the Magisterium has in areas of society, 40 percent saw some influence, 38 percent saw no influence, and 17 percent did not know (Q10). Do Catholics accept the idea of union between man and woman as contained in natural law accepted? Seventy six percent were judged to accept the idea sometimes and an additional 9 percent accept the idea completely (Q11).

### **Praying within the family**

The majority (55 percent) of respondents judge that that Church has been unsuccessful in proposing a manner of praying within the family that can withstand life’s complexities and today’s culture (Q15). In this current “generational crisis” have Christian families been able to fulfill their vocation of transmitting the faith? About three quarters of families are seen as at least partially fulfilling the task, while the remaining quarter is unable to transmit the faith (Q16).

## **Cohabitation**

While the term “cohabitation *ad experimentum*” is never defined in the Survey, it presumptively meant for respondents living together as sexual partners without legal status. Ninety four percent of respondents stated that cohabitation was a pastoral reality in their particular Church (Q20). Their view of the percentage of cohabitation widely ranged, with 54 percent of the respondents’ estimation of its prevalence varying between 21 and 80 percent (Q21). With respondents lacking sociological and demographic data on cohabitation, Question 21 was perhaps one of the least valid questions in the Survey.

## **Separated, Divorced and Remarried Couples**

Separated, divorced and remarried couples were judged to be a pastoral reality in their particular Church by 91 percent of respondents (Q22). Again being asked to estimate the percentage of such couples, there was considerable variation of estimates but not as great as in the previous Q21. Fifty two percent of the respondents judged the prevalence to range from 21 to 60 percent.

Asked in Q24 how these couples feel in regard to the sacraments, the respondents provided a full range of perceived reactions. Three quarters of the respondents felt that these couples know their relationship is not recognized by the Church and three quarters perceive such couples as believing their relationship is worthy of the sacraments regardless of Church recognition of their union. In addition a majority felt that the couples feel marginalized (70 percent) and suffer from the lack a sacraments (51 percent). A strong minority (41 percent) believes that couples in unions unrecognized by the Church as being indifferent to the views of others about their relationship. A majority of respondents (64 percent) felt that there are Catholics in same-sex unions who do not believe their situation warrants denial of sacraments and still approach the Church for them. Elsewhere in the Survey (Q35), the respondents viewed parents in marriages not recognized by the Church as approaching the Church for sacraments (92 percent), catechesis (51 percent) and general teaching of the Church (52 percent).

Turning to possible pastoral responses to couples in unions not recognized by the Church, Q26 inquired if a simplification of the rules regulating the nullity of the marriage bond would provide a positive contribution. Eighty two percent responded, “Yes”. Minorities of the respondents recognized the existence of ministries to the separated, divorced and remarried couples on the parish (24 percent), diocesan (32 percent) and national church levels (19 percent). Most simply did not know if there were such programs on the diocesan (51 percent) and national levels (67 percent) (Q27).

### **Marriage equality for same-sex couples**

There is a law recognizing marriage equality in the states of 57 percent of the respondents (Q29) and marriage equality is very important for 26 percent of the respondents and extremely important for 47 percent (Q33\*).

Respondents were asked to judge the attitudes of their diocese, parish and small faith communities toward both marriage equality and same-sex couples in a committed partnership (Q30). As the geography of the entity became more local and familiar, i.e. from diocese to parish to faith community, the respondents' judged that the attitudes were less hostile, less condemning and less negative and became more supportive, even highly supportive. This pattern applied to both marriage equality and same-sex couples in a committed relationship. One third of respondents viewed their dioceses as hostile and condemning of marriage equality (37 percent) and same-sex couples (35 percent); their parishes as hostile and condemning of marriage equality (11 percent) and same-sex couples (13 percent); and their faith communities as hostile and condemning of marriage equality (3 percent) and same-sex couples (4 percent).

Asked about attitudinal support of marriage equality and same-sex couples, the inverse pattern applied: the more local, the more support for marriage equality and same-sex couples in a committed partnership (Q30). Seven percent of dioceses were seen being at least somewhat supportive of both situations, as did thirty one percent of parishes and two thirds of small faith communities. The striking contrast in this inverse pattern is the discrepancy between the dioceses perceived as hostile and condemning toward marriage equality (37 percent) and same-sex couples (35 percent) and the perception of the respondents' small faith communities attitudes as being highly supportive of marriage equality (45 percent) and same-sex couples in a committed partnership (47 percent).

### **Responsible parenthood and family planning**

The survey asked the respondents to evaluate the degree of knowledge that Catholics have about the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* on responsible parenthood and how morally to evaluate different methods of family planning. Respondents judged that Catholics had at least some knowledge/awareness of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* (73 percent) and knew how to evaluate different methods of family planning (67 percent) (Q38). Q39 asked if moral teaching of *Humanae Vitae* was accepted. Unfortunately the question initially did not make clear if the acceptance was on the part of the respondents or whether the respondents were being asked about the Catholic population's acceptance of the moral teachings of *Humanae Vitae*. Given this caveat about the meaning of the question, respondents said that the teaching



was not accepted (56 percent), accepted in part (43 percent) and completely accepted (1 percent).

Perhaps as a further note to clarify this ambiguity regarding attribution, COR added a question to the Vatican survey in which the respondents were asked to rate the importance they held that contraception be available to them and the members of their community (Q42\*). Over half respondents (56 percent) judged it to be extremely important, 24 percent very important, and six percent somewhat important. Six percent stated that the availability of contraception to them and their community members was not important or that they either did not know or preferred not to answer (8 percent).

Q43 probed more deeply into the area of personal conscience and family planning with four statements that the respondents were invited to endorse or not endorse.

The first statement was, “I follow my conscience about family planning. I do not believe it to be morally wrong for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I participate in the Eucharist”. While 74 percent of the respondents endorsed the statement, it is impossible to interpret the responses to this statement without knowing whether the conscience decisions about family planning were consistent with the moral teaching of *Humanae Vitae* or not.

The second statement of Q43 was similar to the first except that the respondents were asked to respond for their loved ones following their consciences about family planning and participating in the sacraments. Seventy five percent endorsed the statement, but the impossibility of interpretation remains.

The interpretation ambiguity of statements one and two is presumptively clarified by the responses to the third and fourth statements in Q43. “I/my loved ones fully support the Church’s teaching on family planning and use only methods approved by the Church”. These statement of personal practice were endorsed by seven percent of the respondents regarding their own support of Church teaching on family planning and three percent regarding the support they judged that their loved ones gave to the Church’s teaching. Following of conscience about family planning even when it is not consistent with Church teaching does not appear to restrict approaching the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist.

The final quantitative question of the Survey (Q44) was an additional list of statements attempting to identify the differences between the Church’s teaching and individual practices of sexuality. Nine percent of respondents fully accept the church’s teaching in *Humanae Vitae* while 52 percent do not. Seventy percent support education about human sexuality and family planning in civic education while 5 percent do not. Seventy six percent support alternatives to *Humanae Vitae*, including contraception.

In summary, the results of the quantitative questions of the Survey were consistent with many previous studies of Catholic population beliefs and practices (D’Antonio et al. 2013, Pew Forum, 2012). They also are not unlike the Synod preparation reports from other ecclesial bodies that have been released to date (German Bishops Conference, 2014; Swiss Bishops Conference, 2014; Diocese of St. Petersburg, 2014).

### **Results: Qualitative – in their own words**

The primary objective of this Report is to provide a forum for the voices of the faithful in response to a request from the Vatican about family life. In calling for a Church which is poor and for the poor, Pope Francis said, “They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but also in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #198). In reading the very words of the respondents to the survey – many of whom expressed a poverty of pastoral care or ecclesial marginalization, one has an opportunity to be taught, even perhaps evangelized, by them.

The challenge was how to employ a methodology that could listen to the voices of 16,582 respondents, especially in the 21 questions that called for free text responses only. Presumably the quantitative questions provided information in terms of percentages. But we sought to listen beyond aggregated numbers. We wanted to hear the voices themselves.

Our “listening” method had following three criteria:

- 1) the number of responses chosen for each question would both enable a representation of the total respondents and avoid reader fatigue;
- 2) the responses would proportionally represent the Vatican II age groups in Table 2 above; and
- 3) perhaps most importantly, each respondent to the free text Survey questions would have equal opportunity to be heard.

#### **Random sampling of free text responses**

To satisfy the first criterion we initially decided upon 25 comments as being a workable compromise between being a sample that was both representative and readable. This would total 525 responses for the 21 free text questions. The random sampling would prevent a bias in selecting responses, a “cherry picking” of those responses that would support the position of the person(s) conducting the survey.

The second criterion of proportionality with the Vatican II age groups in the U.S. Catholic population (citation 2011) recognized that the population of the Survey respondents were older than the U.S. Catholic population. The Pre-Vatican II (ages 76+) and the Vatican II (Ages 56-75) groups were over represented and the Post-

Vatican II (ages 36-55) and Millennials (ages 19-35) were underrepresented. (Table 2) For example, while the Millennials comprise 23 percent of the U.S. population, they only accounted for 9 percent of the Survey population. This meant that many of the voices “future church” would have a decreased opportunity of being sampled.

To achieve proportionality, we stratified the population according to the four Vatican II age groups and divided the “representative and readable” number of 25 by the percentages of U.S. Catholic population each age group had. This resulted (with rounding) in proportionally selected response groups of Pre-Vatican II = 3; Vatican II = 8; Post-Vatican II = 9; and Millennials = 6. The total now was 26 selected comments for each question.

There were two remaining groups: those Under 18 years of age (N=60) and those (of all age categories) who completed the second survey that was made available in Spanish on Survey Monkey™ (N=68). In light of the low number of respondents in each of these two groups, we decided upon one comment randomly selected from each group for each of the 21 questions. This was done “without replacement”, i.e. no respondent could be chosen for more than one question. If there were none remaining unselected, an additional random sampling would be done on the entire groups of under 18 years of age and Spanish respondents. This now brought the number of selected comments per question to 28, a total of 588 comments for the free text questions.

To achieve the third sampling criterion of equal opportunity to be heard, we randomly selected responses from each of Vatican II age groups, repeating the random selection for the 21 free text questions. The respondents were assigned a random number (Microsoft™ Excel™ for Mac 2011) for each question. Those with the lowest random numbers in each Vatican II age group were selected if they responded with comment to the specific question. Missing (non-responses) and those such as “see above” were excluded.

This random sampling procedure was chosen and designed to provide a selection that was, as previously stated, both representative and readable, and free of selection bias on the part of the reporter. From the participating respondent’s viewpoint, while the respondent may not find her words selected in the Report, there is a high probability that the respondent’s thoughts will be reflected in some of the comments that were randomly selected for each free text question.

### **The Responses: Voices of the People**

A full report of the 588 responses to the 21 free text questions is available at <http://mycatholicfamily.org>. If the reader does not have the opportunity to read all the responses, he might concentrate on the replies to Q47-Q49. These questions were more open-ended and elicited more extended responses.

## Impressions and comments on free text response

The following impressions and comments on the responses to the 21 free text questions are meant to be neither conclusive nor exhaustive. Nor are they meant to be a distraction from the words of respondents themselves found at <http://mycatholicfamily.org>. These comments are meant to further and continue the discussion and discernment that the respondents have initiated.

- **Pastoral care urgently needed**

In keeping with several of the questions' call for pastoral suggestions, it is clear that there is a perceived urgent need for more pastoral care to be given to those in separated, divorced, remarried and same-sex unions. In the dialectic between doctrinal and pastoral approaches, the respondents clearly want clergy and church members who know how to pastor. A Vatican II respondent writes (Q48):

“The magnificence of families can be found in their steadfast commitments to each other, however the families were formed, through marriage, cohabitation, divorce and remarriage, adoption, same-sex marriage. The strength and beauty of these families should be held up and celebrated as living examples of the Spirit alive in our world. A church hierarchy that can only celebrate one form of family leaves millions of people outside the door, marginalized from the power of an honest relationship with a faith community and deprives the church of the gifts of millions of good people who do not feel that their talents and energies are welcome in the church.”

*Boston, Layperson, Member of a church reform organization, Weekly Mass-goer, Married*

- **Pedagogical/evangelism challenge**

The large number of “I don’t know” responses from the respondents, including one from a priest in Chicago about how God’s mercy is proclaimed to separated, divorced and remarried couples, suggests that the “ignorance” implied in “I don’t know” is significant and is a major pedagogical/evangelism challenge confronting the Church’s pastoral responses to families. It is, as the Survey often asks, “a pastoral reality”. A Millennial writes (Q48):

“I think it is time for the Church to see that those who are responsible for keeping it alive, the individuals of the Church, are struggling with many topics in the 21st century and aren't willing to just take Church teaching at face value anymore. And that it might, in part, be a mis-understanding or lack of knowledge of Church teachings, but sometimes it is just because they don't make any sense any more.”

*Hartford, Layperson, Weekly Mass-goer, Married*

A Vatican II respondent critiques the Church's education given to Catholics on family life:

Mostly in "no form"...no sex outside marriage, no abortion, no gay couples or lifestyle, no family planning.....all of these topics are legislated without sufficient education, formation, support therefore we are either preaching to the choir or lacking the will and wisdom to be in conversation with those impacted by our decision and different from our way of thinking.

*Monterey, Professed religious*

- **Separated, divorced and remarried**

While the canonical status of divorced and remarried couples is adjudicated in diocesan tribunals (some attesting to it having been a positive experience), the pastoral situations are being addressed on the parochial level. One expects that there is a great variation in the quality of the pastoral care – or lack thereof. A newly-wed Millennial captures the thoughts of many in responding to Q25 which asks if the sacraments are available to the divorced and remarried:

The sacraments are available and they are not discouraged to refrain from the sacraments. Many divorced couples ask how long do you remain committed to your vows if it is obvious that your spouse has no intention and actually prefers to be divorced. Many feel that the annulment process is incredibly intrusive and out of the realm of possibilities due to the violent nature of many divorces.

*Charleston, Layperson, Weekly Mass-goer, Married, Newly wed*

- **Same sex marriage**

In the quantitative section of the COR survey respondents indicated that marriage equality was extremely important for 47 percent, very important for 26 percent, somewhat important for 13 percent and not at all important for 9 percent (Q33\*). While there were voices in the qualitative responses that accepted the traditional Church teachings about homosexuality and same-sex marriages, there was pervasive support for same sex-couples to have equal access to the sacramental life of the Church as do heterosexual couples. A Post Vatican II respondent captures the tension between current magisterial teaching on marriage and the pastoral care of same-sex couples (Q31):

While our theology clearly cannot support marriage for them, this is no excuse to marginalize the couple. We need to listen to their stories, hear their confessions, provide counseling and encourage regular reception of the sacraments available to them. We must recognize that growth in Christian love could possibly come through a partner of the same gender.

*Denver, Layperson, Weekly Mass-goer, Third Order Religious*

A Post-Vatican II respondent in a domestic partnership speaks directly (Q31):

Provide us equal love and support and equal access to the sacraments

*Ohio, Layperson, Domestic partnership*

- **Women in the Church**

Recently Pope Francis called for women to have a “more capillary and incisive” role in the church (Allen, 2014). The respondents frequently had made similar observations – including calls for women to be admitted to the priesthood - even when not specifically called upon to comment on the role of women in the church. A Vatican II respondent writes (Q45):

Women need to be promoted more in leadership roles. Mary gave us the body and blood of Jesus. Many of us women want to work to promote a more open attitude towards reproduction in the church. What does it mean for a woman to have a child? What do we feel when our child is being born? I think as women we need to share questions and answers that we have found, and I think only through this dialogue will the church be able to foster open attitude toward reproduction.

*Cincinnati, Layperson, Employed by Catholic organization, Divorced*

- **Sexual abuse scandal**

Lest there be any doubt that the sexual abuse scandal is a matter of the past, repeatedly the respondents made reference to it and to its lasting effects upon them and others. A Vatican II respondent writes (Q47):

How will we ever get past the shame of the pedophilia scandal--we must open the files, open the doors, let out the secrets, and purge them. Help the victims recover their lives. Families individually and the church family as a whole have suffered immensely. Never again must the Bishops and institution defend such an abomination.

*Seattle, Layperson, Parent, Member of a church reform organization,  
Active parish member, Married*

- **Skepticism and hope**

The respondents displayed both skepticism and hope that their voices would be heard by the hierarchy. Many called for significant pastoral and structural changes in the future church but their tones were cautionary in most cases. A Vatican II respondent describes both the hope and the skepticism (Q49):

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my thoughts and opinions. I sincerely hope that this survey will be used in more than a cursory manner, however I fear it will not. The Church does not seem to understand the true nature of its members, both male and

female, and has never accepted us into full membership. It's about time to start, don't you think.

*Baltimore, Layperson, Teacher in Catholic school, Single*

### **Limitations of the Report**

In addition to the cautionary notes previously made, the principal *caveat* is that the generalizability of the findings cannot be made to the U.S. Catholic population. The quantitative percentages of the 16,582 respondents are the respondents' percentages. The randomly selected free text comments are as representative of the total 16,582 respondents to the free text questions as any 28 responses per question can be.

The Report does not include the Comments sections that were part of many of the quantitative questions. In addition to responses already having been made quantitatively to these questions, we allocated the resources of time and staff such that all Survey questions and their responses could be reported upon.

While the Survey was gender-blind and arguments can be made for that position, it would have been informative to know the gender proportions of the respondents to the various questions.

### **Final Remark**

There can be no conclusion to this Report because it is offered as participation to the dialogue and discernment leading up to the Extraordinary Synod on the Family to be held in the Vatican during October 2014. However, if we were to try to capture what the respondents have said in one sentence, we turn to voice of Pope Francis when he wrote,

“The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”  
(*Evangelii Gaudium*, #114)

If there were one near-universal hope of the over 16,000 respondents to this Survey, it would be that this vision of the church would become a pastoral reality.

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