

# The Call, the Mission, the Journey

## A Summary of Responses

### September 2015

On the Feast of the Holy Family 2014 the bishops of England and Wales invited parishes to reflect, with true spiritual discernment as requested by Pope Francis, on the themes emerging from the Extraordinary Synod on the Family. *The Call, the Mission and the Journey* aimed “to help people celebrate marriage and family life, whilst recognising the difficulties that families often encounter”.<sup>1</sup> The document offered material for reflecting on scripture and on the teaching of the Church on marriage and family life, as well as six questions to facilitate parish and family conversations.

This report offers a flavour of the feedback to those six questions, based primarily on diocesan summaries received from 16 dioceses: Birmingham, Cardiff, Clifton, East Anglia, Hallam, Hexham & Newcastle, Leeds, Liverpool, Menevia, Middlesbrough, Northampton, Salford, Shrewsbury, Southwark, Westminster, and Wrexham. Compiled by the staff of the Marriage & Family Life Project Office, this report also draws on individual and group responses to *The Call, the Mission and the Journey* from other dioceses, received via surveymonkey or sent directly by email or post to the offices of the Bishops’ Conference or to Cardinal Vincent Nichols and Bishop Peter Doyle, delegates to the forthcoming Ordinary Synod on Family.

A number of local and national organisations reflected on marriage and family life as part of this period of spiritual discernment. These include A Call to Action, the Association of Interchurch Families, the Catholic Women’s League, the Union of Catholic Mothers, Two in One Flesh, the National Board of Catholic Women and the Dorcas group. Not all of these used the format of *The Call, the Mission and the Journey* so it has not been possible to incorporate their feedback here. However, some of the conclusions of the ACTA report have been noted in the comments section.

In terms of statistics, not all dioceses provided a breakdown of the numbers of responses received directly rather than via surveymonkey. Overall 1,051 responses were made online of which 107 were group responses, ranging from 2 people to 70+, though most were less than 12 people and many were couples. Across the 11 dioceses providing statistics, an additional 1078 people were identified as having contributed to the reflection process. Of the organisations that provided statistics, CWL noted 132 comments, a local branch of the NBCW 48 participants, Two in One Flesh 7, Dorcas 6 and ACTA 342 responses. The parish responses sent directly to the two delegates to the Synod reflect the views of 123 people.

Of the 1051 contributing online, 84% are lay people, 62% are parents, and 34% are grandparents. 72% are married, 11% are single, 6% are separated or divorced. 28% are aged 66-75, 25% are aged 56-65, 6% are aged under 35. 435 of the total sample of 1051 indicate that they are either a priest, deacon, professed religious, Eucharistic minister, catechist, teacher, headteacher, pastoral assistant, lay chaplain, theologian, church employee or marriage preparation facilitator.

#### **Question 1: What are your joys and hopes of marriage and family life today?**

*“Love and closeness to partner. Having children together and seeing them grow. Bringing children up together. Celebrating family occasions together. Sharing happy times. Helping*

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from HE Cardinal Nichols, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2014

*each other through difficult times (which can often bring you closer). Sharing family time with each other's parents, siblings and extended family. Learning to accept each other's weaknesses and foibles."*

Across all responses (dioceses, parishes, groups, individuals) the joys of marriage, and in family life, are described as experienced through intimacy, companionship, respect, trust, commitment, and life-long mutual support in their shared lives. Family is named as a place of stability where adults and children can feel loved, safe, and free, and family members of all ages not only enjoy each other, but can also make mistakes and learn from them. In the mix of family relationships, respondents recognise the joy of creating a family home together, and in being forgiven and in learning to forgive, working at reconciliation, building trust and coming out stronger. Family is seen as the place where both those on the inside and those on the outside encounter Christ.

*"It's a joy waking up each day next to my wife, working hard throughout the day; seeing our three sons running around and growing up. .. It's humbling to be part of this miracle of the reflection of the Holy Trinity".*

*"My family is the most precious thing to me, we are a team".*

*"The joy of falling in love"; "making love"; "the extension of our capacity to love"; "growing older together".*

*"Life, love and family – love for a lifetime".*

*"Giving every part of myself to the person I love and trust the most. No matter what life throws at us, being together is the most important thing. To put our family first, before work, money and material items."*

The vast majority of responses describe children and the whole miracle of new life, as a great source of joy and hope in families. Both younger and older family members express hope that the next generations will see marriage and family as important, and that they will receive the same blessings experienced in unconditional love, shared rituals, security, stability and spiritual well-being that they have experienced in their families of origin. But they also recognise that all relationships in a family have to be worked at, which in itself is seen as worthwhile and a source of joy. Several responses refer to the joy that is experienced in a deep way when members of families feel accepted, loved and accompanied through the difficult times, including times of intense grief and loss, through death, separation, and divorce. Particular joy and gratitude is located in inter-generational relationships.

Within the family, the main hope is to respond *"to that unalterable call of love that family requires. We may not agree with what our children are doing, but we never stop loving them and having that continually open door"*.

*"Marriage and children are the greatest gift from God".*

*"[Marriage] provides a sound base in which children can grow and realise their potential, [it] can be a key constituent of broader society in which the family not only minister to one another but ... to the wider community".*

*"Children have made us better people, making us more patient and considerate of others rather than being wrapped up in our own individual worlds".*

Couples and families, sharing their lives, doing routine things, describe all this as a joyful growing and learning together. Some speak of the joy of praying together in families. Some raise the hope that parents and children will be encouraged to live, enjoy and hand on their faith, in a renewed understanding of church teaching, and a network of friendship with other families in faith. Many respondents refer to the joy and hope of "lifelong commitment" and the "journey" of married and family life, one that is always changing and affecting lives of family members and those around. Some parish responses name the joy of being listened to, and the joy of maturing, growing in the

ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally with bodies, minds, and hearts, all of which strengthens the relationships across the family, e.g. parent/child and sibling/sibling.

*“God will help us in our marriage.”*

*“Family is everything, and we must celebrate the beauty of marriage more.”*

*“We hope that our children and grandchildren stay faithful/or return to regular practice in the Church and that the Church strives to offer an environment that provides tangible support for their continuing Catholic practice... in family life we pray together, socialise together, travel, holiday together, and integrate lots of events and activities. So if the Church does not encompass these activities, it isolates its community through the ‘religious’ contact only”.*

A response from an inter-church family expresses gratitude for their Christian partner’s positive support. One report expresses a hope (plea?) that families (including those of “just two people”) will come to see themselves, and be seen by the Church, as a community, a “small church”, foundational for human flourishing. Other reports concur, hoping that the domestic church will be actively supported, by other families, parishes, diocesan structures, and society, throughout the seasons of marriage and family life. Included in this is the hope for provision of good marriage preparation, and on-going attentiveness to marriage and families, in a pro-active way, not simply waiting for things to ‘go wrong’, when it may be too little, too late, or in the face of irretrievable breakdown.

Hopes are expressed for continuing awareness and support to be available for all families, whatever their situation, *“including those who are estranged, separated or divorced”*. Respondents hope that the Church will make marriage preparation and pastoral care of marriage and families a priority, learning from families, and having a more sympathetic, pastoral, merciful response that recognises both the pain of endings, and the joy of a fresh start in the gift of a second marriage.

*“We like the idea of ‘accompanying’ (EG169) our families, but also for the church to accompany families. We like that fact that we learn from our family life, and we learn from all those who come to our churches too – the whole variety of families.”*

*“We believe that single parents, unmarried couples and remarried divorcees can give love and security to children, who may be happier than some children in more conventional family units.”*

*“A hope that couples would enter into marriage with a lot of thought and preparation... The church would benefit from emphasising the link between sexuality and spirituality.”*

*“A source of hope and joy is seeing young people willing to respond to the call of marriage and share the sacrament of marriage... the church offers an alternative to the normalisation of family breakdown.”*

*“It was interesting to note how many who responded to the survey had children who had married but did not go to Church. It would appear that the example of marriage has been a positive one, whilst for many, the experience of church has not.”*

Other voices similarly express the hope that dioceses might provide places for real dialogue with families, including the variety of forms of family life.

*“People who do not fit in the ‘ideal’ family unit should still be made to feel valued and worthwhile members of the church.”*

*“...attentive listening, selfless love, managing change sensitively, are among the pre-eminent building-blocks for happy marriage and family life. It would seem that right now the Church may well have more to learn from marriage and family life than to teach... more to gain than to lose.”*

*“My hopes for family life today are that I and others can be accepted and loved by our*

*Church, whatever our circumstances. It has caused me great sadness and pain to separate from my husband and I look for the love and support of those around me.”*

One group make a point about distinguishing between the experience of marriage and that of family life.

*“The Church ALWAYS needs to distinguish between marriage and family life. The two spiritualities are different and they require different types of pastoral care.”*

## **Q2: What are your struggles and fears of marriage and family life today?**

*“Pressures on families for economic survival are very hard, partly because more is expected in the way of material standards of living, and partly because they no longer enjoy the same job security as we did. This means the pressures on both parents to earn a living are intense; at the same time expectations of the role and importance of parenting have increased. It is hard to do all this and have time for reflection and personal relationships as a couple. At the same time, the strict and often repressive code of sexual morality under which we grew up is almost unknown in contemporary society. That makes it harder for some to remain faithful to their vows.”*

Some dioceses note that responses to this question are broader compared to the previous question on joys and hopes, reflecting Tolstoy’s comment that while ‘all happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way’<sup>2</sup>. Not all reports distinguish responses according to struggles and fears, but where comments relate concretely to the present personal reality of family life it seems that these describe struggles. Fears are reflected more in concerns for what might happen in a family or what seems to be happening elsewhere, but not yet personally encountered by the respondent. Most diocesan reports identify struggles and fears in the areas of economics, relationships, culture, health and church. The level of detail under each heading might suggest the frequency with which they recurred in conversations or simply the depth of felt-anxiety. Some of the struggles may be interrelated though how is not always clear. For example, ‘materialism’ may be perceived as increasing the economic pressure on families which then strains family relationships. However, one might also see that economic pressures which limit family time could increase the likelihood of material compensation of children by their parents. Media portrayals of ‘ideal’ family types and behaviours are also implicated in responses.

**Economic struggles:** The financial pressures on families and their consequences are frequently mentioned. One diocesan report suggests that although families are struggling, most are coping, albeit through heroic efforts. However, the impact on couple relationships of the multiple demands of time, finance and work is very evident.

*“Poverty, unemployment and debt are significant pressures on many families. Pressures of work and money can make life difficult for parents.”*

*“‘Because I want it, I’m entitled to it’. This can lead to financial worries and the encircling threats to relationships within the family.”*

*“Tiredness & how are we going to pay the bills?”*

**Relationship struggles:** These include family breakdown, the fragility of relationships, the pressure in the media to conform to ‘perfect’ family ideals, the ease of divorce and the increase in numbers of single parents and those who have remarried after divorce. Some mention incompatibility with their partner. Others point to the complexity of making good choices where children of a previous

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<sup>2</sup> Anna Karenina

marriage are concerned. Geographical distance from family members can be problematic, impacting both young and old, making it difficult to keep a family together. Caring for elderly family members and the need to balance care of others and care of self are two further recurring themes.

*"I struggle to have the time for my children and to move from the busyness of getting through the grind to take joy in them in a way that will trigger them to find joy in my gaze. And I fear that the incessant demands of work and childrearing have drained my life and my spouse's life of the quiet and stillness needed for our own intimacy."*

*"Listening properly to each other and our daughter rather than being caught up in our individual selves. The demands of a child is a physical stress sometimes to me as an older mother but also where to draw the line on a child's demands so as to create a family atmosphere of us all working together and being careful with money. School spats between children requires empathy which is sometimes hard to achieve when you have an adult mind."*

*"We see the struggles that many couples face is that they want everything to work without having to work at it. Marriage needs work and love to grow just as a garden needs tending to help it flourish. Without love and care the flower will wither. It needs sunshine and rain. That is also vital in marriage. We need difficult days in marriage too in order to grow stronger."*

*"Staying married is probably the greatest challenge of my life. It is deeply frustrating and disappointing to accommodate another person in all aspects of my life and having to put aside some of my deeply held hopes and expectations. I think this is a hidden reality. Popular culture suggests love is a warm glow and relaxing: I have found it to be extraordinarily tough and challenging. Having seen the breakdown of marriage in our extended family and friendships, I am aware of the far reaching repercussions. It is very destabilising: it is divisive: it is depressing. It is not a private matter. It leaves scars most notably amongst children. This is the case even when a second relationship is obviously better than a first. As a Catholic, I feel very fortunate to share faith with my husband. Initial attraction binds you at the beginning but shared faith and values enable us to share a common language in times of happiness and hardship".*

**Struggles with Culture & Society:** These include references to individualism, materialism and secularism and societal and peer pressures to conform. The increased influence of media – especially social media and new technologies - is noted as disrupting family communication and influencing young people's views of marriage and family life. Some note that the meaning of marriage is being lost as society embraces multiple life options and the media trivialises adultery and divorce, portraying 'dysfunctional' families as normal. Intolerance of faith perspectives is mentioned along with the challenge of maintaining one's own beliefs and values even within the family.

*"We live in a 'me/'" culture where there is a tendency to 'be served' rather than 'to serve' others."*

*"I see the pressure of both parents working and dashing here there and everywhere unceasingly. Sadly sometimes family life suffers. In my own parish family life the involvement of families is held dear and acknowledged. However peer pressure is greater at times than family example. Social media can be an influence of good but also of evil and I sometimes fear for my grandchildren and what life will be for them."*

*"Financial worries, we just scrape by with the help of grandparents. The world our children, and their children will inherit. Living in a society that cherishes things more than its people. Religious fanaticism (from all sides, it should be a personal belief not a requirement)."*

**Health:** A good number of reports point to struggles related to health: illness, old age, infertility, addiction, drugs, alcoholism. These include personal struggles and the struggles of caring for family

members affected, especially as parents' health declines. Isolation and stress are noted as some of the consequences of caring for older family members.

*"Illness, money worries, children's exposure to evil, old members of the family and their care, isolation."*

*"There are a lot of new possibilities to plan family life and reserve marriage and child birth for a later date. It seems that contraception and IVF treatment go hand-in-hand: it gives young families the impression, that pregnancy can be reserved for a later date. They are unaware of the dangers and difficulties in late pregnancy, including reduced fertility. IVF treatment seems to be a viable option. However they do not notice that young mothers from poor background are struggling to finish their pregnancy."*

*"We have also been under great pressure as carers for elderly parents. I looked after my father in law for 6 months and it put a great strain on us in terms of space and privacy and time, even though we loved him very much and felt it our duty. Then I became a carer for my elderly parents and moved them opposite us, and did this for 5 years, and this was immensely difficult, both financially and in terms of strain, especially with my mum's dementia."*

**Church:** Struggles with the Church and with Church teaching include generalisations about the Church being out of touch, unbending or unrealistic and specifics relating to sexual ethics, a lack of support for same-sex partnerships, or contraception. Some mention a lack of confidence in the clergy and some point to difficulties in pastoral practice and with family ministry, including inadequate marriage preparation. Struggles around passing on faith in God to the next generation also emerge alongside differences on faith matters within the family, e.g. 'mixed' marriages and the loss of the younger generation to the faith. A lack of care for those who are divorced and remarried or abandoned by their spouses is noted. Some feel 'short-changed' by Church leaders and 'recent ambiguous reports' of the last Synod. Some struggle with a lack of mercy shown by the Church and that the Church fails to acknowledge that though people make mistakes they still need their church community.

*".....my children do not see any relevance in the Church. They do not feel engaged or part of it.....I do not know how to make it more relevant to them and I do not want to" water down" the faith simply to make it easy. I am not sure the Church has provided me with the tools and guidance to help overcome this."*

*"The loss of teenagers from the church and their disillusionment in faith."*

*"The churches treatment of women has alienated my wife from church attendance."*

*"The disconnect between THE CHURCH and ordinary people. None of my 4 grown children and their families gather together in the church community. They appear to me (though of course only God sees the whole) totally disaffected from church... and are typical of many families. Their many talents and gifts are informed and shaped and used generously in a secular manner and milieu in which they are also cared for. Secular is good – 'the child of Christianity'."*

*"I see many people at extraordinarily difficult times in their lives, struggling with marriage, sexual orientation etc. One of the great joys of my job is that I can accept them for exactly who they are, without any hint of judgement. I wish the Catholic Church would be similarly open and accepting of people of different sexual orientations."*

**Explicit Fears:** Many of the struggles already mentioned also represent respondents' fears. Additional fears that were explicitly named include fears for children and of the loss of a spouse through death, separation or mental deterioration. An increase in marital breakdown and divorce, difficulties in obtaining an annulment, the fact of couples marrying later, and a loss of extended family networks are also worrying people. Church related fears concern a reduction in the numbers

of priests, the loss of a spiritual dimension to young people's lives, the manipulation of the synod by progressives, bishops not acting quickly enough and the privatisation of marriage within the Church. There are also fears around what children are being taught at school about relationships and gay marriage and fears surrounding addictions e.g. drugs, alcohol, pornography and gambling. Job insecurity is another fear.

*"I fear for those marriages marred by domestic violence. I fear for those families torn by war and violence and disease. I fear for those families and individuals who do not feel accepted by their own communities and who feel that they are seen as social underdogs. And I fear too, for those who think that they are right and successful when they have not been challenged as some others are challenged, because they do not really love or respect those who are so challenged. Being a member of a community is a natural human desire; but this should not lead to isolation from other communities or to arrogance. The Church is the strength of believers; respect for those with other beliefs or none should not weaken that strength, for hatred of others is a sign of defensiveness which the Church does not need."*

### **Question 3: How can we better understand marriage as a vocation?**

*"No amount of writing, teaching or preaching can replace the witness of families in action: to their own family members and to those in the world in which they live. Therefore, if this is important to the Church (and it must be) family life and the role of lay people following this vocation must be more central. Far more married, lay people should be engaged in decision-making and leadership roles, for example."*

Marriage as a vocation is accepted in a positive way by the majority of respondents. One of the threads in many of the diocesan responses to this question is the exhortation to promote the equality, dignity and vocation of all the baptised as the 'root' vocation from which all other callings in life spring, including the call to married life:

*"This is crucial. I am sickened by the stress in many official church efforts to maximise the vocation to the priesthood at the expense of any stress on the universal vocation of all the baptised to be Kingdom people as priests, prophets and rulers. From this could come a true realisation of the vocation to marriage – get all that right and there would be no need to aim directly at vocations to the priesthood – such would flow naturally out of this stress on the vocation of all God's people to be missionary disciples of Christ."*

*"Vocation is usually reserved for priesthood and/or religious life. It seldom seems to be focussed on marriage."*

*"A better understanding of vocation is required, and it needs to be from childhood (remote preparation). Giving opportunities for young people to explore marriage and see the benefits."*

*"For too long, this word (vocation) has been synonymous with a calling to the priesthood or religious life, and the married vocation has been seen as some type of lesser status within the Church. Without marriage and family life, there would be no Church."*

*"Marriage is a way of living your life which involves commitment, understanding and has purpose. .. a deep calling with great responsibility".*

*"Marriage is to be taken as a symbol of the nature of Trinitarian love – that is why it is a vocation."*

*"Living in marriage with our blessed Lord is akin to a Holy Trinity."*

All diocesan responses emphasize that excellent marriage preparation, beginning in childhood and adolescence, would aid the broader understanding of marriage as a vocation.

*“The vocation of marriage should be celebrated with the same enthusiasm as Holy Orders/religious life. Marriage preparation needs to be supported by all the bishops, and not ‘run on a shoe string’. Would priests be prepared for their vocation like this?”*

It is also emphasised that the vocation to marriage is better understood through the living of it, in all its ups and downs, and this good news should be shared widely, to all.

*“Marriage as a vocation is best promoted by existing marriages being joyful! If there is long-term love and care within the extended family, this involves, and is an example, to friends and neighbours.”*

*“Marriage means dedicating one’s life to another and is hard work.”*

*“Not knowing what tomorrow will bring should be regarded as an adventure not a ‘life sentence.’ You really have to believe that God has put you with this person for a reason and odd as it might sound it’s not just about love, it’s about service.”*

One diocesan response suggests recognising a period of betrothal, first considered and then committed to by the couple as a serious undertaking, perhaps endorsed by a liturgical ceremony. During this formal betrothal period, the couple might live together, and explore the vocation to marriage. This is seen as a “helpful” development that would be a solid foundation, sustain the relationship, and might prevent marital breakdown later on.

Some respondents recommend marriage as a positive choice for clergy, and note that this would contribute to a better understanding of the joys, hopes and challenges of the vocation to marriage, from the inside.

*“It would be easier for the laity to accept marriage guidance and support from a priest who was married. How can clergy understand marriage as a vocation if they are not allowed to be married themselves?”*

*“There seems to be confusion in the Church – priests are called to the priesthood, but they are not necessarily called to celibacy. The sooner we allow priests to marry, the better.”*

Others highlight a need to involve married people much more in the running of parishes, as a witness to their vocation, and that the voices of lay men and women should be part of the decision-making structures.

*“We have a priest for vocations in each diocese. We should have a couple to promote marriage as a vocation too.”*

*“Celibate clergy are not in a position to understand marriage without the perspective of married people taking the lead. This means changing the hierarchical structures of governance/pastoral care/support for marriage and families.”*

*“We need to be identifying good marriages in our parishes and trying to get these couples to share their stories in a positive way.... getting a witness of marriage first hand is very powerful.”*

*“In order to better understand marriage as a vocation, I suggest more consultation of and respect for the laity. I also suggest that women’s views are heard and respected. Women represent half the world.”*

As well as regular preaching on the baptismal vocation of all, and the vocation to marriage springing from this, it is recommended that parishes also offer enrichment opportunities for couples (e.g. retreats, socials) to highlight the church’s respect for the sacrifices, treasures and “messy reality” of the vocation to marriage, and to strengthen the parishes’ pastoral care and concern. This might also include strategies for supporting young married couples and their children in fostering happy, healthy families (e.g. parenting skills, parent-toddler groups).

Confident evangelisation, catechesis/education, and preaching on faithful commitment and the gift of the vocation and sacrament of marriage and parenthood, in both Catholic schools and parishes, together with celebrations of marriage and family life in parish liturgies, with community involvement, would all increase the understanding of marriage as a vocation. To this end, clergy need good formation, incorporating the lived experience of married couples.

*"It's a shame we do not hear enough about how being a parent is an important vocation. Through education and preaching the concept of marriage as a vocation will be then not something new but something that young people are aware of and seek to embrace."*

*"Homilies need to remind everyone that marriage is a special calling from God."*

*"Marriage as a vocation is only possible by realising it is humanly almost impossible! With God's help we can achieve the impossible."*

*"The example and witness of committed married couples is very important in helping others form a better understanding of marriage as a vocation."*

*"Literature provided which details not only the teachings of the church, but an explanation of the meanings and origins of these teachings."*

*"Many couples, even those marrying in church, have little personal experience of God, and so are unlikely to see marriage as a vocation. Hence there is a need first for evangelisation."*

Other ideas for gaining a better understanding of marriage as a vocation range from liturgies and homilies that demonstrate to all generations of the family that they are valued and respected, and have a place in the community, to the publicising of weddings, and welcome of babies, children, and adults for initiation. Several refer to the importance of prayer, for marriage, and within family life.

*"Having baptisms at parish masses, where all can share in the celebration and welcome."*

*"By praying every day and asking God for divine inspiration so that we will learn what marriage is all about."*

*"A couple and a family are not alone in their lives together. Like Abraham and Sarah, they walk hand in hand, putting themselves in the Lord's powerful hands, supported by the grace of the sacrament."*

*"God never abandons those he has called to this special state."*

Families themselves witness to living out the vocation of marriage, across generations. Grandparents and parents can share a realistic view of marriage, through the example and wisdom gained in their own experience of its joys and challenges, and the courage and tenacity required and the blessings received. Young couples find that their sense of vocation is enriched and deepened with the arrival of children, each one of whom contribute greatly to the forming of a family.

*"Marriage is a life-long learning curve and the ability to adapt to change in each other's needs, desires, interests, health."*

*"Teaching by example begins in the home, with development at school and in the parish."*

Some respondents highlight the need for fully-human support for those living the vocation of marriage, and for those couples being prepared for marriage. Pastoral practice involves modelling listening, emotional understanding and communication. Helping individuals and couples develop the skills of discernment of a 'calling' is seen as particularly important in the process for those considering marriage, helping to deepen understanding of what the vocation means, in terms of commitment, faithfulness, discipline, sacrifice, and whether the couple are compatible.

*"Marriage needs time and effort into building the relationship and solutions to difficulties or incompatibilities will not always be quickly available."*

Included in many of the responses to this question is the need to support those who experience difficulties.

*“The church needs to give more support to those in difficulties, and to those who are separated and divorced. There is a need to establish a reasonable level of resource to provide support for families, consistently across dioceses.”*

*“A hope is expressed that the church would be more supportive of those whose marriage does fail.”*

Three diocesan responses specifically express the concern that many people struggle to understand the language of vocation, covenant and sacrament as foundational for marriage in the Church.

*“People don’t know what vocation is, if you talk about being called by God no-one really knows what you mean.”*

*“It’s an ideal to be aspired to, but it expects that both partners are Catholic and committed to this ideal, and the church can be harsh and unforgiving for those who are not able to live up to this ideal.”*

#### **Question 4: How does your marriage enrich you?**

*“My late husband was known as “Jesus” in two of his work places (factories). One of his work mates rang me a little while ago and said, “I wanted him to be alive as long as I was alive. I thought he was Jesus. I’m serious - if Jesus was alive and walking around now, he’d make you feel the way Colin made you feel.” That man is not religious and has been brought up not to celebrate Christmas. The knowledge that such a man as my husband chose me to share his life helps me to make sense of Jesus’s love for me. I am worth something - I must be, in spite of how it feels sometimes. That keeps me going and helps me believe in my dignity. I am trying to live so as to make him proud of me. In my way, with my different character, I try to do for others what he did - what Jesus did.”*

The key sources of enrichment in marriage featuring in diocesan reports are love, friendship, mutual respect, support, companionship, security, stability, unconditional acceptance, the gift of children and grandchildren, self-sacrifice, a life of service, journeying together, being places of belonging, learning and growing together, mutual suffering, overcoming adversity, marriage as a sacrament and the joy of shared faith. Some note that marriage is a unique and at times uncertain journey that, once fully embraced, can lead to greater personal development through the gift of self and shared values, joys and struggles. Unmarried respondents point out that this question does not apply to them. Others do not feel enriched by their marriages and are struggling to overcome a range of challenges in their relationships. These testimonies are in tune with couples who do feel enriched by their marriages but are pragmatic about the challenges and messiness of long term relationships - the highs and lows, the joys and sorrows.

*“Marriage is a partnership, in the good times and the bad. It is having gone through bad/worrying/unhappy times together, that makes it a stronger union in every sense and enabled us to face challenges together.”*

**Love and Friendship:** All diocesan reports show that the abiding love shared between couples is a deeply enriching factor in marriage. This love is all the stronger because it has endured in spite of difficulties, disagreements, sadness and loss. Respondents talk about their mutual love developing into a deep and lasting friendship which is intimate, trusting and sexual. Being “best friends” and having “a friend for life” are consistent themes.

*“Marriage enriches my life as it is fantastic to share with someone you love and respect.”  
“My husband is my blessing in life. He constantly amazes me with how selfless and loving another human can be (and restores my faith in human nature).”*

*"We are enriched because we love each other and our family; we argue we quarrel, we make up, we have clarity and uncertainty; we have hopes, joys and fears."*

**Trust, Forgiveness and a Life of Service:** The experience of sharing their lives, supporting and respecting each other and learning to give and receive forgiveness enriches couples and features in half the diocesan reports. Respondents speak of "a partnership", the powerful experience of trusting another human being completely in all aspects of life: committing to a family life of mutual service and self-sacrifice and a growing awareness and appreciation of the needs of others. Shared family experience is seen as a "compass for life" through which couples learn acceptance, tolerance and the ability to put aside their own needs and desires. In this way respondents derive a sense of purpose and direction from their marriages.

*"Being loved and cherished enables us to reach out to others, to offer ourselves in service because we are able to see our own goodness reflected in the love of and for one another."*

*"I've been enriched by our often-renewed agreement to apologise for wrongs, to give and receive forgiveness, and not to hold onto grudges - because this is right, but also through wanting to set an example to our children."*

*"Real love is found in giving our life, in putting aside our own desires for the others, being ready to spend time doing things that we would not naturally choose to do."*

**The Joy of Children:** Seven dioceses report that children and grandchildren are a source of great joy and enrichment for married couples. Respondents describe the delight of sharing in their children's lives; caring for them and watching them grow. Couples also derive a deep sense of fulfilment from seeing their children "following in their footsteps" and building good, happy and fulfilling lives.

*"I have been gifted by God with two wonderful children through the love shared with my wife. It puts every other aspect of my life into its proper perspective."*

*"To see the world again through their eyes; to delight in small things and celebrate the joys."*

**Facing Challenges and Growing Together:** The challenges of marriage are also a source of enrichment, providing opportunities for self-development and increased self-knowledge, as noted in six diocesan reports. Respondents do not view marriage through 'rose-tinted glasses' but refer to their relationships as living, breathing entities which "stretch them emotionally, physically and psychologically." Many derive comfort from the fact that they have experienced bad, worrying and unhappy times together, and survived. Their ability to survive becomes a source of strength when facing the future trials of life. This is particularly evident in responses from older couples who have suffered illness or are now in failing health and need their spouse's practical as well as emotional support.

*"We held on through the hard times and it was even more special when we came out the other side; our love was enriched and strengthened."*

*"It is a changing relationship and as such there is a need to modify our behaviour as we go through the various stages of our lives."*

*"I love being married, being a mother. It makes me happy, I am proud to be married and part of a solid partnership. It also makes me feel closer to God, I am thankful for all I have."*

**Shared Faith and the Sacramentality of Marriage:** The enrichment of knowing that marriage is of God and that Christ is at the heart of a Christian marriage is reported by six dioceses. This allows couples to call on God's grace to help them face the challenges of life and sustain their love for one another. The complementarity of husband and wife, mutual love, support and self-giving are also seen as practical opportunities for growth in Christian values. Marriage is described as a means of deepening the couple's spiritual life as well as their individual relationships with God. The joy of sharing and practising their faith together is a source of enrichment which simultaneously

strengthens the couple's relationship and their faith, providing a fruitful environment in which their beliefs can be handed on to the next generation. Many write of the spiritual enrichments of the Sacrament and their closeness to God, emphasising the importance of praying together as a couple. A young couple say how much they value the stability of marriage, in enabling them to look forward, knowing that life will not be easy but that they will not be alone because they have each other and God.

*"Marriage provides an environment in which the Faith can be handed on. It also gives witness in the world to love and commitment. The opportunity to give this witness is itself enriching."*

*"Our faith is a 'shared' experience and our life has been bigger together than the sum of us apart."*

*"Years ago a favourite saying was "The family that prays together stays together", this we feel is very true. However, this does not necessarily mean sitting and reciting formal prayer, more an acceptance that you trust and believe in your partner by virtue of an ongoing relationship through God."*

*"When my husband was alive his care and support made me experience something of the love of God."*

**Confidence and Completeness:** Five dioceses report that couples derive peace of mind, confidence in facing the world and a sense of wholeness or completeness from their marriages: a confidence in becoming and being 'who you are.' Many feel they can genuinely 'be themselves' with their partner and family and communicate with them honestly and openly. The mutual trust, forgiveness and respect learned through marriage and family life consequently becomes the foundation on which many respondents build their lives.

*"It absolutely makes me a better person in every way! While I have a strong sense of self, I am reminded that my place on earth is to enrich others."*

*"I have experienced profound love, trust, loyalty, happiness, security and a confidence in who I am and what I can give."*

**Security, Stability and Belonging:** The trust and support experienced in their relationships gives married couples a sense of security in both practical and emotional terms which is described as an 'anchor' in their lives, as noted in five diocesan reports. This feeling of safety and belonging comes from the knowledge that they have committed themselves to each other for life. The belief in the permanence of their relationships is a rock on which to build their lives. One person describes their marriage as an antidote to experiencing the world as a "harsh, uncaring place at times." A number of couples say that their mutual trust helps them to feel "safe, complete and strong."

*"It keeps you more stable in your everyday life, like an anchor - Nothing greater than being a loving husband and father; you feel compete as a person."*

*"Even in a mundane secular sense it gives me a reason to go home and a reason to go out to work ...it allows me to be who I am and makes that 'who am' truly present."*

**Lack of Enrichment:** A minority of reports reflect that some people don't feel enriched by their marriages because they are under pressure, struggling financially or emotionally, or have reached challenging stages in their relationship. Some have been in marriages that have failed, though few say they regret the marriage. Indeed forgiveness is often expressed and appears to be rooted in the love shared before the break down of the relationship. In one diocese, a few respondents who have experienced marital breakdown write that they have grown stronger as a result and still have reason to be thankful for what they have received. Respondents who are widowed also speak with gratitude for the love they have shared with their spouses.

*“Challenges of outside world, financial pressures, stress, children away at work or university and the stresses they face does not enrich our marriage, these things batter at the walls of our castle.”*

*“It has to be said that it is often hard work and difficult. There is often no space for anything except the sheer drudgery of survival.”*

*“At the moment it doesn’t really. We are struggling and my marriage still exists because of a vow and a wish for our children to grow up with both their parents.”*

*“Since I have reached a difficult stage in my marriage it would be dishonest to say that it enriches me; it is a challenge which I try to meet because of the promises I made.”*

One group notes that even a ‘failed’ marriage can be enriching although no one would choose such a means:

*“Struggles and difficulties can teach new skills, creating the person you become. Afterwards you can learn how to connect again, how to live, how to trust. One participant said she had developed inner strength through such experiences and, having been held up by others through the bad years, was now able to hold others up in her turn. Changed social expectations mean that very few women would now stay for years in an abusive marriage.”*

#### **Question 5: How does your family life enrich those around you?**

*“Support, caring, friendship, a community, not taking ourselves too seriously, are all part of the importance of family life. Being part of a loving family helps us find our place in the world and understand what it is to truly love.”*

A number of diocesan reports indicate that people found this question difficult to answer, typically responding: “Not a lot”, “I don’t think it does” and “You’ll need to ask them”. Consequently the summaries provided are less detailed. Nevertheless a response that recurs significantly is that families enrich those around them by their example.

The kind of example offered by families is described in the following terms: love, values, welcome/being open, stability, Christian life, fidelity/faithfulness, non-judgemental, commitment, forgiveness, respect, compassion, continuity, unselfishness, being comfortable with faith, generosity, good relationships, integrity and going to Mass.

*“We are told that the love that shows between our family members reveals a caring and support of each other that others find occasion to admire and wish for.”*

*“By providing me with a grounding in love and acceptance I go out into the world a healthier, wholer person who can bring more centeredness to my friends, work and volunteer engagements.”*

*“Hopefully, by the witness of our life, joy and peace, despite our faults and human frailty.”*

*“Everyone enjoys the support of an extended family whether it is parents, siblings or the wider family. When family members fall out or have disagreements, the desire to resolve issues ultimately is due to loyalty to people to whom you are connected by blood. It is much easier to walk away from disagreements with friends or acquaintances without a backward glance.”*

*“Continuity, stability, commitment has a subtle but profound impact on those around us.”*

*“I would hope that our family is an open and welcoming place for anyone.”*

*“As a group, (5 individuals) we believe we do our best.....reflecting values to those around us of mutual support, love, respect for others and concern for their well-being.”*

*“Family life, to be enriching, has to be first and foremost one of selflessness.”*

*“We try to build community at every level, and I hope that we show a reasonably good*

*example of the importance of openness and forgiveness. I hope that we are comfortable in our faith and that this comes across even without us needing to shout about it.”*

*“We stick together despite what life throws at us. Our children know we are here for them, no matter what. We love them unconditionally. Outsiders see this.”*

The next most frequently recurring response is that families enrich those around them by giving practical support to family & friends. Similarly involvement in parish and community life is another way families see themselves as enriching the lives of others. Rather fewer reports note the sharing of life experiences, both positive and negative.

*“Families enrich parish life and promote the enrichment of lives in the wider world, through social and charitable work.”*

*“Family life is an important part of the greater good of the community as a whole, not just the church community which is becoming more insular and more like a sect.”*

*“With the happiness that secure family life brings to me and my children and husband we are better placed to offer and bring love to those who we meet day to day.”*

*“I believe that our three adult children have decent moral standards which show care and concern for others and the global environment. By always being ready to help friends and family when in need. By helping in the local community.”*

*“I hope that by being happy and loved, and tested and forgiven in the family we can all go out and love others more. By having to confront our weakness and deficiencies and faults within a loving family I hope we are more compassionate to others we meet who may not have as much loving support. The family can be brutally honest - it is a community and we (parents and children - and siblings) may not always see eye to eye or enjoy living alongside each other at times!”*

Responses that relate explicitly to faith and religious practice include handing on faith, prayer, being domestic church, offering inter-church experience and providing a counter-cultural witness.

*“We try to live Christian lives that are visible to the Community. Many types of families in our community enrich us too with their diversity.”*

*“I think seeing all of us together enriches the parish. We are enriched by all the families, couples and single people who come to our church.”*

*“We think sharing our family life with the clergy would be beneficial to both parties: messy families supporting other families – solidarity in sharing our worries.”*

*“People are blessed by the unity and bond of love they observe between us. Theologically, people often state rather obviously (nothing wrong with obvious) that this is because our relationship images those of the Most Holy Trinity. However in more aesthetic terms it enriches others because there is goodness, beauty, truth and unity evident in our relationship, when things are going well. People respond to what their heart craves for deep down and though they might not think in terms of the Most Holy Trinity, their hearts are restless until they experience God on a relational level. Often Christian families are the first point of contact for experiencing God on a relational level because they will attend 'the domestic Church' way before they ever summon up the courage to enter an ecclesial one.”*

*“For several years we have opened our home in small and big ways to be more hospitable and build community in the parish. This ranges from coffee after Sunday Mass to meals at home, to organising Meals on wheels service for new Mums and Dad's and their newborn children. It has also included running home groups or cell groups in our home, weekly meetings where we offer praise and worship, teaching and formation, prayer ministry and fellowship/social time. Courses like alpha or The Gift, seasons of weekly Lectio Divina or teaching and workshops on the Gifts and Charisms of the Holy Spirit, on parenting and marriage and family life.... Many who come report a warm and welcoming atmosphere, a*

*home from home, find faith renewed and invigorated. We are blessed to have prayer and ministry weekly in our home, House Masses too and deeper, more meaningful relationships with fellow parishioners. We have been given a pastoring charism, we want to see everyone living out their full baptismal inheritance. We would love to see our parishes full of "families on fire" with God's love! If we are what we are called to be, we would set the world on fire! (Paraphrasing St Catherine of Siena) People have also commented on how good it is to see a family with 4 children, the witness to a pro-life culture, to welcoming each child, our family Mass attendance together...the fact that it is a priority for us, not an optional lifestyle choice."*

Also mentioned is the hope that family strengths give rise to, the intrinsic goodness of marriage and the sense that caring and united families enrich the whole community.

*"A stable and happy family atmosphere is an example that can be shared with others. Society is as strong as individual families. We can be enriched by the customs, talents and practises of other nations joining our parish communities and neighbourhoods. All ages may benefit in many ways. Being more tolerant and enthusiastic whenever they come together creating a happy, united community".*

**Question 6: In what way, through the abiding presence of God, are your family 'salt for the earth and light to the world', and a place of and for handing on our Faith?**

*"Salt: as Christians, we provide an added dimension of richness and depth of thought to issues on abortion, justice for all, as people of Hope through our Lord Jesus Christ. Light: as Christians through friendliness, approachability, assistance, a shoulder to lean on, as someone who will support you in your worries through prayer, as someone who will believe in second chances, as someone who believes that at heart, we are all members of Christ's family."*

Although families were invited to reflect on the abiding presence of God in their lives, the activity of being salt and light in the world and the ways in which they hand on faith, it is not clear from diocesan reports that families distinguish these elements to any great degree in their reflections. Some reports acknowledge that some families find the question difficult or reject the way it was expressed. One diocese helpfully categorised families' responses in terms of positive faith reflections, negative faith reflections and rhetorical faith reflections, the latter focussing on what should or shouldn't be the case, not what actually is. The 'positive' and 'negative' reflections are therefore summarised here rather than an attempt made to tease out elements which apply to salt, light, faith-transmission and God's abiding presence.

One diocese notes that *"many respondents found this a difficult question and many did not answer it at all. A number are critical of the way the questionnaire as a whole and this question in particular were framed."* A group response records that this is *"too technical a use of language."* An individual asks do we need *"such flowery language."* Another dislikes the phrase *"handing on the faith"*, preferring to *"share their faith"*. A father/grandfather comments:

*"'handing on our faith' is a big problem for me as I do not feel the church provides a catechetical language which even my own children would understand and relate too. The very expression 'abiding presence of God' is a good example of words that would mean little or nothing to them..... we should be using the contemporary language and experiences of today, as Jesus did, to flag up to people what they will recognise as insights that have the ring of truth."*

Other individual responses received online also point out that the question is difficult to answer or just unrealistic, often adding that they simply do their best.

*“What an unrealistic question. I'm just doing my best and I would never claim to be the salt of the earth or light to the world. As to handing on our faith, if you have children, you bring them up to have clear moral values and you encourage them to see themselves as Catholics until they reach the stage when they must take responsibility for their own life. Their later choices are their business.”*

*“Plenty of “salt of the earth” but the light has a dimmer switch that I'm not sure who controls.”*

### Positive faith reflections

These are summarised under the headings of trying to live good lives /be a good example, involvement in parish and community life, expressing faith including prayer, generational perspectives, married love, pursuing unity including respect for personal faith journeys.

**Trying to live good lives / be a good example:** One diocese reports that families try to give the best example of faith through their own lives and do their best to live out the Gospel in their communities and families. Another diocese reports that many people refer to their marriage and family as an example to children, friends and the wider community. In a third, only a few people mention God as a constant presence through their family life, but many write of their family as an example to others, either in the Church or beyond, mentioning their “practice of the faith”, or more specifically their faith, their prayer, their Mass attendance or their involvement in the parish. In a fourth, most stress the importance of their own example of a lived Christian family life, showing love, respect and compassion in action. A fifth notes that this is achieved by families living out their Christian faith in their everyday lives and overcoming difficulties.

*“By trying to live good, modest lives, with those around us just gently aware of the motivations provided by our Catholic faith.”*

*“A Christian family witnesses to the love of God in the world and also shares it with others. This family also witnesses to and shares other Christian values: acceptance, commitment, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, openness, listening and justice.”*

*“We lead by our example. The way we face pain and darkness as the body of Christ.”*

*“We have had to realize that things have changed over time but we attempt by our own personal example to influence the behaviour and faith of our Children and grandchildren.”*

*“The family home is a place where God's love is present through its hospitality, welcome and everyday interaction. Faith can be handed on through Christian witness and how we respond to each other.”*

*“Parents set an example to their children (hopefully) of steadfastness. They see that by believing in something greater than the more fickle world around them, contentment is more easily attained. One's children do not always want to do exactly what their parents have done, such as attending Mass and receiving the sacraments regularly, but the foundation stones can be laid early in life which will be the touchstone for their future.”*

**Involvement in parish/wider community:** Trying to live a life of active participation in parish life as well as in the wider community is seen by many as a key role for the Catholic family. This includes parish based activities such as catechesis, but also ecumenical initiatives such as neighbourhood schemes and ‘unofficial’ day-to-day activities, such as looking after an elderly neighbour. Many speak of engaging with the parish, by regular mass attendance, and the school community, and addressing ethical concerns with action and financial support. A quarter of responses in one diocese mention active involvement in parish life and the wider community as a means of demonstrating their faith and handing it on to future generations.

*"Taking part in church services as readers or welcomers helps us feel we belong to the church family."*

*"The support of the "Parish Family" is important, cocooning children and enabling them to have faith experiences such as Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage."*

*"Many family members are in the caring profession - teachers -doctors - nurses- drug counsellor to name but a few."*

*"Taking a keen interest in the work of Catholic schools. Emphasising the importance of charitable giving - money, time, advice, example."*

*"We believe that as a family we are 'salt of the earth and a light in the world' to other members of our faith community, to our neighbourhood. This is evidenced in our contributions of time and effort to civil and ecclesiastical society."*

**Expressing faith:** The ways in which families make their faith known feature strongly in responses, a typical comment is *"trying to be a model Christian, promoting the Church and not keeping faith secret"*. Some take a traditional approach to passing on their faith, in simple and explicit ways:

*"The children take it in turn to say Grace at meal times."*

*"We talk about God, Jesus, Mary and the saints, we discuss the news and put the Christian point of view whenever we can. We try to hand on the faith by showing how others in the past have sacrificed themselves and how we too must stand up and be counted in today's world."*

*"Religious observance of prayers, and the presence in their home of articles of religious faith such as statues, rosaries etc. bore witness to their lived faith."*

*"We believe that through simple means, ie regular Mass, moments of reflection, grace before meals and night prayers, we can pass on to our family the values of our faith".*

*"We have pictures and the crucifix which shows the presence of our faith in our lives".*

Faith conversations and prayer are mentioned frequently:

*"We are able to talk about our faith without embarrassment. This enables others, who are embarrassed, to open up and ask questions."*

*"People know we are Catholic because I tell them when I get the slightest chance and mention going to mass and lent etc. They know the family and how we are. Maybe not great evangelisation but I think we shine to all around. But it doesn't mean we shine beyond our community."*

*"The family is where we try to teach our children to listen to the word of God in scripture, to learn a habit of prayer and to find help enrichment and solace in the sacraments. It is where children should learn to respect all human life. This is especially important today in our society where, at this moment, legislation for assisted dying is being mooted."*

*"Through spending time with each child to talk about the aspects of faith which mean the most to them at that stage."*

*"Through prayer and reflection I recognise what I hold is important, I connect to the true messages of the New Testament and listen to the words that impact on my behaviours and actions."*

*"Through prayer together – such as the Angelus and prayer to our Guardian Angel".*

*"We have always been committed to the pro-life affirmation of the absolute value of every human person, made in God's image. That is the basis of all justice and all good works. It is the only answer to the evil that would use, and if necessary destroy, people to further other people's aims and ambitions. We have always prayed together and discussed our faith at home. We affirm one another, and my home is a "safe place" where family members can come when buffeted and in need of peace and acceptance. They also know they will be*

*challenged if they stray from right behaviour. Love and mercy do not mean we let them get away with anything!"*

Others note the importance of being a living example of faith:

*"It is only by our actions, behaviour and attitudes to others that we really hand on the faith."  
"Showing others the attractiveness of God and the joy it brings to our life and the importance we give to the practice of our faith."*

*"If [children] can see that Christian faith is a natural part of their parents' lives, enriching them as they deal with people and situations, then this must be a possible foundation for their own faith development."*

A few responses mention the family as domestic church:

*"We feel we are the domestic church and that our home by its very nature is a holy place. Although our daughter is not currently a member of any Christian church we believe we have given her the groundings in it and know that if she decides to return to church she will not find it a completely alien experience."*

*"Our home is a domestic church. We pray together, talk of our faith, eat cake on solemnities, we feast and fast together. We each have a day for saying grace."*

**Generational perspectives:** Concerns for the younger generation are alluded to in the way older family members often 'hold the torch' of faith on their behalf.

*"The way in which our family is 'salt of the earth and light to the world', I believe, is the 'ripple effect' through the generations. My parents set a standard for me to aspire to, reinforced by the word of God. Consequently my marriage reflects that and affects both my child, relations and friends, thereby affecting the future. We are a positive example of love, trust, comfort and support, a strong unit that isn't exclusive but inclusive as we extend these attributes to neighbours and friends and I believe it makes a difference to their views of marriage and having a faith in God and the gospel."*

*"At the moment the relevance of the Church comes at times of need: funerals, weddings and baptisms. We pray that the seeds sown will emerge later. Whatever their practice of faith, I believe they can still provide salt for the earth and light to the world, because of their upbringing and who they are. What of the next generation? We have to find new ways of letting the gospel and the sacraments touch them. We need to be more open."*

*We try to live a life based on the values Jesus taught us - the beatitudes. Ask yourself - what would Jesus do in any circumstance? Our grandchildren seem to be living in faith - thank God."*

*"We also have a strong line on attending Mass and, even though our children are in their mid-thirties, we make Church attendance, Church politics, the gospel message and Christian values central to the life of our extended family."*

**Married love:** The impact of strong marriages is noted in several diocesan reports, one noting that love between husband and wife is widely seen as a vital element in the upbringing of children and as a demonstration to the world of the importance and relevance of married life:

*"The abiding presence of God that has been "salt of the earth and light to the world" has been our married love and our personal respect for each other's faith belief."*

*"Many have commented that the strength of our marriage is a witness to them, and an encouragement, and we share that it has only got there through struggles (34 years of marriage, now, praise God). We also run Marriage Preparation Courses and Marriage Courses."*

*"As a married couple we pray that we can be the leaven that brings about the growth of the*

*body of Christ by acting kindly, and in a non-judgemental way to all those people we meet in our everyday life.”*

**Efforts towards unity:** Three diocesan reports note the contribution of families who work towards achieving religious unity, whether at home or in the wider Christian and other faith community: ‘involvement in ecumenical or interdenominational projects and initiatives. One response says that interdenominational work encourages Christians “to see each other’s point of view and work towards a greater fellowship.”’

*“Our family is rather split religiously. It is a difficult situation. Ideally it would be a place to work together in celebrating feasts, praying together in little ways. As it is now, in my situation, I can gently explain scriptures in more detail, explain how things work in our parish, encourage thought, encourage prayer, encourage challenge and most of all encourage acceptance. For my children to know that whatever they do they are loved by God, really loved for who they are and not for what they do. If that is the only thing that can be achieved within my family I will be satisfied.”*

*“My wife and I see ourselves both as devout Christians who are members of the Catholic Church. We are very active in our local community in inter-church and interfaith issues as well as involved with communities in other countries especially in Palestine.”*

Respect for personal faith is an integral part of this effort, especially within the home:

*“...try to show tolerance and respect for others whilst staying faithful to church teaching.”*

*“We don't condemn or judge anyone.”*

*“Encouraging everyone to find their own path up the mountain as well as showing example by our continuing to go to Mass each week .”*

*“being a place of understanding, tolerance and allowing people to grow and develop.”*

*“showing respect for all religious beliefs.”*

### Negative faith reflections

On the other hand diocesan reports also describe a sense of failure where passing on faith is concerned, the impact of children not practising faith, difficulties with church teaching, the complexities of not sharing faith at home nor having a supportive society or parish for passing on faith in God.

**A sense of failure:** Diocesan reports repeatedly report the sadness of the older generation about their experience of handing on faith in God to their children and grandchildren:

- ‘One respondent describes the sadness of failing (as they see it) in this task.’
- ‘Several people doubt whether their family is salt and light.’
- ‘Some express uncertainty about how successful they were but hopeful that their efforts would bear fruit in the long term.’
- ‘A number of responses express sadness that their children are not practising the faith. One said “sadly our family is not a place for handing on the faith, but it is a place where the keystones of faith are practiced”. Another said “our family may well hand on good human values, but not, as it stands, handing on the faith”.’
- ‘The overwhelming feeling from so many of the older people’s responses was that they had failed to hand on the faith to some/all of their children and consequently to their grandchildren. There seemed to be great sadness and guilt that they had failed. This was so sad to read from people who have tried their best to follow God all their lives; a sense of blaming themselves for not achieving this. Most cited examples of bringing their children to

church, trying to uphold the catholic faith and citing examples of how they were or are still involved in parish life – but still with the sadness of having failed in inculcating this to their children. We plant the seeds but often we do not see the results.....the best we can do is try. And sometimes it is very hard to try!

- ‘A third of responses expressed sorrow and disillusionment over their lack of success in handing on the faith to their children, in spite of their best efforts.’

*“We tried to pass on the faith but not sure we have been very successful, nor have most of the parents we know. Could we have done more? Not sure.”*

*“we, like many others, did our best to hand on the faith. My child does not now believe in God and does not attend church. To the younger generation the Catholic Church is a medieval irrelevance. While I, myself, believe in Jesus - I am appalled at what the institution He founded has become. A tyrannical power structure, stuck in a medieval culture and unable to bring itself into the modern world. One good example of this is the so called New Translation of the Mass. A backward step from language that ordinary people understood to a ridiculous artificial so-called sacral language which is no more than a mixture of garbled English, medieval theological vocabulary and transliteration from Latin.*

*“This gives me the opportunity to “come clean”. Despite all my fine words above I have to confess that two of my three children have lapsed seriously. Looking back I think that I imagined that they would grow in their faith by the same sort of osmosis that I did. I am very serious about my faith and I did not want to put them off by being too heavy! I would do it differently if I had my time over again.”*

**Reflections on Children:** Despite this sense of sadness and failure, many responses suggest parents have had some success in passing on faith, though not if they measure that faith by Sunday Mass attendance. Many mention that their children no longer attend Mass, often adding that they are nonetheless loving and caring people.

*“Although our children do not attend church any more, I feel that there should be an emphasis on the role of the family in society. Our family is colourful and at times dysfunctional, however if a person needed help or assistance or in fact protection, I know my children would be the first to respond. I know that this would not be as valued as attending church every Sunday.”*

Some describe how their children live good, moral lives although they do not attend church and hope that the example they were given as children may bring them back to the church eventually.

*“Sadly, neither of my children have kept up their faith but I think the Holy Spirit is working within them as the fruits of the Spirit are evident. I hope one day they will return to the church.”*

*“I made great efforts to hand on my faith to my children.....In spite of this three of the five do not practice. I hope that the salt of the earth and light of the world is evident in that they all are in productive and/or compassionate occupations, so that while their faith may not be currently evident, I believe the values are deeply embedded.”*

*“It sometimes feels as though we are pushing water uphill, but we continue to live out our married life together in love and hope so that this example may be sufficient for our family to believe that it is the best way and the right way to live their lives.”*

*“We haven’t done too well at handing on the faith to our children but we have given them a grounding in basic Christian behaviour.”*

*“Being honest, both my children are very caring and tolerant of Christianity but neither feel they have to prove this in a church every week. I can't say I agree with this but I believe that they do have some faith and this is because I try to set an example.”*

*“My niece and nephew live the gospel outside the Church (they are non-practising). They live*

*marriage, reaching out to extended family, being there for people who need them and raising a son with love and gentleness, him to respect other people - in my eyes they are a living example of Christian marriage and family life."*

**Difficulties with the Church:** Diocesan reports note the difficulties experienced by some with the Church and its teaching, particularly in reconciling some of its practices with the Gospel. One diocese reported:

*'People found it hard to be "salt and light" as often the church is dismissed as being bigoted and out of touch. People try and do their best, they want to respond to problems in society but feel they need better leadership from the pulpit, less judgement and more compassion and mercy. Examples were given of good people who love God and do good works who are in irregular marriages, the converse is also true, there are people who tick all the boxes for receiving communion but are bitter and judgemental and, in some cases have been the reason why some have left parishes. There was a general consensus of the church being pharisaical in its response to who can and cannot receive the blessed sacrament. They believe church teaching to be true in the letter of the law but wrong in application of the "spirit of the law".'*

Comments made:

*"We are ashamed of our Faith – so misogynistic, controlling, self-opinionated.....we are not salt of the earth: we give no flavour to the joy of our Creator, but bang on about matters which are not part of the big picture."*

*"The family is not a place to hand on the faith of the Catholic Church. As children grow into young adults they do not identify with an organisation that holds outdated and misogynist views. They live their lives according to what they think is right. This could be so different. How can it be right for people living with HIV/AIDS not to use condoms? How can it be right for divorced and remarried people to be refused Communion? How can the Catholic Church's view on the evil of homosexual, cohabitation be right? Thank God for the secular world which has blown in to the murky corridors of the Vatican. The Church needs to be a force for good in the world. I pray that things may change."*

*"There are external forces that make evangelisation difficult and people like us need the support at parish and national level to help us in this task of evangelisation. At the moment the Church appears irrelevant even uncaring and alien. There needs to be closer liaison between senior Church leaders and members of the faithful. Opportunities for dialogue from below upwards need to be created if the bishops are not to find themselves out of touch. In recent years there has been a great danger of a disconnect between bishops and the laity. We must take steps to avoid this happening and to make our Church less clerical."*

*"We can hand on the Gospel values of Christianity through example, discussion and lives well- lived. Handing on spiritual and doctrinal beliefs has been much more difficult. Children and young people see the horror, as well as the beauty, of the world around them, much of it inflicted and encouraged by religious extremism of all types. They see a Church which discriminates against those who are divorced, gay, against women, and yet hides internal corruption and displays huge riches in the face of international poverty. They see a Church which prohibits the use of condoms thus proliferating the spread of HIV and AIDS. Add this to the normal agnostic/atheist tendencies experienced by many young adults, and millions are lost to the Church. Often these are people who do live lives according to Gospel values."*

*"Our family love and care for each other as a result of their Christian upbringing within our family life but not primarily as a result of what they have seen in the church, diocese or sadly their Catholic Secondary schools. Their faith is that of following Christ as Christians but not always with the Institution of the Catholic Church which seems at times to be more*

*concerned about promoting its authority than in serving and supporting the laity. They are handing on a Christian way of life but not within the institution of the Catholic Church. The examples and behaviours of our parish priests who have run away to wed, been a child abuser have not helped. A married priest was a good example of Christian marriage and there is a strong argument for more of the within the UK priesthood."*

*"I think that the Lord's comments were directed at a group not individuals or families. So the question is more properly addressed to parishes and the higher echelons of the Church. And I must say that as witnesses we do a pretty poor job. The hymn says "We'll be turning the world upside down". But as a church we don't. We are far too conformed to the powers of this world. It is easy - almost a let-out - to attack sexual morality or the lack thereof. But to find Christians who will speak out on major issues of our time and maybe go to prison for their beliefs, we have to go to the fringes, Pax Christi, the London Catholic Workers, some Justice and Peace Groups. (And when bishops retrench for financial reasons what do they cut first? Why Diocesan J and P staff!) A good yardstick will be when some members go out after Mass feeling uncomfortable and very possibly angry at what they have heard in the homily. As for handing on the faith, I don't think that this is something we can do in the present state of the Church. Actually all anyone can do is pass on values and I think our schools are very good at this. But if by handing on the faith is meant producing adherents to the Church by and large we can forget it. We will be fortunate if 10% continue to attend Mass. This is an issue demanding urgent attention. When will we have an honest, widely spread debate on this? And bishops should realise that if there is consultation, the data must be published to the participants. This is rule one of opinion surveys however unwelcome the findings may be for those commissioning the survey."*

**Lack of shared faith:** The challenges experienced in marriages where faith is not shared are noted. An abiding comment is that an "ideal" vision of marriage is all very well but does not reflect the difficulties of married life in challenging and fractured times.

*"I am the only Catholic in my little unit."*

*"Things have not always been easy."*

*"The simple answer is that it has not been - as I am married to an atheist."*

*"That's hard as my husband although supportive is not catholic and doesn't share my faith. My children constantly question and it can be hard to keep them engaged. I look to my church for support in this."*

**Pressures of a world unsympathetic to faith:** One report writes that in general people feel they have failed to pass on the faith to their children, however, 'few blame themselves for this but rather the pressure of society and the media'. Another report notes concerns by respondents that 'their children might not come to their own knowledge of God and might succumb to the lure of the material world.'

*"Very difficult to pass on religious beliefs and feelings in a secularised society."*

*"I would like to think that we "hang on in there" through thick and thin.....handing on our faith has proved more problematical than for that of our parents."*

*"A difficult question to answer in what is now a secular country where God has been forgotten in higher education and the media including our Government."*

*"I'd be wary of using such grandiose terms to describe our little messy family.....and we do our best to hand on our faith to our children. This is very hard in a world where different values are pushed at them all the time."*

*"It is actually quite hard to hand on our faith as the concept of tribal catholicism has all but disappeared." The lack of young families at Mass all meant significant challenges to passing on the faith within family life."*

### **Question 7: Do you have any other comments**

*"Without my faith I couldn't get out of bed each morning. After years of questioning, reading, doubting, searching it has become a very simple thing. I believe in the historical and divine person of Jesus Christ. I believe he died to redeem humankind. I believe he left us the Gospels as an example of how to live lives of unconditional love and service. I believe he left us the Eucharist to strengthen us in order to do that. I believe in the resurrection. I find much of the rest of the dogma, doctrine, strictures, and attitudes displayed by the Church deeply unsettling and detract from, rather than support, my faith. I would describe myself as a person of faith rather than of religion and have always tried to communicate this to my children and extended family."*

This question was included in the online response form, so some dioceses have provided feedback to it in their summary reports. As one diocese points out, respondents used this section to comment on issues which were not explicitly included in the preceding questions ('although by no means absent from their responses to those questions'). Another diocese noted that comments in this section tended to be negative. The main issues emerging seem to centre on divorce/remarriage, the challenges of family life and the response of the Church, the processes of consulting the laity and issues of gender and sexuality.

#### **The Plight of those who have Divorced and Remarried:**

*"I believe it is important for our Bishops to know that marriage is not always a "gift" and that Church teaching on marriage has led to untold misery for many couples and has had lifelong, detrimental impact on the mental, physical and spiritual health of their children."*

In one diocese the principal issue raised in this section, by a significant number of respondents, is that of *communion for those divorced and civilly-remarried*. The answers indicate that there are those who have fairly strongly held views in favour of *maintaining the Church's teaching* and practice and those who *desire change*. Nevertheless, many of the responses perceive a tension between the importance of upholding the *sanctity and permanence of marriage* and the need for *compassion and understanding* to those who have entered a new partnership (or who are in other irregular situations).

In another diocese the most common area by far for comment concerns the issue of marriage break-up and divorce. Many write of happy and fulfilling marriages but often with a sting in the tail regarding their children having difficult and broken relationships and not keeping the faith. Time and again respondents refer to the pain and suffering caused by the denial of the sacraments to those whose marriages have failed and have divorced and remarried. The disturbing and damaging effect on children is frequently referred to. Many write of the difficulties of maintaining the 'ideal' vision of marriage and family life which the church hopes us to aspire to. Virtually no one is opposed to the 'ideal' vision of marriage but many are disturbed by the legalistic and punitive response of the church to those who cannot live up to the standard.

In particular there is a common view expressed that the denial of the sacraments has a corrosive impact and many cannot understand the Church's position on this issue. *"The grace and love of receiving the Body of Christ is such an incredible assistance to a life in such an atheistic modern world. To be excluded is so very sad. When one considers that God alone knows what is in our heart, the love, the longing. One can be a criminal, an occasional Mass goer, someone who hardly believes, but still Holy Communion is available and offered."* Another writes on similar lines *"Should someone whose marriage has failed be then excluded for the rest of their lives of all the benefits that being*

*with another person can bring? The only unforgivable sin in the church seems to be marrying the wrong partner. The church seems to lack forgiveness." Someone who was divorced and some many years later received an annulment writes "In these modern times when things have changed so much is there nothing that can be done to stop the isolation of these divorced and remarried people (even people who have taken a life can receive the Sacraments.)"*

In another diocese the single most common theme is the pain of people who are barred from receiving the sacraments because they are divorced and re-married (without an annulment). *'Could it really become a sacrament offered for healing those who are suffering? ..... Eucharist should not be used as a sanction or a prize for 'worthiness' when none of us is worthy to receive the gift of God. Several people suggested that Jesus would be more compassionate than the Church is: 'When people who have divorced and remarried have been coming to church every Sunday for years we should be welcoming them to the Eucharistic table. WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?'*

The ACTA survey reports that the vast majority of respondents, 88%, rejected the church's policy of refusing access to the sacraments for the divorced and remarried.

### **The Challenges of Family Life and the Need for a Responsive Church:**

*"I want a Church that welcomes all and that is in tune with modern life. Marriages fail, gay people exist, children live in broken homes, people have dependencies. We are all inadequate and struggling. Minister to us, include us, all of us. The alternative is that people become disillusioned and drift away.....".*

A number welcome Pope Francis' initiatives, one group hopes *"that his pontificate would see growing acceptance of all individuals of faith regardless of the 'messiness' of their lives."* Many highlight the messiness of modern family life and the need for the Church to respond in a pastorally inclusive, accepting and compassionate way. With respondents stating that they *"are deeply worried about certain aspects of the Church's attitude to marriage and the family which means increasing isolation and defection to more tolerant Christian communities. The danger is that the Catholic community will be seen eventually as a marginalised elite, out of touch with the very society which it should be helping to bring into a loving relationship with Our Lord."* Several respondents comment that the Church is behind the times and needs to address contemporary societal attitudes and become "more relevant" to the lives that Catholics are experiencing in a complex world. Some concern is raised about the Church being seen as judgmental and irrelevant amongst the younger members of the respondents' families. Three comment on the use of "Church language" and the need for better communication with contemporary young people. Another states that the young of the Church need to hear that God loves them in a way that is meaningful in the context of their own lives. In particular, the Church needs to communicate *"more effectively to young people the importance of Scripture and the Eucharist."* Two respondents (one a group) feel that the Church needs to be more inclusive of lay single people and recognise their vocation and contribution to the life of the Church and members of families. One implores: *"PLEASE make use of our experience, our faith, our commitment, our prayer life, and our knowledge and understanding of many areas of life.... We are often very involved in supporting families, young and old, and many of us see this as part of our Christian vocation."*

*"The Church needs to look carefully at why so many young people today enter with sincerity, fidelity and commitment into a pre-nuptial cohabitation and consider whether, since a period of living together is regarded as a genuine step on the way to the wedding ceremony, the potential goodness of this stage cannot be respected, without the need to exclude them from*

*the graces of the Sacrament. Such exclusion can lead to young people leaving the Church altogether.”*

ACTA’s report reflects on the kind of support experienced and needed by families from their Church in a changing world:

*“Respondents found that with their families, the most useful forms of support came through shared meals (215 responses selected this choice), support from families and friends (190) and days out or holidays spent together (132). Family groups and prayer groups also scored highly (73), followed by prayer at home (59). With fast declining numbers of male celibate priests, new ways of supporting families on their faith journey will need to be devised. There are many obstacles that prevent families from taking part in church activities. Work patterns, with both partners working, were cited by 85 respondents, lack of time and the pace of life by 83, and other family commitments by 56. The lack of support from non-Catholic partners (30) and the diversions of social media, TV and the internet (20) were also significant. The church needs to find its voice in working with other partners to take on issues of social justice such as work-life balance, lack of childcare, respite and poverty. These issues appear to be strangling the future of the church at a time when the clergy is ageing and numbers are falling. Contributing to food banks, and SVP projects are a step in the right direction, but only 93 (27%) responded to the request in the questionnaire for suggestions for future joint projects; and none of these involved, for instance, working with local councils.”*

#### **The Process of Consulting the Laity:**

*“This survey does not seem to address directly many of the concerns expressed by Catholics (whether in my own diocese, England and Wales or most of the "West") in response to the earlier survey. Unless the Church is prepared to face up to and address those concerns honestly and constructively rather than pretending that if we just go on preaching an unrealistic vision of perfection all will be well, it will fail to minister to its own faithful, never mind being an effective evangelising force in the world. This means facing up to and dealing with the often rather messy realities of human behaviour and relationships as well as reflecting on how we would all ideally like to live. This is both difficult because it requires humility and challenging because there are no easy answers. It could also be immensely rewarding and fruitful.”*

*“It was felt that the discussion questions offered to the laity by the Bishops’ Conference, though admirable in themselves, and highly suitable for eg a marriage encounter meeting or retreat, would not enable us to discuss and share with those attending the synod the issues which we felt were of most concern to us. Therefore we chose instead to discuss amongst ourselves and then share with you our greatest concerns.”*

A significant number have been critical of the two questionnaires which have been issued in the last year to elicit responses to the issues raised by the two Synods. The criticism has essentially focused on the nature and language of the questions, and of the management of the process of consultation. Many have expressed their positive response to the idea of consultation but have been critical of the nature of it. Most common has been a disappointment at the language used which has been seen as obscure and lacking in clear focus. This was particularly the case with the first questionnaire which many thought was far too intellectual and theologically based. A typical comment was that only those with a degree in theology or philosophy would be able to respond adequately to it.

On the questions set out as part of the document "The Call, The Journey and The Mission" one especially eloquent comment was *"this is just the sort of anodyne communication so beloved by middle management in every large organisation and clearly seeks to steer the laity into convenient channels by putting certain questions"*. The same respondent goes on to add *"I believe you, the Bishops of England and Wales, and indeed the World should be asking different questions. Whom are we rejecting? The divorced, the same sex relationships, the confused and doubting, the remarried, the lapsed, to these people do we throw open our doors in welcome? Do we support these people on their journey?"* Another response from an experienced and well respected priest reported *"the comment kept coming that the bishops seem to want to avoid any discussion of the 'messy' areas of life.....parents are looking for guidance on handling actual situations in an acceptable and workable manner, not for silent avoidance of uneasy issues. Did not Pope Francis say we should start from the lived realities not from text books? The bishops' document, it was suggested, did just the opposite."* Many other people echoed this type of comment, if perhaps not in such an articulate manner.

*"The above are very silly questions, inviting people to write like Patience Strong. I think my marriage is a good and happy one and I hope that my children understand from it something of what a good marriage should be but it would be monstrously arrogant to claim that my family is the salt of the earth or in any way an example to anyone else. If you are serious about wanting to know what real people think about marriage, please give some thought to asking sensible and practical questions about the difficulties many people face everyday. If one has to deal with a divorce or an abusive spouse or a son or daughter setting up in a same-sex relationship, one is not going to appreciate being preached at by someone else who doesn't have these problems. Good marriages don't appear out of the air- an increasing number of people are never likely to achieve married happiness because they didn't grow up in an environment where they could observe it. It might be pointed out that this may be the case even though their parents' marriage was outwardly a perfectly respectable Catholic one. I presume that these questions have been thought up by a celibate with a starry-eyed view of marriage. Find some married people who understand that there is a lot of hatred going on within marriage as well as love."*

The other area of criticism in relation to the questionnaires focused on the management of the process. Again this is best reported by a direct quotation from the same priest referred to above. *"Several people, some of whom had worked hard to respond to that difficult questionnaire that was published before the Extraordinary Synod, were disappointed (one even said "angry") that no report had been produced of what had been said in that collective response. The following passage from one of them is fairly representative: "This document reads like a series of platitudes and, crucially, makes hardly any reference to the earlier commitment to involve the laity in this process of 'discernment'. Then we took the invitation seriously and responded with our ideas and concerns. Where has all that effort gone and why have we heard nothing about the overall picture that transpired? Why should we bother to answer the questions again?" They question whether this time they might receive some indication of what people at large within the Catholic community of this country are thinking. In other words, they are questioning the very integrity of consultation. For the sake of future consultation and collaboration, beyond the October Synod and in all aspects of church life and activity, I think the bishops need to give careful consideration to keeping the people on board"*.

*"The answers to the questions were provided at the outset.... I doubt that the true opinion of the faithful will match that false expectation....that as before we, the church in England and Wales will not be provided with feedback about the outcome, unless edited to suit the magisterial line and not cause waves in Rome. Our episcopal shepherds do need to address this lack of trust and perception among the faithful in the pews."*

In another diocese a relatively small number of respondents, no more than twenty per cent, have presented what might be called a traditionalist perspective. *“They generally are fearful of any changes and indeed believe many things to have already altered for the worse. They are often critical of church leaders for not defending more publicly and rigorously Church doctrine and values as they see them.”*

#### **Issues of Gender and Sexuality:**

*“We are concerned about the role of women in the church too. As women in the home and in the workplace, we have a sense of value and equality, and in every generation this increases. For us and our children, this is the norm. They can’t understand the lack of equality or voice in the structures of the church at high level. The church refers to ‘herself’ as ‘mother’ – perhaps the church could take the lead from parents – so that the Parish learns from and becomes more like a family in its heart-sharing attitude.”*

*“I was hoping that there would be sections on sexuality, sexual orientation, contraception, the evils of child abuse in the church, women priests, expanding the role of deacons, the environment, the ageing Catholic (dementia, isolation, loneliness), clericalisation, attitudes to other religions and so much more! Perhaps a fuller survey in the fullness of time (the church does tend to move at a glacial pace!) Did you involve any lay people in the design of this questionnaire?”*

Other issues raised here were those of same sex partnerships and contraception, where again respondents’ views were divided between those who accepted the Church’s teaching and those calling for a rethinking. Some also raised issues related to the clergy (celibacy and the formation of priests in matters relating to marriage and family life).

*“The language and attitude of the Church towards those in same sex relationship must always reflect the care and compassion of Christ. They too are created in the image of God and are his children so deserve respect instead of the immoderate language used by some in the Church. We welcome the guidance of Pope Francis who asks us to recognise what is good in irregular situations.”*

*“Humanae Vitae included so much wisdom on sexuality and the dangers for society of a careless approach to this - sadly it has been lost because all focus has been on the banning of all artificial contraception and, for some at least, on the unsatisfactory way in which Paul VI arrived at his decision. When some of our bishops continue to prioritise this ban, they continue to widen the gap between Catholic teaching and the actual practice of most married Catholics. A great pity.”*

#### **Appreciative Comments:**

A theme running through many of the answers was a sense of gratitude to Pope Francis for bringing to the fore the whole area of marriage and family life, and for his invitation to lay Catholics to reflect on these matters, and their support for the Bishops to whom the task of the Synod has been entrusted.

*“Thanks for this opportunity. I don't for one moment think that Francis holds the same views as me but his words have been thought provoking comforting and anchored in the Gospel - I truly hope and pray that the Pope is listened to by his Bishops.”*

*“Thank you for asking and good luck with your work. Perhaps, as the church is beginning to recognise the importance of marriage and family it is time to look at the wider picture of the Church as family and consider that it might be time for women priests.”*

*“Thank you for the chance to speak. As a woman I do not get this opportunity often in the Church. Now the Church needs to show that it has heard and has listened.”*

*“This survey could have been better designed, though it's an improvement on the last one. It also assumes that the people completing it are in an 'orthodox' marriage, despite offering the 'single' and 'cohabiting' option. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to do this. We hope that you will use the responses in a fair and honest way, reflecting all views, and I sincerely pray that the Holy Spirit is really working in the Church today, to create real conversion of heart so that the haemorrhage can be stopped, and we can once more be a truly Catholic church - a home for everyone.”*

*“Thank you for the Synod and the opportunity to speak as a wife and mother. Marriage and family life is where the strength of the church lies and the source of future vocations. It is the embodiment of God's love. Marriage as a vocation faces many obstacles, but brings so many long-lasting gifts. I hope you can find a way to enable young people to find love for the Sacrament of Marriage. I pray that with God's guidance a renewed love and understanding of the vocation of marriage and the gift of parenthood can be found.”*

*“Thank heavens this was so much more easy to answer than the last questionnaire!!!!”*

*“The Church, for all its centuries of learning and theological reflection, needs always to consider "what would Jesus have done". The outcomes would be rather different, I suspect. I do not offer my reflections for them simply to fall into a black hole. I would encourage the Bishops' Conference to find a way of holding a mirror to those who did and those who didn't contribute to the preparation for both the 2014 and 2015 synods, by publishing a synopsis of these contributions. In any further consultation on this topic of major importance for the Church, a far greater effort must be made in bringing the consultation to the attention of regular church-going Catholics. Thank you.”*