



Pastoral challenges to the family in the context of evangelisation

Summary of the responses from the German dioceses and archdioceses to the questions contained in the preparatory document for the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2014

This summary is based on the responses from the 27 German dioceses and archdioceses, as well as on those from roughly 20 well-known Catholic associations and institutions. Owing to the short survey period that was stipulated by the Synod of Bishops, they are based on different survey processes and drafting procedures. These include statements by experts and specialist bodies, elaborations in councils at the various levels, ranging through to random surveys among individuals as well as online surveys, followed by an appropriate statistical evaluation. Despite the linguistic style of the questions, which many criticised as being difficult to understand, many individuals and bodies have taken the initiative themselves and have studied the preparatory document for the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and sent to the dioceses their responses to the questions which it contains. This means that input from married couples and families in particular was also incorporated in the preparation.

All in all, this summary is based on broad participation on the part of the baptised. The commitment which was developed over this short period, both on the part of the individuals involved and of the institutions which dealt with the analysis and systematisation, is considerable. This demonstrates, firstly, the fundamental relevance of the overall topic for life and, secondly, that people have a great deal of interest in contributing their personal ideas and assessments to the preparation of the Synod. The German bishops are grateful to everyone who took part for their commitment to the Church.

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

a) Describe how the Catholic Church's teachings on the value of the family contained in the Bible, Gaudium et spes, Familiaris consortio and other documents of the post-conciliar Magisterium are understood by people

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today? What formation is given to our people on the Church's teaching on family life?

Many of our people are familiar with the Bible's statements on marriage and the family (for instance the Creation Story, the Sixth Commandment, the Sermon on the Mount). The Church's documents are however not known in detail, or are only known to few people, and hence have virtually no direct meaning for people's personal lives. Most of the baptised have an image of the Church on the one hand that it is family friendly in its attitude, whilst at the same time considering her sexual morality to be unrealistic. As a matter of principle, statements made at universal level are regarded as not being suited in terms of their linguistic style and their authoritative approach to be understood and accepted among the baptised. This is why there is a lack of willingness to approach them.

Marriage preparation courses and pastoral care offered to married couples and families are available at diocesan and parish level, but frequently do not actually take place. Where these offers stress the personal dimension of marriage and the family (and are hence close to the spirit of *Familiaris Consortio*), there is also agreement in terms of their content. Whilst there is considerable interest in the teaching of tried and trusted practical skills, such as with regard to communication within couples or child-raising, discussion of natural family planning meets with a lack of interest or is rejected in most cases.

The Church's teachings on marriage and the family form part of the curricula for religious instruction. However, they only play a small role in youth work. The Catholic perception of the family is only referred to in sermons in isolated cases.

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

In most cases where the Church's teaching is known, it is only selectively accepted. The idea of the sacramental marriage covenant, which encompasses faithfulness and exclusivity on the part of the spouses and the transmission of life, is normally accepted by people who marry in Church. Most of the baptised enter into marriage in the expectation and hope of concluding a bond for life. The Church's statements on premarital sexual relations, on homosexuality, on those divorced and remarried, and on birth control, by contrast, are virtually never accepted, or are expressly rejected in the vast majority of cases.

The Catholic perception of the family makes an impression on many people of being too idealistic and unrealistic. Particularly the Church's requirements concerning sexual morality and family planning, which only permit natural birth control, are only relevant for a very small number of couples. Since not least celibacy is also regarded by many as the expression of a critical fundamental standing on sexuality on the part of the Church, this makes it difficult to positively impart the Church's teachings on marriage and the family.

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

There is a multiplicity of activities and offers. Family catechesis frequently takes place within the context of sacramental catechesis, for instance in marriage preparation courses or in the

accompaniment and inclusion of parents when bringing their children to the initiation sacraments – especially to baptism and first communion.

The family is the subject and the object of catechesis in equal measure, since religious instruction in the family is indispensable for transmitting and learning the faith. For various reasons, however, parents frequently find the religious instruction of their children to be difficult. The Church is challenged here – as is shown in pastoral practice – to support and strengthen families as places where the faith is transmitted. When it comes to baptism, it is important for parents and guardians to prepare for the celebration of their children's baptism and to bring their own lives into connection with the Gospel. Meeting committed families and groups in the parish can be helpful here. In the context of pastoral care for first communion, it is also the function of the catechesis to make it clear that the family is a place where one can meet Jesus Christ despite the different realities in which children grow up and live.

Family pastoral care is firmly anchored in the German dioceses and archdioceses. Each diocese or archdiocese has staff members who are responsible for marriage and family pastoral care. The Commissions of the German Bishops' Conference include a separate Commission for Marriage and Family in which societal challenges for marriage and the family are talked about and family pastoral care initiatives are discussed, coordinated and initiated at the level of the Bishops' Conference.

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

The Church's sexual morality is regarded outside the Church as being a "morality of prohibition" pure and simple, and is judged as being incomprehensible and unrealistic in its argumentative style and language. The Church's refusal to recognise homosexual unions in societal and legal terms is furthermore understood as constituting discrimination against people on the basis of their sexual orientation.

The societal and cultural factors which inhibit the communication of the Church's teachings include a fundamental change and pluralisation of the definition of the family, as well as the privatisation of sexual morality and of human relationships as a whole. Most people consider questions of sexual morality to be part of individuals' and partners' private lives, on which institutions may exert an influence only in an advisory capacity, but may not set norms. The social and also public exchange on topics related to marriage and the family is appreciated as long as the individual's conscience-based decision is respected. The secularisation of society and culture makes it difficult for the Church to communicate the religious and spiritual dimension of marriage and the family. Most people are unable to follow the language and content of the theological statements. Finally, the pluralisation of unions is making it increasingly difficult to formulate socially-binding principles which do justice to the different circumstances. These developments make it possible to understand that the Church's offers of marriage, family and life counselling are highly appreciated within society, whilst the Church's theology on marriage and her sexual morality are virtually universally rejected.

2. Marriage according to the Natural Law

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

Very few people are familiar with the term “natural law”. It has virtually no role to play at institutional and educational level or in everyday culture. The term natural law is also only rarely used in academic ethics and legal justification. At the same time, there is a great deal of sympathy for the general validity of human rights, but this normally takes place without consideration for their theoretical foundation. It is interesting to note that Art. 6 § 2 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (*Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) speaks of parents’ “natural” right to care for and bring up their children. There is broad agreement with this legal view among the population. There is however no uniform, generally-accepted anthropological concept. The interest in determining the relationship between ethics, the humanities and theology has been rekindled in the moral theological debates of recent years – not least since the speech held by Pope Benedict XVI in the German Bundestag in September 2011 – and patterns of natural law thinking are shown here from time to time.

Even if an explicitly natural law perspective plays virtually no role, the fact of successfully living in a stable couple relationship and a family continues to be greatly appreciated in society. People would like to have relationships as couples which are meant to last forever, based on reliable appreciation of the partner. In particular also for young people and for young adults, a very high value attaches to having a good family life. This broad societal agreement with the general significance of relationships and reliable family structures might offer people potential connections to contemporary concepts of natural law.

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

Most of the baptised are also not familiar with the term “natural law”. Many baptised categorically refused to answer this question in their responses, stating that they simply had never heard the term before. Having said that, the reality to which it refers in relation with the bond between husband and wife has an intuitive plausibility for many of the baptised, albeit also without having any ultimate normative authority. The inner connection between love, sexuality and fertility as constituting the essence of marriage is absent in many cases. The consequence of this is that many aspects of the Church’s sexual morality – in particular the statements of the Magisterium concerning contraception methods and extra-marital sexuality – are not understood by the majority of the baptised and/or they do not agree with them. Also the position of the Church vis-à-vis active homosexuality and the right of adoption for homosexual couples is difficult to communicate against this background.

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

The attitudes of a majority of people with regard to important questions on marriage and the family are de facto contradictory to traditional-type natural law. Love and sexuality on the one hand, and procreation on the other, are hence increasingly understood as two different, separate circumstances.

Whilst a certain permanence and a personal bond, as well as the principle of monogamy, are broadly accepted in society as general indicators of marriage, a large majority reject the principle of the strict indissolubility of marriage leading to the non-permissibility of remarriage. The heterosexual nature of marriage is also being questioned by a growing share of the population. Accordingly, the trend is towards legally equating same-sex partnerships with marriage, and large sections of the population agree with this.

The natural law dimension is not explained at all in civil institutions. The idea of natural law in the sense of a normativity that can be derived directly from certain natural particularities runs counter to a rather constructivist understanding of reality in the Modern and Post-modern ages. Natural law is also hardly elaborated on or detailed within the Church, and it is frequently decidedly rejected as being historically out of date and not compatible with modern ethical discourses. In particular, there is sharp criticism of a narrow, biological determinism-based view of “natural law” because it is said not to do justice to the Christian understanding of man. Some propose replacing the term “natural law” with the Biblically-grounded term “order of creation”, which has more positive connotations. A more personally argumentative foundation, as already appears in the texts of Vatican II (in particular *Gaudium et spes*), but primarily also in *Familiaris consortio*, is by contrast considered to be better suited to open up the people of our day to the rich meaning of Christian (family) ethics.

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

If non-practicing Christians or declared non-believers wish to marry, they should first of all be welcomed with open arms, and their decision to marry should be encouraged and strengthened. At the same time, it is important to offer them extensive, high-quality church marriage preparation and to make this a prerequisite as bindingly as possible. Young couples who have decided to marry are in a phase of their lives in which their relationship as a couple is particularly important to them and in which they as a rule are open to advice coming from someone who has experience with regard to a successful life in marriage and in the family. If they experience in marriage preparation in the Church, firstly, the high esteem in which the Church holds marriage, conjugal love, sexuality and life in a family and, secondly, obtain practical and helpful skills, such as in communication within couples, marriage preparation is also able to open a door towards reconciliation with the life of the Church.

Couples who continue to distance themselves from the Christian understanding of marriage even after such marriage preparation cannot however conclude a valid sacramental marriage because of the lack of a consensus. At the same time, however, their desire for a church

ceremony – which may be expressed out of a diffusely religious sentiment – should be taken seriously. The answer to the question as to whether and in what form the desire expressed by such couples to celebrate the conclusion of marriage should be met differs widely. The respective individual case will always have to be considered on its own merits. It is possible that a blessing of the couples – without asking as to the marriage consensus as required by canonical law – might be a suitable form.

3. The Pastoral Care of the Family in Evangelisation

a) What experiences have emerged in recent decades regarding marriage preparation? What efforts are there to stimulate the task of evangelisation of the couple and of the family? How can an awareness of the family as the "domestic Church" be promoted?

Many different course and event models have been developed for marriage preparation in the German dioceses. They range from a one-day seminar through weekend seminars and several-part evening courses to series with several weekend events. Experience with this varies widely. Some dioceses report on falling attendee numbers, whilst others have found that the attendee numbers have been rising, particularly very recently. Depending on the diocese, these reach between 10% and 60% of couples who marry in church, the average being roughly one-third. The highly time-consuming marriage preparation seminars in particular are attended by few couples only. The marriage preparation talk with the local priest or his representative is obligatory for all who wish to marry. However, it is frequently not used as an opportunity to engage in a more in-depth discussion, remaining within a somewhat formal framework. Couples also complain again and again that their concerns are dealt with in an impersonal, formalist manner.

The evangelisation mandate of married couples and families is primarily considered to lie in developing the marriage over the years as a personal community in such a way that the Christian model of marriage is made more attractive. The transmission of the faith to coming generations is however also understood in such cases as a genuine evangelisation mandate for families.

Impulses for this evangelisation mandate are offered in the shape of large numbers of events at diocesan, deanery or parish level, as well as being provided by the associations and movements. There is strong demand in particular for seminars on questions of education. A Family Sunday has been celebrated on a yearly basis in the German dioceses since 1971. To this end, in each case a topical volume is published by the Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference tackling topical subjects and questions. Many other publications and journals offer impulses for a Christian family life.

The awareness of the family being a domestic Church is not very widespread in Germany. It can be best promoted by making it clear to what extent all elements of family life play a role here, without reducing the aspect of the domestic Church solely to prayer in the family circle. There are considerable reservations in Germany when it comes to forms of domestic religious services, and these also have a cultural and denominational historical background.

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

The practice of praying within the family differs widely in Germany. Among the forms of prayer, Grace is said particularly commonly in Christian families with small children. Evening prayers with the children are also a common practice. More and more families do not however manage to develop a practice of praying together. There is a considerable demand for simple gestures, signs and words to bring prayer into everyday family life, particularly where there are small children. Simple, practicable leaflets on this achieve impressive circulation numbers. The question of prayer frequently becomes difficult in the family when the children become older. The new book of prayer and song entitled "*Gotteslob*" (Praise to God) is also intended to be helpful in practicing prayer at home.

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

A grave situation of conflict between the generations in families existed in Germany in the 60s and 70s of the last century. Since then, the relationship between the generations within families has become much less tense. Parents today make considerable efforts not to force children into anything, particularly with regard to religion. Conflicts are rather avoided than acted out in this area. What is more, parents themselves feel insecure when it comes to religious topics, so that they are frequently speechless when it comes to transmitting the faith, and delegate this topic to institutions such as kindergarten, the local church and school, even though they consider it to be important. An important role in this connection is frequently played by grandparents, who seem much better able to transmit the faith. Having said that, this is frequently made more difficult by the fact that many families today live quite some distance from the grandparents.

Where efforts are made to transmit the faith, considerable significance attaches to participating in the Christian celebrations over the year, and moreover also to the celebrations of baptism, first communion and confirmation. Faith is also a central aspect in discussions with the children on illness and death. Particularly when close relatives such as grandparents die, the fundamental Christian stance of hope becomes a central topic. At the same time, however, religious speechlessness frequently becomes particularly pressing at such times.

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

There are family circles, family recreational offers, family exercises and various family courses at the level of the parishes, deaneries and dioceses. A number of church movements place the family within the focus of their efforts. These are however not mass phenomena in any of the cases that were mentioned, but rather approaches which are pursued on a small scale. Furthermore, there are educational courses for parents which are offered by church agencies, such as the CESS education concept (cooperative, encouraging, social, situation-orientated) of the Working Party on Catholic Family Formation (*AKF*), which is funded by the German bishoprics. Also the "You and we letters to parents", which are published on

behalf of the German bishops and provide a fundamental Christian approach to up-bringing while the children are growing up, reach a large number of young families with a total subscription of 130,000.

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

The success of marriage and the family is no longer regarded as being a matter of course today. This means that young people are all the more seeking models for success, and in terms of society as a whole there is a great degree of estimation for married couples who continue to live together in a loving personal relationship after many years of marriage. If Christian married couples and families openly confess that marriage and the family gain in stability and perspective as personal communities which are borne by love, this makes such models of success visible, and marriage and the family remain plausible as models for life. This is repeatedly regarded with a great degree of unanimity as a central element of the missionary work of married couples and families. Many German bishoprics now hold central anniversary celebrations offering thanks for couples after many years of marriage which are attended by the bishop. In addition to praising these lifetime achievements, these celebrations repeatedly offer a very good opportunity to make the success of marriage visible both in the Church and reaching out into society.

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

Several projects can be mentioned here by way of example which have been implemented in most German dioceses. These include the EPL communication courses (a partnership learning programme) for young couples, which were developed as a tool evaluated by methods of social science designed to enhance the skills of couples associated with the Catholic Church and which are offered both in marriage preparation and in support of marriage.

There is also a positive reaction to the Letters on Marriage, a subscription to which is given as a present to couples who marry in many dioceses. These are ten letters which arrive in the mail over a period of two years. Special significance attaches, finally, to marriage, family and life counselling, a professional advisory service that is offered within the framework of pastoral care, with currently 274 advice centres and 345 full-time posts nationwide for professionally-trained counsellors and an annual counselling volume of 420,000 consultation hours. 72 % of the funds for this generally-accessible counselling service, which is largely free of charge for those seeking advice, are provided by the German dioceses as there is little state support available in this field.

The offers of antenatal counselling and telephone counselling, as well as the further counselling and crisis services offered by Caritas, should also be mentioned in this context.

Also in view of these examples, it should however be noted that there is a marked need for a greater commitment on the part of the Church in many of these areas. Additionally, the offers are spread very differently depending on the region, and several regions have a considerable need to catch up.

4. Pastoral Care in Certain Difficult Marital Situations

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

The statements from the dioceses are unanimous in maintaining that “pre-marital unions” are not only a relevant pastoral reality, but one which is almost universal. Almost all couples who wish to marry in Church have already been living together, frequently for several years (estimates are between 90% and 100%). A recent demoscopic survey has shown that a similarly large proportion of Catholics as in the overall population consider this to be acceptable. Weddings between couples who already have children are becoming increasingly common. Here, cohabitation is regarded less as an “experiment”, and more as a generally-customary preliminary stage to marriage which is entered into intending to cement the relationship by these means and to marry later if the partnership proves to be stable. In view of the ultimate binding nature of marriage, and in an awareness that a failed marriage means a profound life crisis, many in fact consider it irresponsible to marry without living together beforehand.

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

De facto unions which are not recognised either religiously or civilly are a growing phenomenon. 87% of the heterosexual couples living together in a household in Germany in 2012 (20.693 million) were married (17.993 million) and 13% were non-marital unions (2.693 million). The shift can be made clear by showing another figure: 180,311 children were born to Catholic mothers in Germany in 2012. The mothers of 128,455 of these children were married, but 51,856 were not. This means that 71.8% of all children who were born to Catholic mothers in 2012 were born in wedlock and 28.8% were born to an unmarried mother. This means that, taking society as a whole, the share of children born out of wedlock in the new Federal *Länder* which make up the former GDR form a definite majority (in 2011: 61.7 % in the new Federal *Länder*; 29 % in the old Federal *Länder*). Even the birth of children today is thus no longer an absolute reason to marry. Catholics in Germany accept unmarried couples living together without any major reservations. Only three percent adopt a strictly negative position in this regard.

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

Separated couples and those divorced and remarried have also become a normal part of pastoral reality in Germany. One marriage in three in Germany ends in divorce, albeit the absolute number of divorces per year has been falling. Joint minor-age children are involved in roughly half of all divorces. Surveys have found that Catholics’ marriages are somewhat more stable than average, but the difference is not very great.

In the pastoral care of the Church there is a broad range of marriage, family and life counselling which is also open to people in particular in the situation of separation, divorce and even remarriage. Furthermore, there are concepts in the German dioceses for pastoral care of lone parents, who also frequently suffer from major problems in social terms and have a higher poverty risk.

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

The baptised do not consider their situation to be irregular. People in fact emphatically reject the terms “regular” and “irregular” in this context because they are perceived as being marginalising and discriminating, particularly vis-à-vis families which in any case are already facing difficult living conditions. They consider their separation and the establishment of a new relationship as morally justified, and on the contrary may even consider it to be wrong to remain in an unacceptable relationship.

There are also quite a number of couples among committed people in the parishes who are divorced and remarried. Many of them however undergo considerable suffering, particularly those who are committed members of the Church. They feel discriminated against and marginalised by being excluded from the sacraments, but also by being excluded from certain services and offices.

Divorce and remarriage frequently lead to a process of becoming distant from the Church or of widening the existing gap towards the Church. Many no longer wish to be associated with an institution which they regard as unforgiving. This process of becoming distanced from the Church also repeatedly leads to a distance from the Christian faith, which becomes less and less significant where people no longer have any connections with the Church and because of the contents which the Church proclaims and which people do not understand.

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

Most Catholics, including those who live in intact marriages, are unable to comprehend the teachings of the Church in this regard, but demand that pastoral care should involve respect for the individual’s conscience-based decision and a merciful approach towards failure which also allows people to make a new beginning and be re-admitted to the sacraments, in particular to the Eucharist. They point out that Christian values such as love and faithfulness, as well as responsibility for one another and for the children, are usually also practiced in the new relationship. Admission to the sacraments is particularly demanded by Catholics who take part in parish life.

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

The statements from the dioceses are unanimous that most Catholics whose marriages have failed do not concern themselves with the question of validity because they do not regard their marriages, which may have lasted for years in many cases, as “null and void”, but as having failed. They therefore frequently consider an annulment procedure to be dishonest. They expect the Church to enable them to start again in a new relationship, for instance in analogy to the practice of the Orthodox Churches. The canonical annulment procedure could help solve the problems of a small number of those concerned if the procedures were kept short, were simplified and were accompanied by pastoral care.

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

The canonical exclusion from the sacraments as a result of civil remarriage is perceived by those concerned as constituting unjustified discrimination and being merciless. Exclusion from the Eucharistic community becomes particularly painful for people when their own children take their first communion. This exclusion frequently leads to the discontinuation of the Eucharistic community of the children too, since they have no parental example of a living Eucharistic community.

It must be presumed in many cases of concrete pastoral care that there is a practice of autonomously going to receive the sacraments. There is also a common practice of re-admission to the Eucharist, as a rule preceded by a talk with the pastor. Special services are also offered for people in the situation of separation and remarriage, frequently linked with an offer of discussion. Individual arrangements are however unable to change the widespread impression that the Church is unmerciful towards those divorced and remarried. Several statements therefore explicitly support the “Pastoral care leaflet for accompaniment in separation, divorce and civil remarriage” (2013) of the Pastoral Office of the Archdiocese of Freiburg.

According to a recent survey by the Allensbach Institute for Demoscopy, 66 % of Catholics are in favour of divorcees being able to marry in Church.

5. On Unions of Persons of the Same Sex

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

The legal institution of the registered civil partnership has existed in Germany since 2000, is open to same-sex couples and has been virtually equated with marriage in legal terms in recent years. Only the right of joint adoption of unrelated children is currently reserved for married couples. There were 32,000 registered civil partnerships and 17,992,000 married

couples in Germany in 2012.

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

The bishops in Germany have repeatedly opposed legally equating marriage and same-sex unions, pointing out that marriage has a different significance both for the persons involved and for society than have same-sex unions, not lastly because of its orientation towards offspring and family-formation, and that this should also be expressed in the legal status of the respective institutions. The Catholic Church has been virtually unable to have its voice heard in society with this position since the aspect of the prohibition of discrimination is so strongly concentrated on that no other argument is heard. For the future, a discussion is to be anticipated on whether the two legal institutions are to be combined in one single institution of “marriage” which is then open to both heterosexual and to homosexual couples. The Catholic Church rejects this plan too, and warns against it because she considers it as equating something that is per se not equal.

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

The Church offers to people who live in a same-sex union in particular pastoral discussion and advice in the context of her counselling institutions (marriage, family and life counselling). In very rare cases, targeted seminars or explicit services for pastoral talks are offered. The pastoral attention has been low as a whole so far. It would certainly be possible to approach people in these life situations more clearly and explicitly. Catholics in Germany consider tolerance and individual esteem towards homosexual people to be very important overall. There is considerable accord here with the warning contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that “every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.” (CCC 2358).

Against this background, there is a marked tendency among German Catholics to regard the legal recognition of same-sex civil partnerships and their equal treatment vis-à-vis marriage as a commandment of justice. The opening of marriage as such for same-sex couples, by contrast, is largely rejected. Large numbers however also consider it to be expedient and positive to offer a rite of blessing to same-sex couples.

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

These small numbers of children are by no means excluded from the efforts of the Church to transmit the faith if their guardians wish these children to receive baptism, catechesis, religious instruction and first communion. Unequal treatment of such children is vehemently rejected.

6. The Education of Children in Irregular Marriages

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

The children are growing up with both biological parents in 79 % of all families in Germany. One or several children are not the biological children of one parent in 10 % of families. 11 % of families have one parent, in most cases the mother, who is a lone parent.

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

Parents approach the Church with a wide variety of attitudes. Cases in which they request “the sacraments only” for their children are tending to become rarer because parents also no longer consider baptism or first communion to be important in most cases if they have no further interest. Those, by contrast, who would like baptism and first communion for their child as a rule also request catechesis and teaching of religion. The aspect of the blessing is highly significant for the intention of parents: They would like the Church to give their children God’s blessing. They want their children to be welcomed, and regard this as a sign that they are accepted together with them. At the same time, parents are also seeking support in the religious and value-orientated up-bringing and socialisation of their children.

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

Germany has almost 9,200 Catholic kindergartens, 686 general schools and 219 vocational schools, and these are also very much appreciated by and in demand from broad social groups. Moreover, almost all the Federal *Länder* have denominational religious instruction in schools. Participation in preparatory catechesis for first communion and confirmation in general can be provided to all children who have been baptised. It is also no longer considered to be a problem in many parishes if parents who are divorced and have remarried in a civil setting actively participate in preparation for first communion.

Further offers are made by the Church’s (extra-curricular) work with children and youth, in particular in the 16 member associations of the *German Association of Catholic Youth* (BDKJ), in the Church’s movements and in pastoral care for children and youth, such as the work of altar boys and girls. All these offers are open to all children regardless.

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

As a rule, parents are invited to register their children for preparation for communion, which in most cases starts at the beginning of the third school year. In an optimum case, a personal talk is held at the beginning of communion preparation between the pastor responsible and each family, at which the mutual expectations and requirements are clarified. In most parishes in Germany, children and parents are accompanied in the preparation by a team of voluntary

Catechists, who also carry out the catechetical instruction of the children. Parents of communion children who belong to different denominations also take part in everyday pastoral care, as do parents who live in divorce, separation and civil remarriage.

Particularly in this context, there is frequent and sometimes fierce discussion as to admitting divorced and remarried parents to the sacraments because parents consider it difficult and frustrating for their children to be confronted within the parish with standards that they as parents do not meet and about which they are asked by their children. In many cases, it is decided primarily in connection with first communion catechesis whether the Church loses access to the remarried couple, and hence to the family, or whether she also has the opportunity to reach the children with her message, and also them as fathers and mothers. These contexts make clear the decisive status of sensitive, appreciative pastoral care which keeps an eye on the situation of the children and families and where necessary reacts to it by providing particular attention and assistance.

7. The Openness of the Married Couple to Life

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

The encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968) on responsible parenthood is only known among the older generation. Its reception was limited from the outset to the prohibition of so-called “artificial” birth control methods. As clearly emerges from the appropriate responses, the encyclical is unknown among the younger generation.

Nonetheless, the teaching that parents should weigh up the number of children they have in accordance with their health, economic, spiritual and social situation (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, No. 51; *Humanae vitae* No. 10) is broadly accepted both within and outside the Church. By contrast, the distinction between “natural” and “artificial” birth control methods and the prohibition of the latter is rejected by the great majority of Catholics as incomprehensible, and is not adhered to in practice. For most Catholics, “responsible parenthood” also includes taking responsibility for the appropriate method, which is selected according to criteria of safety, practicability and health compatibility. The distinction between contraceptive and nidation-inhibiting methods meets with broader acceptance. The vast majority of Catholics are against abortion.

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

The vast majority of Catholics, as well as the overall population in Germany, affirm the fundamental openness of marriage for children and attach a high status in their own life planning to a successful family life with children. However, the majority of Catholics reject the Church’s teaching that each sexual encounter should involve all elements of the meaning of human sexuality, and that therefore any “sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive” is intrinsically wrong (cf. *Humanae vitae* No. 14). A minority of fewer than

3% favour natural family planning methods (NFP) and practice them out of personal conviction, frequently also for medical reasons.

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

The German Bishops' Conference maintains a separate specialist unit for work on natural family planning methods which is attached to the Malteser relief service. There is also established cooperation at this level with the women's clinic of the University of Heidelberg. Many dioceses also offer courses on natural family planning methods. Demand is persistently low. Also many full-time staff in pastoral care and within Caritas are highly sceptical and relatively unwilling to learn about this method or to publicise it.

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

Since a majority of practicing Catholics do not accept the distinction between "natural" and "artificial" birth control methods, they also do not make a connection between the selection of the birth control method and receiving the Sacrament of Penance or the Eucharist. The responses from the dioceses are unanimous that Catholics do not regard the use of "artificial" birth control methods as sinful, and consequently also not as something to be confessed. Most in fact consider the question of sin and guilt to relate to the relationship between the two partners. For instance, unfaithfulness, a lack of love or of respect are considered sinful.

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

Sex education outside the Church encourages young people to relate to their own physicality in a deliberate, self-determined, responsible manner and to approach others with respect. Accordingly, responsible sexuality primarily includes avoiding unwanted pregnancies and the transmission of diseases, particularly HIV-AIDS. With a view to the prevention of HIV, the Church's prohibition of "artificial" birth control methods, in particular of the use of condoms, is also regarded not only as unrealistic, but as blatantly immoral.

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

The decision to have a child depends on a multiplicity of factors. State family policy has focussed for a long time on enabling both parents to remain in gainful employment permanently, and hence on improving the reconciliation of "family and work". It is however vital to the future of families over and above this to provide a framework ensuring that young parents can take a free, responsible decision on structures within marriage and the family. The availability of childcare, as well as flexible working hours, part-time employment and going back to work are important factors here. However, questions as to the right time to start a family, stable partnerships, a secure livelihood, the family friendliness of our society and the

recognition of family work within society also influence family formation and the number of children to a similar degree.

In pastoral care, as well as serving as an advocate of the family in society and in the political arena, the Church helps to promote a life-serving climate which is friendly to the family and which enables people to take responsibility. Furthermore, it promotes appropriate frameworks. Openness to life is not only a moral theological challenge, but also a social and ethical one. The German dioceses support families by investing considerable funding in expanding, maintaining and ensuring the quality of kindergartens and schools. They provide valuable aid and support through their many facilities and by offering considerable advice and further training, and not only in difficult situations. The Catholic Church in Germany has gained wide recognition within society through this commitment.

8. The Relationship Between the Family and the Person

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

The family remains the place in the society of the Federal Republic of Germany in the 21st Century where humans are influenced first and fundamentally. People experience fundamental trust, personal ability to form bonds and fundamental religious formation in the family. As a rule, the family remains for a lifetime the place of unrestricted personal acceptance and identification. The high celebrations of the Church year, which foster the process of becoming familiar with the person of Jesus Christ, are held as central festivals in the family. Where the family ceases to operate as the primary institution for upbringing and forming bonds, it is very difficult to replace. The consequence of this is that the family is to a considerable degree a privileged place for transmitting the faith. Furthermore, parents today remain to a large extent liable to provide for their children – who are growing up in a plural, complex society – a fundamental orientation for their lives which goes beyond their childhood. Having said that, they frequently feel overstrained here. They themselves are insecure when it comes to questions of religious orientation, and hence are frequently speechless.

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

In a highly-structured, all-encompassing world of work which requires of families an increasing degree of flexibility, families today face the difficulty of organising a family life together. In situations where it has for instance become virtually impossible to establish regular meals together in the family, it also becomes impossible to say grace together. Today's parents complain without exception, and in every survey and every study, that they have too little time for family life with their children. The acceleration of life's processes leads to a situation in which rest and recreation as a family are becoming ever rarer. Even within the family, the increasing individualisation of everyday life also leads to religion being increasingly regarded as a private matter for the individual members of the family. It becomes

very difficult to talk about the meaning of Jesus Christ for one's own life against such a background.

On the other hand, one should also mention many people's increasing fundamental insecurity when it comes to questions of religious orientation and faith. They notice for themselves that their faith from their childhood is no longer viable. Insufficient opportunities are offered to deal with faith-related issues in a manner suited to adults, and not many people take advantage of them – particularly given that the time available for this is also scarce during the family phase. It is difficult to keep an active watch for the suitable forms of transmitting the faith in this situation.

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

Insecurity and crises of faith frequently contribute towards a process of distancing from the Church and from her teachings, which are felt to be hard to understand. They lead to silence on faith-related matters and promote a tendency to settle into a lifestyle and a society poor in terms of religious connections and symbols, in which central questions of faith are not so much denied as suppressed. Family life therefore increasingly takes place in a climate of "practical agnosticism". This however means the loss of the security and ultimate orientation which faith gives to people. At the same time, the tendency appears which sociologists frequently describe of expecting a spouse and a family to provide ultimate happiness and absolute meaning. This not only overelevates, but also overstrains marriage and the family, thus in turn further heightening the risk of failure.

9. Other Challenges and Proposals

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

Despite the wide variety of individual approaches taken in the German dioceses, the survey has also made clear a number of aspects and perspectives which are significant to the overall situation of the Catholic Church in Germany and for the re-orientation of pastoral care:

It is hence pointed out that greater significance needs to be attached to the individual as a person and a subject within his/her own responsibility. The boundaries of any "prohibition ethics" are also made clear in this context which attempt to address what is important to these ethics in instructions and prohibitions, which may even lead to penalties. Rigorous requirements, frequently also put forward in language with legalistic colouring, lead to an opposing fundamental stance and no longer cut any ice where stronger advisory ethics can certainly make themselves heard. Where the Church can make it clear that it is indeed striving to facilitate a successful life within a community, it will also be taken notice of if it raises its voice as a warning or reminder in order to convince people.

The responses from the bishoprics make it clear how great is the gulf between the baptised and the official teachings, above all when it comes to pre-marital cohabitation, those divorced and remarried, birth-control and homosexuality.

In particular in the field of sexual, marital and family ethics, it is hence also a matter of finding a style which is able to liberate itself from the prejudice of hostility towards the body and from a legal ethic which is hostile to life. Instead of stressing casuistic individual questions, it is a matter of imparting in an appealing manner the Church's central message of marriage and the family in its unconditional affirmation of life and of the body. In this context, the significance of life in marriage and the family will also need to be considered in greater detail once more as a separate form of calling to follow Christ.

A new approach also appears to be indispensable in view of the evaluation of the "failure" of human relationships. As the responses clearly show, neither people in general today, nor the baptised, understand the thinking and the arguments of the Church concerning this question. This is a matter of fundamentally re-defining the place which the Church reserves for people whose marital relationships have failed and of constructively and productively tackling the question of perhaps re-admitting them to the sacraments. A fresh look needs to be taken at the significance of blessings for people in difficult situations, with these being kept clearly distinct from sacramental celebrations.

It is however also clearly shown in the responses from the baptised that pastoral care needs to make greater efforts to accompany married couples on their way in their frequently highly differing circumstances and phases of life. Where the Church is experienced in a role of lending strength and support, it is also very much appreciated, even after many crises and scandals. An even better knowledge of the life situations and the difficulties facing married couples and families in today's society will be indispensable for this pastoral approach towards accompanying people on their path. The offers that are made to people and couples in crisis situations are to be repeatedly analysed as to whether they are generally accessible and can be networked even better.

Equally, there is a need for a social commitment on the part of the Church in favour of family- and child-friendly social, political and economic frameworks. It is also a concern here to perceive families themselves as subjects and as experts on their own territory and to support them with the means available to the Church. Strengthening the Catholic family associations and networking them internationally is a further concern in this context.

Finally, when holding the extraordinary Synod of Bishops 2014 and the ordinary Synod of Bishops 2015, it is a matter of actually taking married couples and families seriously as subjects of marriage pastoral care and of family pastoral care and involving them actively in the preparations and appropriately engaging them in the deliberations of the Synod itself.