



Friday, November 22, 2013

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The stability of the most important social unit since the beginning of mankind is under grave threat, prompting Pope Francis to call a rare meeting of the world's Catholic bishops to discuss the state of the family. And prior to next fall's Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, the Holy Father is asking for input from the world's Catholics on those issues seen as undermining families.



To that end, the Vatican has issued a "[preparatory document](#)" and has asked bishops to make it available to Catholics in their diocese so their input might be reflected in a report due by the end of this year. These reports will then be shared with the bishops who will participate in next year's Synod.

The document includes a questionnaire that covers a range of issues including marriage, natural law, same-sex unions, and parenting. The document also asks several questions about the understanding and importance of Church teachings on family life. These questions are integral to the purpose of the Synod, as outlined in the introduction:

"In every age, and in the many different cultures, the teaching of the Pastors has been clear nor has there been lacking the concrete testimony of believers – men and women – in very diverse circumstances who have lived the Gospel of the family as an inestimable gift for their life and their children. The commitment for the next Extraordinary Synod is inspired and sustained by the desire to communicate this message with greater incisiveness, in the hope that 'the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the Church, more and more fill the hearts of each person'" (DV, 26).

Indeed, the Pope is not conducting a poll on Church teaching. Rather, he wants the chance to communicate directly with and look into the hearts of the world's Catholics to better understand the challenges facing Catholic families, what role the Church plays in their lives, and how the Church can

better support them and open them to the fullness and beauty of Church teaching.

I invite each of you, regardless of how active you are in the life of the Church, to participate in this consultative process. [The document is available on the Archdiocese's website.](#) Each parish also has copies of the document for those unable to access it online. My report is due by the end of the year, thus I ask that you complete the survey by December 15 if you wish your comments to be reflected in my report. However, the questionnaire will remain up on the website through the end of the year in hopes that those people unable to respond in the coming weeks might have more time to do so over the holidays.

My hope is that this exercise is the beginning of an extended dialogue regarding the critical challenges facing marriages and families, as well as other issues of great concern to Catholics and to the Church.



Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ William E. Lori".

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore

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