

Most Catholics don't know Church teaching on sex, life, and family: Vatican

By Hilary White, Fri Jun 27, 2014

ROME – The Vatican's preparatory document for the upcoming Synod on the Family, released Thursday, includes as a major theme the fact that in many places ordinary Catholics, clergy and laity, either do not know or do not accept their Church's teaching on sex, marriage, life, and family. This situation of general ignorance has come about, it says, because of a failure to clearly present the Church's teachings to Catholics.

In some places "many Christians, for various reasons, are found to be unaware of the very existence of this teaching [on marriage and family]," states the document, known as the "Instrumentum Laboris" or working text.

"The People of God's knowledge of conciliar and post-conciliar documents on the Magisterium of the family seems to be rather wanting," the document notes. "The documents ... do not seem to have taken a foothold in the Faithfull's mentality."

"When the teaching of the Church is clearly communicated in its authentic, human and Christian beauty, it is enthusiastically received for the most part by the faithful."

This remark will be considered the understatement of the century for most Catholics who have been involved in the pro-life and pro-family struggle. The entire pro-life movement has insisted for decades that one of their greatest obstacles is that the majority of Catholics have rarely, if ever, heard homilies or other instruction from the Church on sexual morality, procreation, abortion, marriage, homosexuality, contraception, divorce and remarriage, and cohabitation.

The Vatican's document, titled "[The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization](#)," (*) was created after officials examined the results of [a questionnaire](#) sent out not only to bishops and theologians, but to the laity in parishes around the world. Whatever the outcome of the Synod, the first session of which is set for this coming October, this document can be taken as a general summary of the current situation of the

Church, which some members of the hierarchy have already acknowledged is grim.

The document notes that many responses said it is not only laity who suffer from a general ignorance of Catholic teaching. "Some observations attribute the responsibility for this lack of knowledge to the clergy, who, in the judgment of some of the faithful, are not sufficiently familiar with the documentation on marriage and the family, nor do they seem to have the resources for development in these areas," it states.

"Some observations inferred that the clergy sometimes feel so unsuited and ill-prepared to treat issues regarding sexuality, fertility and procreation that they often choose to remain silent," it continues. "Some responses also voice a certain dissatisfaction with some members of the clergy who appear indifferent to some moral teachings."

"Their divergence from Church doctrine leads to confusion among the People of God," it adds. "Consequently, some responses ask that the clergy be better prepared and exercise a sense of responsibility in explaining the Word of God and presenting the documents of the Church on marriage and the family."

In the months following the distribution of the questionnaire, various Episcopal conferences reported a dire lack of knowledge among the faithful of the Church's teachings on marriage and family. The [German and Swiss bishops](#) went so far as to say that the near-total ignorance of Catholic teaching by the laity was an indication that it ought to be changed, or even abandoned.

This refrain was [taken up by others, including the Vatican's own](#) head of the Synod, Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, who suggested that the time has come to "update" Church teaching. (The cardinal

* http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20140626_instrumentum-laboris-familia_en.html#The_Knowledge_and_Acceptance_of_the_Teachings_on_Marriage_and_the_Family

later clarified that the update he was calling for was in the spirit of Pope St. John XXIII's call at the Second Vatican Council, rather than a demand that the Church abandon her teachings.)

But the document offers a clear-cut and much more obvious solution: *get busy teaching those doctrines.*

"In places with a vibrant Christian tradition and a well-organized pastoral programme, people are responsive to the Christian doctrine on marriage and the family," it says. "When the teaching of the Church is clearly communicated in its authentic, human and Christian beauty, it is enthusiastically received for the most part by the faithful." (Part I, Chapter II (8))

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