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Iowa dioceses post entire Vatican synod survey online

Joshua J. McElwee | Nov. 18, 2013 NCR Today

[**Editor's note**: *This blog was updated Tuesday morning with more information*.]

Three of Iowa's four dioceses have posted online in its entirety a Vatican survey of Catholics' views on issues like contraception, same-sex marriage and divorce and are asking their faithful to submit written answers to nearly 40 questions.

The diocese of Davenport, which encompasses nearly the entire southeastern quarter of the state, is accepting answers to its survey [1] until Dec. 1. Responses can be identified by name or be submitted anonymously.

The archdiocese of Dubuque, which encompasses nearly the entire northeastern quarter of the state, is accepting answers to its survey [2] until Dec. 10. The diocese of Des Moines, which covers Iowa's southwestern quarter, is asking for responses [3] by Dec. 20.

The survey from the Midwestern dioceses is in response to an Oct. 18 request made by Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri, the secretary of the Vatican?s Synod of Bishops, in preparation for a global meeting of Catholic bishops next October.

Called by Pope Francis last month, the Oct. 5-19, 2014, meeting is to focus on the theme "Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization."

Baldisseri sent a letter [4] to heads of bishops? conferences globally Oct. 18, asking that they distribute a questionnaire on some of the topics expected to be discussed at the upcoming synod "immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received."

Recent Vatican statements have left unclear [5] just how widely the Vatican meant the consultation of lay Catholics is to go. While the U.S. bishops' conference has not said how it will specifically seek consultation on the matter, the bishops of England and Wales posted the questionnaire online as a poll [6]. Belgian's bishops posted the document online [7] and are asking Catholics to submit answers by mid-December.

The Philadelphia archdiocese has also posted its own version [8] of the questionnaire, which is remaining open until Dec. 2.

Unlike the east coast archdiocese, however, the two Iowa dioceses have posted the Vatican's survey without any changes in the wording of the questions.

The Davenport survey asks respondents to limit their answers to each question to 500 characters or less.

"Catholics in the Diocese of Davenport are invited to participate in a survey on challenges facing families today," the diocese states in a note on its website [9]. "Your responses will be used to prepare for the Extraordinary Synod called by Pope Francis to discuss this important issue. The Synod will convene in Rome in October 2014. These questions have been distributed from the Vatican to dioceses throughout the world."

The Dubuque survey allows responses of up to 1000 characters per question.

"What is new with this questionnaire is that it is sent not only to bishops, but also to all people; this is an expression of Pope Francis? desire to consult widely," Dubuque Archbishop Michael Jackels writes in a statement [10] on his archdiocesan website.

"It is also new in that it surfaces controversial topics such as cohabitation, Catholics entering civil marriages, divorce and remarriage, contraception, and same-sex marriage."

"To be very clear, however, contrary to an impression given by the media, the questionnaire and the meeting of the Synod of Bishops do not contemplate a departure from the Church?s teaching on marriage and family. Indeed, the desire is to pass on this teaching with even greater clarity," Jackels states.

"The questionnaire and meeting are rather a pastoral exercise that seeks to know how people can be helped to know, understand, accept, and put into practice the Church?s teaching on marriage and family life," he continues. "Also under consideration is how better to minister pastorally to people who feel marginalized by the Church?s practice of the teachings in question."

The Des Moines diocese is asking faithful to respond to the survey via email or postal mail.

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[2] http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SynodOnTheFamily2014
[3] http://www.dmdiocese.org/family-ministry.cfm
[4] http://ncronline.org/node/63041
[5] http://ncronline.org/node/63426
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