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December 29, 2014 – Solemnity of the Holy Family

To the Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Honolulu

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

Aloha and blessings to you in this New Year!

Pope Francis has called for an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the topic of *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*. It will be held in Rome in October, 2014, and representatives of each national Conference of Bishops throughout the world will send a few representatives to participate in the Synod. It is customary for the Holy See's Office for the Synods of Bishops to send out a preparatory document (*lineamenta*) and to ask for input and comments from all the bishops of the world. A second draft (*instrumentum laboris*) is then prepared in light of the comments received, and it is that second document from which the bishops who actually attend the Synod do their major work.

Pope Francis has determined that he would like the preparations for the 2014 Synod to be a bit different, however. Instead of sending out only the *lineamenta*, he has asked that questions be prepared so that bishops could do a wider consultation with their clergy and people. In light of the responses received, each bishop is to prepare his own response and send it to the Holy See. Just as the bishop is to use the input from his diocese to assist him in preparing his submission, the Synod Office of the Holy See will in turn collate the responses that are received from the bishops of the world, and that will become the *instrumentum laboris* for those who participate in the Synod.

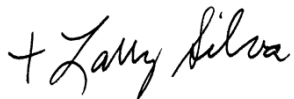
Since this is the first time such a questionnaire has been sent out for wider consultation, the questions were not as succinct and “user-friendly” as many would have liked. The survey was sent out on October 30, 2013, and at our November 11-14 meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we bishops were struggling with how best to make effective use of the rather cumbersome survey. I decided to post the survey on our diocesan website and to ask a wide variety of people to submit their reflections. Dr. Kristina DeNeve, Ph.D., Diocesan Director of Adult Faith Formation, offered her services to receive the responses, collate them, and put them into a digestible form that would help me to prepare my own response. I am very grateful to her for doing so! I am also grateful to those who took the time to respond to the questions on this most important issue for our Church and our community.

I am presenting here the responses that I have made to the questionnaire as the Bishop of Honolulu. They take into account the valuable input I received in the survey. If you would like to see Dr. DeNeve's report of the responses to the survey, we have posted it on the diocesan website www.catholichawaii.org.

May our efforts bear much fruit not only in our diocese but throughout the world!

God bless you and all of your families!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Silva". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Larry Silva
Bishop of Honolulu

Responses to the Preparatory Document
by the Most Reverend Clarence (Larry) Silva, Bishop of Honolulu – December 29, 2013

Preliminary Remarks:

I am grateful to our Holy Father Pope Francis for devoting the 2014 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops to *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*. This is a topic that is critically important for the health and well-being of individuals, families, and our entire society. People have expressed a great appreciation that the Preparatory Document sought input from a wider audience, and many people in the Diocese of Honolulu did take the time to share their reflections. 309 individuals, including 36 priests, 13 deacons, 162 lay people, 40 diocesan staff, 34 school staff and 24 parish staff participated in the survey. I am grateful to them for the assistance they have given me in preparing my own responses on behalf of the Diocese of Honolulu (USA).

There was an almost universal concern, however, that the questions were many and complex, and that they were not “user-friendly” in lending themselves to broad consultation. While such broad consultation is definitely appreciated, perhaps in the future the format of questions could be streamlined, so that even more people might have the opportunity to participate. Moreover, the timeline for submission of responses could be extended, since two months – especially those surrounding Advent and Christmas – make it quite challenging.

The topic of the Synod is one that has concerned me and many others for some time. About two years ago I called the priests together for a dialogue about how we could work together to pastorally strengthen marriage and the family. Our Diocesan Pastoral Council spearheaded a convocation of the various groups that work with marriage and family issues (for example, Marriage Encounter, Engaged Encounter, Beginning Experience (for divorced or widowed persons), Retrovaille (for troubled marriage), Couple for Christ, and others). The good work that

each group was doing is now enhanced by their collaboration. During the Year of Faith, I asked representatives of this group to meet with me to discuss what we could do in our diocese to strengthen marriage and family. These ideas will become a part of our pastoral plan, which we will be formulating anew in the first part of 2014.

Once again, thank you for the consultation. Be assured of my prayers and the prayers of the people of the Diocese of Honolulu that this Synod will bear much good fruit.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS IN THE PREPARATORY DOCUMENT

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

It is clear that the majority of Catholics are not aware of the teachings of the Church, and we have been deficient in teaching them effectively. Partly because of the influence of the very secularized media, the teachings of the Church are often ridiculed as behind the times and out of touch with the reality of people's lives. We must find ways to understand these teachings in a positive light and present them as beneficial to the welfare of each person. The clergy have a crucial role to play in this catechetical effort, but there is often more credibility from married couples and families who are trying to live according to the teachings of the Church and are finding much joy and freedom in doing so.

It seems that our formation for marriage is concentrated on pre-nuptial programs such as Engaged Encounter. By the time couples come to participate in those programs, they have already formed their own ideas about marriage and family life, and those are not always in conformity with the teachings of the Church. While they learn much from Engaged Encounter, their reaction is often "Why haven't I heard this before?" We need therefore to begin our formation for the vocation of marriage much earlier.

Working with young married couples and parents can be the key to presenting the teachings of the Church in a positive manner, so that they can be guided and supported in their role as the first teachers of the faith. Even if the parents themselves are not living according to those teachings, when they are presented clearly, and they are challenged to share them with their children, their love for their children can be a strong motivation to conversion.

Our Catholic school and religious education program curricula need to be reviewed to insure that children and adolescents are being presented with substance and sense in a context of faithful commitment to Christ and his freeing commandments.

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?

The secularization of society is a great difficulty, as well as an exaggerated sense of the individual and a diminished sense of covenant. I believe there is a growing "ego-theism" in which we inadvertently change the first commandment of the Decalogue from "I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me" to "I am the lord my god; you shall not have strange gods before me." Couples often enter into marriage with the attitude that the experience must be fulfilling for them, rather than thinking of what they can give to the other person and their children.

The hyper-sexualization of our culture is also a challenge. For ages young people were taught that virginity before marriage was a virtue. Even though there were failures in the past, at least the ideal was held up. Such is not at all the case today, when even early adolescents are almost encouraged to explore sexually.

I believe we need to find a way to articulate the difference between having fun and living joyfully. The former can be irresponsible and even self-destructive, while the latter is life-giving. We need to find ways to demonstrate to young people that sexually is a wonderful gift, and it can be lived most joyfully within boundaries established by the law written in our hearts, the natural law. The demand for immediate gratification is, of course, related to this, and penance and self-discipline are important virtues that must be taught.

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?

Teachings are readily available, but pastoral programs to access them are not very effective. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, for example, has many resources on its website, but I suspect there are precious few who would be motivated at this point to look into the website of the Episcopal Conference.

In general, and not just related to the issue of marriage and family, I believe we Catholics have developed the attitude that we develop programs that people come to. But very few come. We need to find more motivation to take the treasures we have outside of our classrooms and pulpits so that more people can be inspired by them. We concentrate on the quality of the program, as we should, but perhaps neglect to consider the effectiveness of the delivery system. While such a delivery system must include effective preaching, the preaching must engage people beyond the doors of the church.

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

Many people do know and accept the teaching and strive daily to live it faithfully. Many more, however, do not know what the Church teaches. They learn a caricature of the Church's teachings from the media. Some, of course, reject the teachings, sometimes because they think they know them, but actually do not; and sometimes because they are convinced that they are outmoded and outdated. Individualism ("ego-theism") is certainly a factor. Our entertainment is also a huge factor. Movies and television shows seem to presume that having sex is a normal

and expected part of dating. There is also the fostering of an overly romantic notion of marriage, so that when the reality of struggle inevitably comes, couples are not prepared for it. Consumerism also has its influence. Rather than courting and marrying as building a life-long, committed covenant with a person of the opposite sex, there is much co-habitation, “trying on the product to see if I like it.” Homosexual activism has also undermined the Christian notion of true marriage – or it could be said that the deterioration of true marriage has opened the door for homosexual activism and “same-sex marriage.”

Section 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?

I believe the reality of natural law is far from the minds and hearts of people. We need to find ways to articulate it more clearly. It is often opposed, however, by the cultural attitude that every person is his or her own law, or that laws come to us from legislators. There is much talk about “constitutional rights” but very little understanding of what truly constitutes us as human beings and as human communities, and that we are all related because of our common Creator, who has written his law in our hearts.

There is a strong movement, of course, to consider the family as any configuration at all that lives together in a household, trying to share their love. The necessary push for sexual equality has had the negative effect of almost erasing the importance of gender, and the idea of the family as based upon a man and a woman sharing a committed life-long love with their children has become one of many configurations now acceptable to society.

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

In general, it is accepted by the majority, but this is fast eroding, especially now with the legality of same-sex marriage in Hawaii and in other parts of the country and world.

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?

See the answer above in (a). The essential unity of the procreative and unitive ends of marriage taught by the church is not widely accepted, and marriage is seen more as a romantic relationship with someone you love. For some even gender does not matter, as long as there is the feeling of love and the desire for stable companionship.

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

The clergy and others who prepare couples for marriage try to speak about the importance of Sunday worship, the Eucharist, and living a sacramental life. In the matter of non-practicing Catholics, they are encouraged to take up the practice of the faith. In the case of declared non-believers, there is serious discussion about how differences in religious beliefs and outlooks

could be a challenge to the marriage, so that the couple is better prepared to face the consequences of their differences and decide whether they can work them through or not.

One of the pastoral challenges, of course, is that when a couple comes to the Church to request marriage, they are thinking much more of the wedding ceremony rather than the life-long commitment they are making. Clergy and others encourage them to look beyond the wedding, no matter how consuming it might be at that point in their lives, and to reflect deeply on the meaning of marriage, its sacramental nature, commitment, children, and the challenges they will face.

Unfortunately for some couples, their attitude toward the Church at that point is as one of the service providers for their story-book wedding, and not as the place where they seal their life-long commitment in the presence of Christ and his beloved Bride, the Church. This is one of the most frustrating realities the clergy face as they try to evangelize or catechize, but the couple is only interested in the wedding service they provide. There is often a tension between being kind and welcoming to the couple in the hopes they will embrace the Lord and his Church, and insisting that they are not just customer service representatives but only truly serve the couple when they call them to reflect on more important realities than the wedding festivities.

Section 3. The Pastoral Care of the Family in Evangelization

a) What experiences have emerged in recent decades regarding marriage preparation?

What efforts are there to stimulate the task of evangelization of the couple and of the family? How can an awareness of the family as the “domestic Church” be promoted?

Engaged Encounter weekends are very effective and are generally appreciated by the couples. Unfortunately, they are sometimes “too little, too late,” since the couple may already be living in a manner inconsistent with the teachings of the Church. There is also a good use of instruments that measure the compatibility of the couple in various areas and afford them the opportunity to discuss those areas that may be particularly divergent between them.

Remote marriage preparation must be more explicit and accessible to the young, so that they do not start learning of the treasured teachings of the Church only when they are weeks or months away from the wedding. Catholic schools and religious education programs need to be evaluated in their effectiveness, and parents need to be trained in how to promote healthy Christian marriage in their children.

Much more needs to be done in formation of parents to be the animators or “pastors” of their domestic churches. Here small groups and peer ministry can be most helpful.

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?

Formation of parents in how to pray with their families is crucial. Many families do pray together, especially before meals, but much more needs to be done to foster family prayer.

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

Some families are very successful by praying with their children, explicitly catechizing them, and leading them by good example and mentoring. Many other families flounder. Pressures of two parents working outside the home, of sports, meetings, and other distractions can keep families from concentrating on their faith. Here again peer ministry can be most helpful.

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

We have many movements in the Church that attempt to foster family spirituality: Marriage Encounter, Couples for Christ, Singles for Christ, Beginning Experience, retreats. These are effective, but proportionately, they touch very few people.

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

Couples and families have an essential role as witnesses for others. Peer ministry is extremely important. Priests have a great influence on people and know much about marriage from their own upbringing and from their interaction with married couples and families. However, celibate priests often lack the confidence or the credibility that those who are already married can offer. Formation of parents could be a key element in strengthening marriages and families.

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

Many people turn to their priests in times of crisis, and our priests try to counsel them as much as possible. Some lay people are also exemplary in supporting couples in crisis. This is probably most often on an informal basis, and the ministry could be more accessible to many others if we become more deliberate about providing training, resources, and support to those who have the charism of accompanying others in their times of crisis.

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?

Cohabitation *ad experimentum* is definitely a reality here, and the respondents to this survey indicate a range of from 5% to 60% of couples. My perception is that it is in the higher percentages. Moreover, there is also the phenomenon of cohabitation that has become more permanent. In some cases and cultures, people are afraid to marry, because they perceive that their friends who marry end in divorce. There seems to be very little, if any, shame connected to cohabitation, or even to having children while cohabitating.

Some parishes have offered “group weddings” for those who are cohabitating or only civilly married, to make it easier for them to celebrate the sacrament without having to go through elaborate planning for a wedding. Marriage preparation always takes place beforehand. These ceremonies are always appreciated by the participants and are a witness to others in the parish.

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

I am not aware of reliable statistics in this matter, but there is no doubt that such unions are quite prevalent.

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?

This is definitely a pastoral reality. Percentages are hard to pinpoint, but my guess would be at least 25% of all marriages. Beginning Experience is one program for the newly divorced or widowed, but it is not always widely known. Our Judicial Vicar conducts workshops on the possibilities of convalidation and annulments, and these have been very helpful to many couples.

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

Some indeed do feel marginalized, though the parish tries to welcome them and include them as much as possible. Of these, those who seem to feel most marginalized are those who truly believe that their marriages ended through no fault of their own. Others live as if their situation were not irregular at all, and few know whether they are married in the Church or not. They continue to receive the sacraments, whether out of ignorance for the teachings of the Church or simply in disagreement with them. It is because of the great sensitivity of people over this matter that I suspect the clergy are reluctant to speak much about it. There are also those who misunderstand the teachings of the Church and believe that the simple fact of their being divorced, though not remarried, bars them from the sacraments. Catechesis is definitely needed, but it must be most sensitive to people who are sincere and struggling to be faithful despite their past.

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?

There seemed to be two categories of people here. One is of those who simply ignore the Church's teachings because they do not agree with them. As one priest put it: "Many simply go to Holy Communion despite the fact that they are divorced and remarried. They have decided on their own that it doesn't matter, that it is OK to receive. Many don't feel marginalized because they just decide to ignore the Church's teaching, just like they ignore the requirement of getting married in the Church, of not using artificial contraceptives, etc. They don't feel guilty because they don't believe that they are doing anything wrong."

The second category includes people who are more attentive to the Church's teachings, and who are genuinely in pain because they are not admitted to the sacraments, for which they long. They ask why others in the same situation can freely receive the sacraments, while they cannot. They are usually aware of the annulment process, but do not take advantage of it for various reasons. (See next questions for further reflection on this situation.)

f) Could a simplification of canonical practice in recognizing 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?

Some people are hesitant to take advantage of the annulment process for various reasons: They fear that if the marriage is annulled, their children will be illegitimate. They do not want to resurrect traumatic moments and memories in their lives. They feel they worked very hard at the marriage and the other party was responsible for the break up. They do not want to go through the huge amount of paperwork, interviews, contacting witnesses, etc. that the annulment process involves. They think the process is too expensive and they cannot afford it.

I think the process of annulments could be streamlined, and I am sure that canonists and pastors could come up with some concrete ways to accomplish this. However, we also need to be careful about making it seem that annulments are simply "no fault Catholic divorces." In this case the law itself and the process can serve as a teacher about our very serious commitment to the permanence of a true marital bond.

Notwithstanding my prior comment, I might mention here a neuralgic issue I have (along with other bishops with whom I have spoken) with the Apostolic Signatura. Almost every year I receive a letter criticizing my Tribunal for submitting too many cases for annulment on the grounds of "lack of due discretion," as described in Canon 1095.2, even though it is a legitimate ground. While I understand the Signatura's concern that annulments are not to be handed out on demand, since that would truly undermine the permanence of marriage, most priests who prepare couples for marriage could testify that there is indeed a plethora of couples who marry with lack of due discretion. The priest often senses it, and tries to confront it, but in the end, the couple has a right to marry, so the marriage proceeds. I think there is a need for more understanding of the true pastoral situation.

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 Beginning Experience is active in this diocese, and it is a great support for those who are recently divorced or widowed. However, we need to do much more to promote it and let it be known, since few people are aware of it. Individual pastors are often very solicitous in reaching out to couples who are experiencing difficulties or who have recently separated or divorced, IF they know the couples. Since approximately 75% of those who identify themselves as Catholics do not attend Mass regularly, it is difficult for anyone in the Church to know of their situation and therefore to reach out to them. Perhaps training lay people to respond to crises experienced by their family members, friends, or co-workers could help in reaching out to those in need of support and healing.

5. On Unions of Persons of the Same Sex

a) Is there a law in your country recognizing civil unions for people of the same-sex and equating it in some way to marriage? Two years ago, the State of Hawaii passed a civil union law in which heterosexual or homosexual couples could enter a legal relationship that would allow them certain benefits and privileges otherwise only afforded to married couples. On December 2, 2013, same-sex marriage was recognized in law in the State of Hawaii.

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?

In the recent move of the Governor and the legislature to approve same-sex marriage in the law, I was a very vocal opponent. A large number of Catholics and other people of faith joined in opposing the law. My point was never against persons with same-sex attraction, but against the redefinition of marriage. I also expressed the serious concern that if same-sex marriage is legally equivalent to marriage between one man and one woman, there would be far-reaching societal consequences in education, public services, and “idea policing” that would be the logical consequences of declaring such equality. Unfortunately, not all Christians or even all Catholics were in agreement. They saw marriage as a private affair of love between two people, no matter their genders, which the state recognizes for the sake of benefits. They could not seem to see beyond the individual couple to the profound societal changes same-sex marriage would bring about.

It is very difficult to convince some people that you do not hate them simply because you disagree with them on an issue as profoundly important as marriage, so there have been many rifts in the community over this issue.

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

I would say very little, since it is an extremely difficult issue. To be true to the teachings of the Lord and not water them down on the one hand, and to be loving to those who disagree with them is difficult in any situation, but particularly in this. Some people have chosen to leave the Catholic Church when they are in these situations because the Church is so clear in its teaching about the sinfulness of homosexual relations that they feel they are simply not welcome. I have also had a couple of people offer to act in the name of the Church in reaching out to those who are in same-sex relationships, but so far they have been people who do not believe what the

Church teaches and simply would want a legitimized platform from which to attempt to change the Church's teachings. It is a very difficult matter indeed.

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?

It is important to welcome everyone, especially children, and to teach them about the love of Christ in his beloved Church. Christ's love, however, is a demanding love that requires conversion. So the children should be accepted into our schools and religious education programs, but some respectful and honest dialogue must take place between the pastor and the parents, so that the parents understand that enrolling their child in the Church's programs means that the child will be taught what the Church teaches, even if the parents themselves do not agree with it. This could cause great conflict in the child, so the matter needs to be handled sensitively by all and a decision needs to be made about what is best for the child.

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?

It is difficult to know the proportion, but it is safe to say that it is a growing number. There are children being raised by a couple of the same sex, children whose mother and father are divorced and who live with one or the other, children who are shuttled between both parents and have two homes, and children whose parents are living together but not married, and children who live with one parent and his or her live-in partner. This presents a real challenge in presenting the norms for marriage and family life and the teachings of Christ and the Church, since children will know their parents are not living these ideals. Children must always be treated with great sensitivity and understanding in these situations. While conflict cannot always be avoided, it can be managed by affirming the child in a special way and above all avoiding making the child a pawn in the conflict.

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 do approach the Church asking for the sacraments for the children and sometimes for themselves. It is always difficult but necessary to balance commitment to the Gospel and its teachings with compassion and understanding toward those who do not fully agree. Sometimes we can only speak the truth in love, then let God do the rest.

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

For the most part, these children would be treated like any others and not singled out because of the situation of their parents.

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

See above, (a), (b), and (c).

7. The Openness of the Married Couples 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?

I believe most Catholics know parts of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*, but many reject or ignore them because they do not understand the context and the goal of *Humanae Vitae*. It is a document that was and is much maligned because the secular media and many in the Church do not understand its depth of teaching. In these days of education by sound-bite, it is extremely challenging to present these teachings. We need to find ways to proclaim that legitimate family planning is good science and good for physical and spiritual well being. There are some who are able to articulate the truths of *Humanae Vitae* very well, and we need to make them more prominent for the clergy and lay leaders.

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

Generally it is not accepted. The teaching against the use of artificial means of birth control poses the most difficulty for people because they have not had the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the consequences. Many see Natural Family Planning as unreliable. There is an attitude that balks against the discipline necessary to practice Natural Family Planning when it seems so harmless to live without these restraints. Another difficulty is the prevalent notion in our society against large families. The popular notion is that two or three is enough, and therefore the means to regulate birth, even if artificial, become acceptable to many.

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

Natural Family Planning holds regular classes in the Diocese, and there are classes as well on the Theology of the Body (of Pope John Paul II). When people go to these classes, they usually say, "Why haven't I heard this before?" Nevertheless, we must do much more to disseminate word about the classes and to make them more available, perhaps with some on-line links on the internet.

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

Occasionally someone will either confess using artificial means of birth control, or admit they are struggling to be faithful to the teachings of the Church, but this does not seem to be a topic that is brought up regularly.

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

When asked to describe these differences, both priests and lay people who answered the survey reported that civic education promotes the use of contraceptives to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases when engaging in sexual intercourse. In other words, it presumes that one cannot restrain oneself from sexual intercourse. The Church, on the other hand, teaches of abstinence outside of marriage and chastity for all. These are not at all popular notions in the secular culture, which is where our people spend most of their time.

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

Promoting Natural Family Planning and its outlook could help. Also engaging parishioners to be “extended family” to all children, so that parents do not feel they are alone. This can be challenging, however, in these days of fear of abuse of minors and liability concerns.

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?

By family prayer, especially the Eucharist, and family Scripture reading. The family could also work together in reaching out to the lonely, the sick, and the poor. Focusing more on mission could strengthen families.

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

The secular media and its frequent animus toward Christ and especially his Church can be real obstacles. Commitments to sports and other activities for the children can also take away a family's attendance at Mass and religious education. Pornography, especially over the internet, is also an obstruction to a full encounter with Christ. The need for both parents to work, or for multiple jobs, can take parents away from critical time with their children.

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

Many parents and grandparents are heartbroken when their children or grandchildren no longer practice the faith in which they so lovingly raised them.

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?

- The importance of gender identity and becoming the person God made us to be.
- The primacy of prayer and worship in a culture focused on itself.
- Migration issues, with split families, whether by choice or by circumstance.
- Changing a culture that is in so many ways opposed to the teachings of Christ and the Church.