

AoA Questionnaire for the Synod on the Family

1. What is your current role in the church?

2. Is the Church's teaching on the nature and purpose of the family adequately understood by people today? Why? How well does the Church form her members to live this teaching on the family? Is the Church's teaching on the family effectively transmitted in her pastoral and catechetical programs? Why or why not?

Answer: Formally, no, people don't know the teachings. Informally, yes, they know more than they are given credit for. Most people last learned about the teaching on family in 1 day of "pre-Cana" marriage preparation. Since then they have been living life probably without much thinking about the teachings. I don't recognize any "formation" of married spouses. Marriage Encounter is probably the closest thing I have experienced...it was life changing! Study as part of RCIA as a sponsor had a session on the Sacrament of Matrimony. But, I don't recall teachings on the family being discussed in Faith Formation at any level, or even in homilies. Focus is on the children, not the parents.

3. Do people understand that God's designs are written into nature? Does this "natural law" typically impact peoples' understanding of the family and the union of a man and woman in marriage?

Answer: Yes, but typically from a practical view, not a formal understanding. People, even Catholics, experience God in different ways in their lives and to different degrees. But, very basically, yes, I think we understand natural law from a "created" viewpoint, and marvel at His creation. It is more practical than philosophical. Married life, family life, is a very complex mix of a woman and man in a loving and intimate relationship as the foundation of their family....even without children.

4. Is there any progress in today's Christian formation of couples to encourage: living of the faith as a family; praying together; passing on the faith; giving Christian example; as well as preparing for crises in marriage and in the family? If there is specific progress, what is it? If there is not, why not?

The church is meeting parishioners mostly as they attend Mass or participate in a program, but this is not necessarily where they are spiritually. To the extent that the parish has family oriented programs and ministries open to family participation, we give them an opportunity to practice and experience these things. But, it is very informal at best...not what I would call formation. Outreach ministries are the best way that we challenge people's prejudices and change their hearts toward others and God. Our spiritual experience and encounters outside the Catholic Church environment encourage me that God's love and mercy are alive and well in the world...in the goodness of others...evil is not winning. I doubt many people first think of the Church to address a marriage or family crisis...but, in any case priests need to provide pastoral support and counseling....and be ready to refer them to professional, Catholic counseling whenever we detect such a crisis. We do well with illness and death crisis, but not other aspects of family life.

5. In your observation, how common is it for couples to cohabit before marriage? Is it common for couples to continue to live together without the Sacrament of Marriage? Is there any improvement in the pastoral attention offered to couples who are cohabiting before marriage; who live in non-sacramental unions; who are divorced and remarried? What do you think about these situations, and how do you suggest they be addressed? What questions do divorced and remarried people ask of the Church concerning the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist? Would a simplification of the process for a declaration of nullity be a help to the couples involved?

Answer: Majority, I would guess 90% or more, cohabitate before marriage...there is no longer any social stigma against it. Much fewer do this for extended periods. Many marriages are of mixed religions. There are better outreach programs for divorced people. The Catechism says divorce is immoral, but it is clear divorced people are supported, not shunned. Unfortunately the pastoral attention I have heard about for divorced who have remarried is closer to no support, if not outright rejection...we help with the annulment process but do nothing to support or nurture their new and loving relationship....which many times is helping to salvage broken lives and rebuilding families with children. For people not yet married, pastoral attention begins by discouraging cohabitation until the marriage...this is out-of-step with reality. The divorced and remarried who are coming to church despite feeling judged and rejected, want the sacraments but are told no. It is no wonder they go elsewhere for their spiritual needs to rebuild their relationships with God.

The church needs to focus on welcoming all people and stop severe judgment on baptized Catholics by denying the sacraments. People feel they are excommunicated, when what they need is encouragement to participate in all the Sacraments which convert and change hearts, and nurtures their relationship with Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

If simplifying annulments was possible, it would attract many Catholics back to the church....and non-Catholics to join us.

6. Do you have a clear understanding on the Church's teaching about same sex unions? How does that affect your attitude toward government policies which promote same sex unions? How does that affect your attitude toward individuals in same sex unions? What pastoral attention should be extended to people in same sex unions and to the adopted children of these unions, especially with regard to passing on the faith?

Answer: Yes, and the onus is on us as we deny the Sacraments while we say that they are welcome to worship in our judgmental, intolerant and very unforgiving environment. Who are we to judge? I know too many decent and loving and normal and family-oriented people who happen to be gay. Who are we to exclude people created by God, who have a difficult time accepting that God loves them when all they have experienced is hatred, who have developed loving relationships, and want what everyone else wants, equality, peace and security....and, to participate in a loving community of disciples of Christ for the salvation of their families and children? We get it, they will not be married in the Church. But we have given them no other choice in society except to be married to have the same equal rights for their families.

7. In your observation, is the attitude of parents married outside the Church toward the sacramental preparation and Christian education of their children properly informed? How should the Church respond to the sacramental and religious formation of these same children?

Answer: Properly informed, yes, but the message is one of rejection, not encouraging responsible parenting. We should rejoice when anyone wants a Catholic education and sacraments for their children...and help them make it happen, no matter the hurdles. It is probable that these people feel little obligation to prepare their children for the sacraments or a Catholic education. These are the "fallen away" Catholics who are likely going to a protestant church for their spiritual needs, because they feel the doors of the Catholic Church are locked to them. Time and again I have heard non-practicing Catholics approaching the Church for their marriage, and being told the rules that make it possible, BUT only if they change their ways. We are being exclusive, not inclusive. We are turning away people who are asking to participate in the Salvation Jesus provides.

8. How well do members of the Church understand the Church's teaching on contraception? On natural family planning? How well are couples helped to follow this teaching of the Church?

Answer: The whole world knows the Church teaches artificial birth control is intrinsically evil and immoral...and that a majority of Catholics use it anyway...what is it, 70%+? Some have heard about the Theology of the Body...much to absorb, believe and practice. Few have heard the teachings on "Responsible Parenting" which is the context of the Vatican II teachings. Fewer still have heard about the Papal commission during Vatican II that had a majority conclusion including 12 Bishops and 20+ priests that artificial contraception is NOT immoral and should have a place in the Church's teaching.

The "crisis in faith" is a leadership crisis. The Church leaders have lost their moral authority with the pedophile priest cover-up and scandals that continue, and the fabricated "attack on our religious liberty". But, look how Pope Francis has regained attention, if not trust, by living the Gospel with genuine love and mercy. 50 years of increasingly hardline teaching needs to be revisited...it is not working. And, the Church has abdicated with minimal active help for couples to follow the teaching...few would attend sessions anyway.

9. In your view, how might the family be made a more fruitful place to encounter Jesus Christ? What factors typically impede this encounter? Given today's crisis of faith and its impact on family life, what practical steps should the Church take to address these concerns?

Answer: As I said above, our spiritual experience and encounters outside the Catholic Church environment encourage me that God's love and mercy are alive and well in the world...in the goodness of others...evil is not winning. I question the outcry that there is a spiritual "Crisis"...Pope Francis has done more in 6 months to prove people are hungry for God in their lives and are eager to receive Him. There is a crisis in spiritual leadership...the hardline, judgmental, those who tout being "conservative", the supposed "keepers of the Truth", are driving many away from Christ and His church.

10. What other challenges or proposals related to the topic of family and marriage do you consider urgent and useful to address?

Answer: Be dedicated to the Salvation of all. Work on welcoming people and families into the community. Follow-up, working on building community in the parish for families to participate. Encourage family participation in a spiritual life, the Sacraments, and as Stewards of God's gifts and blessings.