



# Study on Critical Family Issues for 2014 Synod of Bishops

## REPORT

January 2014

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Association of Catholics in Ireland (ACI) would like to thank all of the individuals who took the time to respond to the survey, we are grateful to them for their contribution.

**The report was prepared by Geraldine Prizeman in collaboration with members of the ACI Steering Group.**

**Disclaimer:** The Association of Catholics in Ireland supports sharing the views expressed by individuals who responded to the survey for the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops October 2014. They wish to say that the views expressed in these appendices are personal to each respondent and do NOT necessarily reflect the views of all members of the ACI.

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.1 Introduction and Methodology**

The **Association of Catholics in Ireland** (ACI) is an organisation working from within the Irish Catholic Church promoting a Reform and Renewal Agenda. The ACI supports inclusivity and welcomes the diversity of membership which is a characteristic and strength of the Association.

The Extraordinary Synod on the Family is to be held in October 2014. The purpose of the Synod is to proclaim the Gospel in the context of the pastoral challenges facing the family today. In preparation for the Synod, the Vatican asked national bishops' conferences around the world to seek the opinions of Catholics on a number of church teachings including contraception, same-sex marriage and divorce. The ACI wanted to allow its members, and other interested individuals, to make a contribution and share their beliefs and opinions on the issues involved. To this end, they decided to conduct an online survey which would enable individuals to have a voice in Church governance and policy.

It was decided to use a questionnaire that was a combination of the original document released by the Vatican with some additional questions from the Church Reform Movement in the United States of America<sup>1</sup>. This approach was to enable ease of completion for those taking the survey and all original themes and questions from the Vatican's document were included.

The questionnaire was developed and tested using SurveyMonkey online survey software. The survey was launched on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and remained open until 5<sup>th</sup> January 2014. The survey link was sent to ACI members (approx. 200 individuals) and a link to the survey was also placed on the ACI website. Members were encouraged to forward the link to others whom they felt would be interested in completing the survey, to allow as many voices as possible to be heard.

Once the survey was closed, data were downloaded, cleaned and checked for duplicates and non-responses. In total, 159 individuals took part in the survey. No attempt was made to interpret the findings, the aim was to present the views and perceptions of responding individuals.

## **SECTION 2: ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS**

This section sets out the key findings based on responses from the individuals who took part in the online survey, charts and tables are included where relevant.

### **2.1 Demographic information**

Many of the respondents were living in the Dublin area (39%) with smaller numbers coming from Cork, Kildare and Meath. Many counties had only one or two representatives and some had no representation. In addition, individuals (N=13) said they were from outside the island of Ireland<sup>2</sup>.

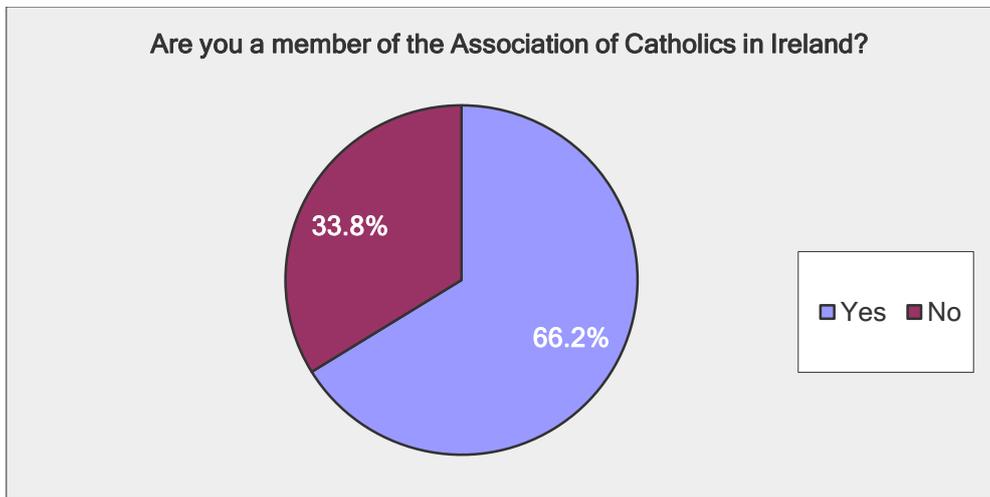
The majority of respondents were lay people (80.9%: N=127) while 16.6% indicated that they were religious. Two-thirds of the respondents (66.2%: N=102) indicated that they were members of the Association of Catholics in Ireland.

People were asked to indicate the capacity in which they were answering the questionnaire and many indicated that they were doing so as a 'lay person' (N=112). These lay people also indicated that they were also answering in the capacity of parents, teachers, members of church reform groups, weekly mass goers, volunteers and atheist. Those who answered in a non-lay capacity included priests, deacons, seminarians and professed religious, theology students, lay missionaries, retired and former priests.

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<sup>1</sup> The ACI would like to acknowledge the support of the Reform movement for allowing the adaptation and use of their questionnaire.

<sup>2</sup> These included, Scotland, England, Canada and the USA.



**Chart 1: Membership of ACI**

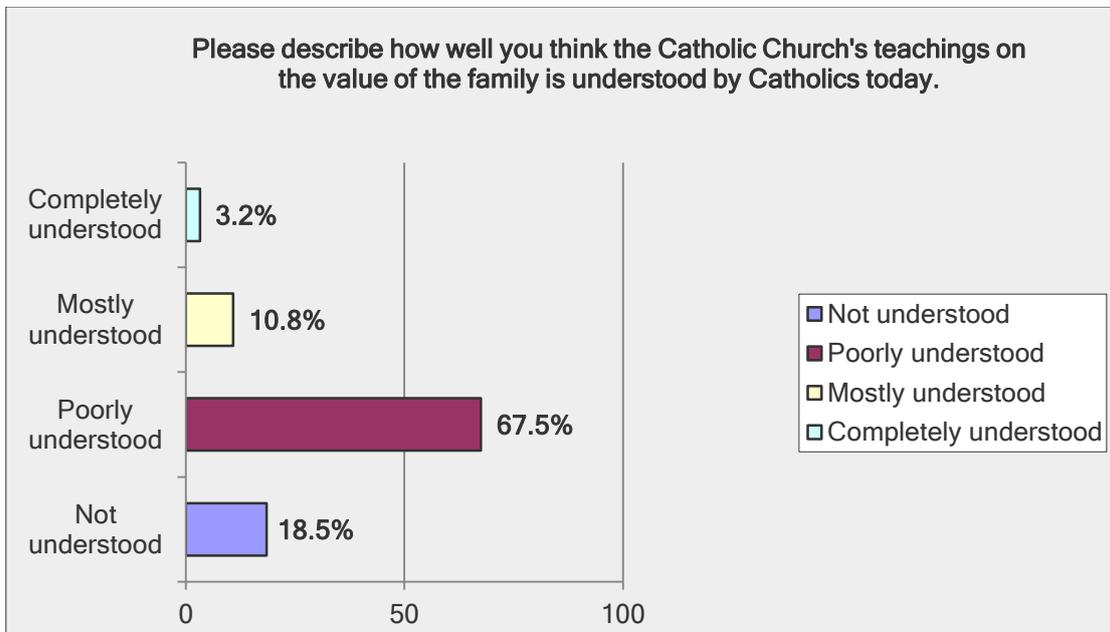
Over half of the respondents were married (56.6%:N=90) while 28.9% indicated that they were single. Smaller numbers indicated that they were divorced, separated, engaged, widowed, in a civil union or co-habitants. Looking at the age breakdown of participants indicates that almost three-quarters were aged over 55 years (see the table below).

**Table 1: Breakdown of Age**

<b>Age Category:</b>		
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number (N)</b>
Under 18 years	0.0	0
19-25 years	1.9	3
26-35 years	3.2	5
36-45 years	7.1	11
46-55 years	9.7	15
56-65 years	30.3	47
66-75 years	33.6	52
Over 76 years	14.2	22
<i>answered question</i>		<b>155</b>

## **2.2 About the Catholic Church's teachings**

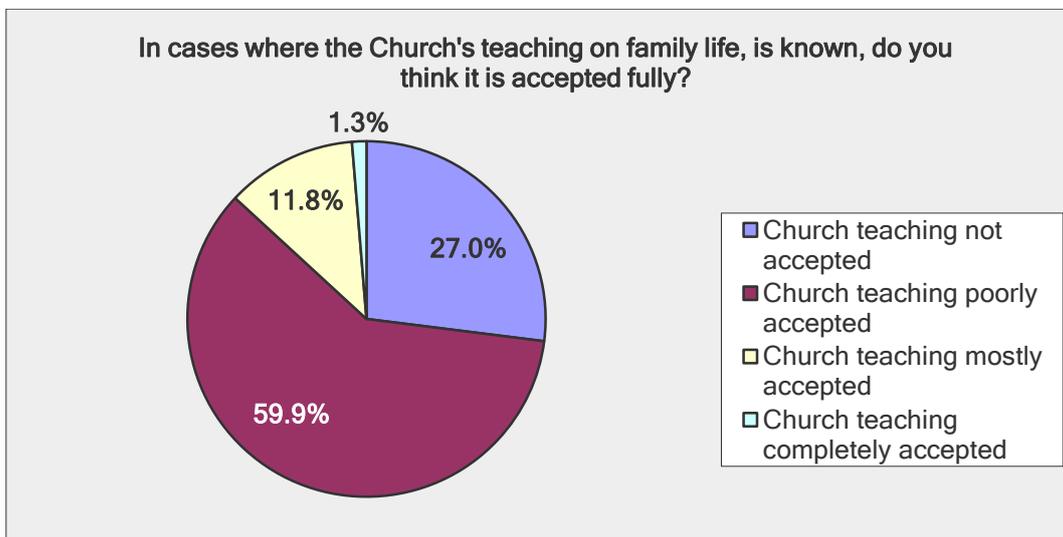
Respondents were asked to indicate how well they thought the Catholic Church's teachings on the value of the family was understood by Catholics today. Over two thirds indicated that they felt they were 'poorly understood' while 16.5 per cent indicated that they felt they were 'not understood' at all. See Chart below.



**Chart 2: Catholic Church's teachings on the value of the family**

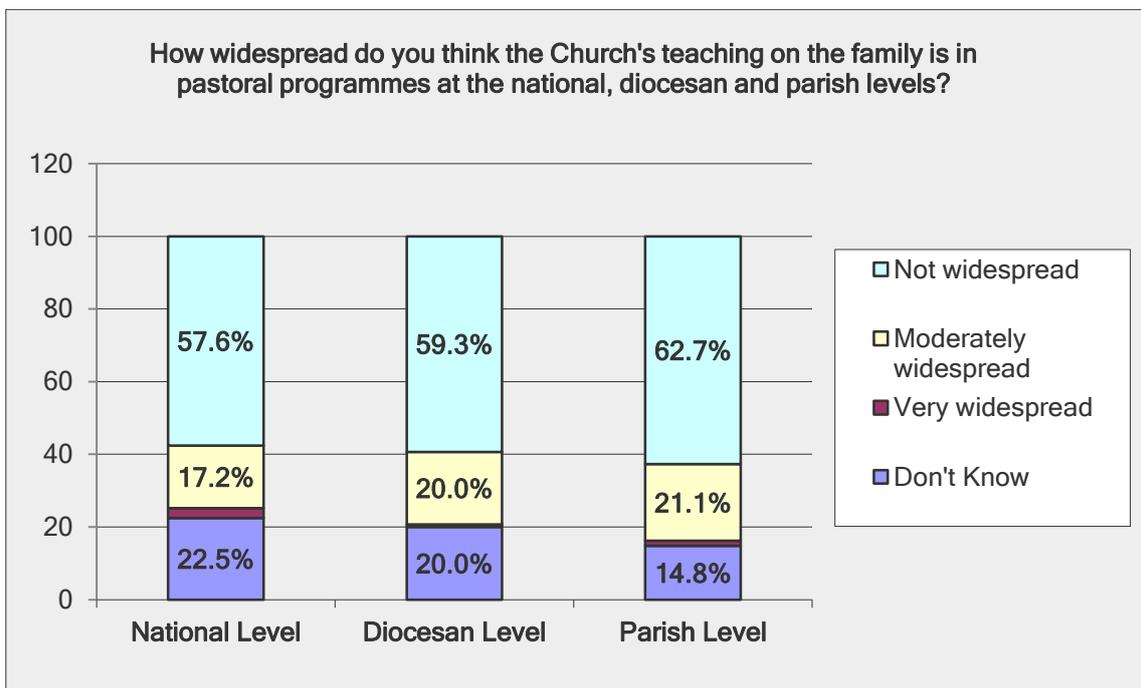
Many people, who indicated a reply of poorly or not understood, gave reasons for their responses. These included, the belief that the Church does not understand the issues faced by individuals on a daily basis and that the Church is not connecting to its followers and therefore not communicating its teachings very well. Others believed that people were not interested in further understanding the teachings of the Catholic Church, it was not a priority for them at the moment.

Respondents were then asked if they thought that in the cases where the Church's teaching on family life was known was it fully accepted. Over half of those that responded (59.5%: N=91) indicated that they felt that the Church's teachings were poorly accepted while a tiny number (N=2) felt that the Church's teachings were completely accepted.



**Chart 3: Church's teachings accepted**

The final question in this section asked respondents to comment on how widespread they felt the Church's teachings on the family was in pastoral programmes at a national, diocesan and parish level. Replies indicated that many respondents felt that the teachings were 'not widespread' at any level. From the Chart below we see that at a national, diocesan and parish level teaching in pastoral programmes is not considered to be widespread. Also, up to one-fifth of respondents just did not know how widespread the teachings were at any level.

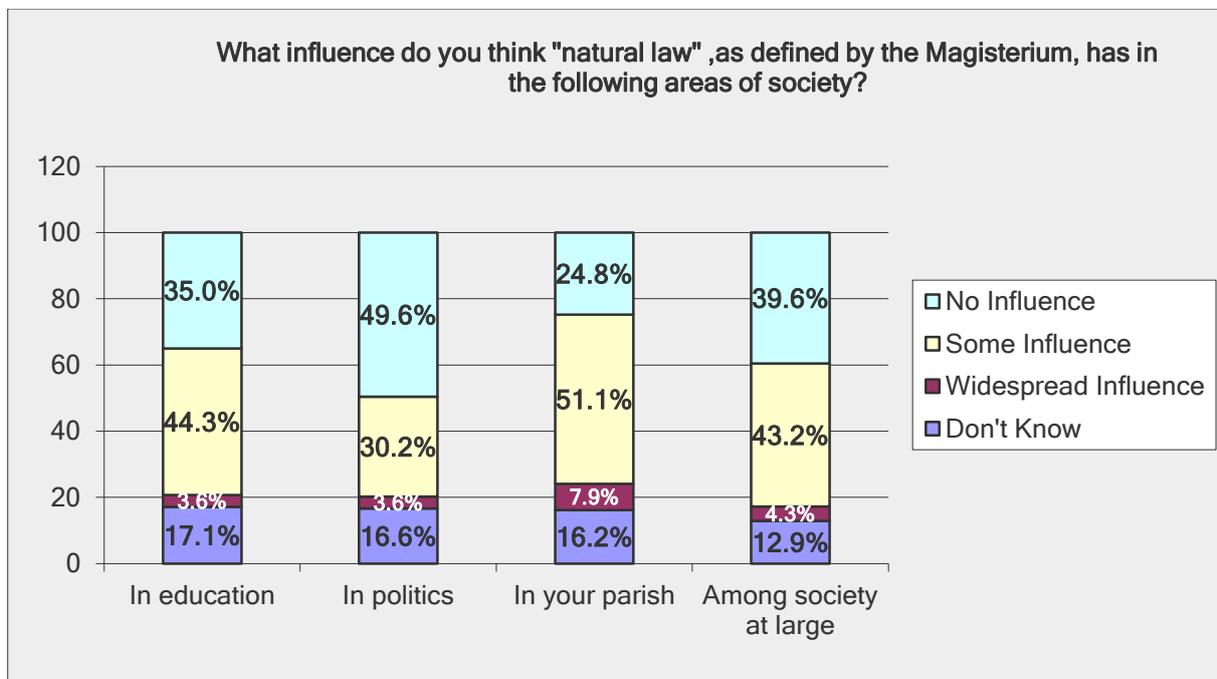


**Chart 4: Church's teachings in pastoral programmes<sup>3</sup>**

### **2.3 Marriage according to the Natural Law**

The questionnaire contained several questions on the influences of 'Natural Law' (as defined by the Magisterium) in four key areas of society; these were, in the parish, among society at large, in politics and in education. Over one-third (35%) of respondents indicated that they felt that 'Natural Law' has no influence in education and almost half (49.6%) indicated that this was the case in politics also. Four in ten felt that Natural Law has no influence among society at large while almost one-quarter (24.8%) felt that this was the case in their parish. Generally, respondents felt that the 'Law' was more influential in their parish than in other areas of society. From the chart below we can see that large numbers could not say what the level of influence might be.

<sup>3</sup> Number of respondents for each question: National Level (N=151); Diocesan Level (N=140); Parish Level (N=142)



**Chart 5: Influence of 'Natural Law'<sup>4</sup> in Society**

Some respondents provided comments after their reply. Many of the comments made reference to the complex nature of the term/concept Natural Law and the fact that this is not something that 'ordinary' people discuss. Instead it was seen as an academic concept, some of the respondents indicated that they did not understand the term.

When respondents were asked if they thought that the idea of the union between a man and a woman, as contained in "natural law" was commonly accepted by Catholics, over three-quarters (79.4%) indicated that it was accepted 'sometimes'. Smaller percentages indicated that the union was 'not accepted' (12.1%) or 'accepted completely' (8.5%).

**Table 2: Union between a man and a woman commonly accepted by Catholics**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
Not accepted	12.1%	17
Accepted sometimes	79.4%	112
Accepted completely	8.5%	12
<i>answered question</i>		<b>141</b>

The comments provided indicate that again the concept of natural law is difficult to understand in an 'everyday' way. People indicated that there was a slight shift and that the younger generation would not accept the union as defined by the Church. They also indicated that people would make judgements based on their personal experiences and that people were more accepting of difference (gay/lesbian relationships/ divorce) now .

When respondents were asked how they thought priests and clergy dealt with the request for the celebration of marriage from non-practicing Catholics, they indicated that the request would be granted (48.3%) or granted with conditions (45.8%). Only a small percentage felt that the request would be refused (5.9%).

<sup>4</sup> Number of respondents: In education (N=140); In politics (N=139); In your parish (N=141); Among society at large (N=139)

**Table 3: Request for celebration of marriage from non-practicing Catholics**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
Refuse Request	5.9%	7
Grant Request	48.3%	57
Grant Request with Conditions	45.8%	54
<i>answered question</i>		<b>118</b>

Respondents were asked to comment on how they believed the case of non-practicing Catholics, or declared non-believers, requesting the celebration of marriage would be dealt with. In total, 87 people provided a comment. There was a variety of responses with some people simply saying they 'didn't know'. Others suggested that the priests would deal with the request in a variety of ways depending on the priest and the parish. In general there was a feeling that the request would be granted, a marriage or a blessing would be granted, perhaps with certain conditions being put in place.

#### **2.4 The Pastoral care of the family in Evangelization**

When respondents were asked about the success of the Church in proposing a manner of praying within the family which can withstand life's complexities and today's culture, almost three-quarters (71.9%) stated that the Church was 'unsuccessful'. The remainder (28.1%) of respondents felt that the Church had been 'partially successful'.

**Table 4: Success in proposing a manner of praying within the family**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
Unsuccessful	71.9%	97
Partially successful	28.1%	38
Successful	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		<b>135</b>

Many respondents provided comments which suggest some positive and negative thoughts on the subject. Some respondents felt that the Church is detached from 'reality', does not understand family life and has made no real effort at proposing praying in families. Others felt that initiatives such as prayer cards and prayer groups were useful.

Respondents were asked how they thought Christian families have been able to fulfil their vocation of handing on the faith, in the current generational crisis. As seen in the table below many respondents felt that families were 'partially' able to fulfil their vocation while over one-quarter felt that the family was 'unable' to do this.

Many respondents provided comments on their answer, which suggest that people believe that some parents have been somewhat successful in handing on the faith through their actions and passing on their values, but then as children get older they choose not to participate. Others felt that parents have a difficult task competing with TV programmes and other forms of media. It was also suggested that grandparents can play a role in this area.

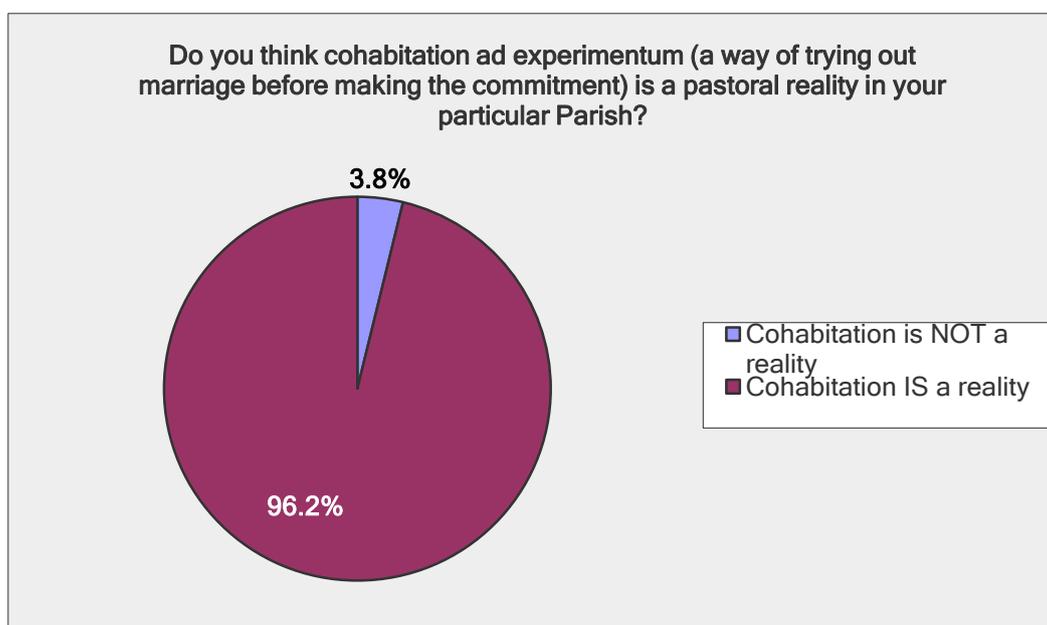
**Table 5: Families ability to fulfil their vocation of handing on the faith**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
Unable to fulfil	26.7%	36
Partially able to fulfil	71.9%	97
Completely able to fulfil	1.5%	2
<i>answered question</i>		<b>135</b>

## **2.5 Pastoral care in certain difficult marital situations**

When asked if they thought that cohabitation ad experimentum (a way of trying out marriage before making the commitment) is a pastoral reality in their particular parish, an overwhelming majority (96.2%) of participants indicated that it was a reality in their parish.

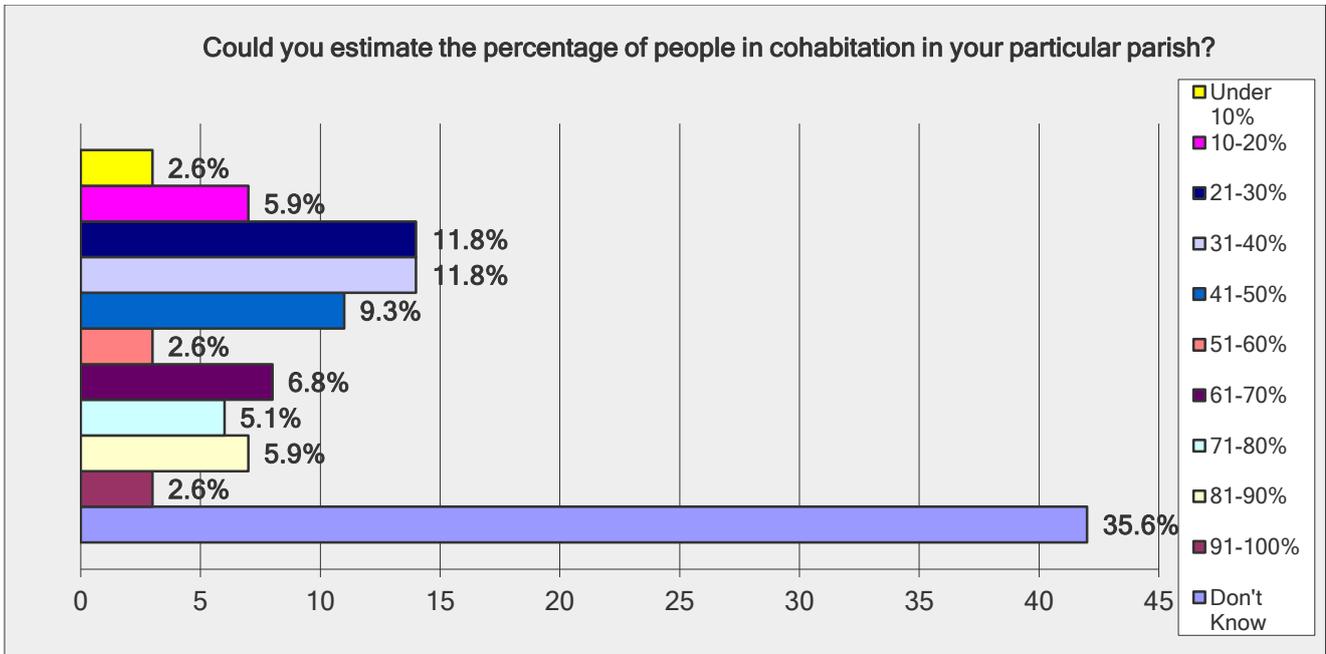
The comments provided by participants suggested that they felt that cohabitation is now the norm in society. They also suggested that cohabitation is somewhat like “betrothal” in the Bible and was probably the norm in Jesus time. Many also felt that cohabitation was a positive development. Smaller numbers felt that cohabitation was a ‘sad’ reality.



**Chart 6: Cohabitation is a pastoral reality in your parish<sup>5</sup>**

When asked to estimate the percentage of people in cohabitation in their parish over one-third of respondents said that they did not know. Others suggested a variety of responses. The comments provided suggest that for some it was hard to provide an estimate while others felt that younger people they know are currently or have been in cohabitation before marriage.

<sup>5</sup> Number of respondents = 133



**Chart 7: Estimate of people in cohabitation in parish<sup>6</sup>**

Respondents were also asked if they believed that separated couples and those divorced and remarried were a pastoral reality in their particular parish. The table below shows that the majority believed this to be the case. The comments suggest that some people felt that the percentage was low but a reality that needs to be addressed by the Church.

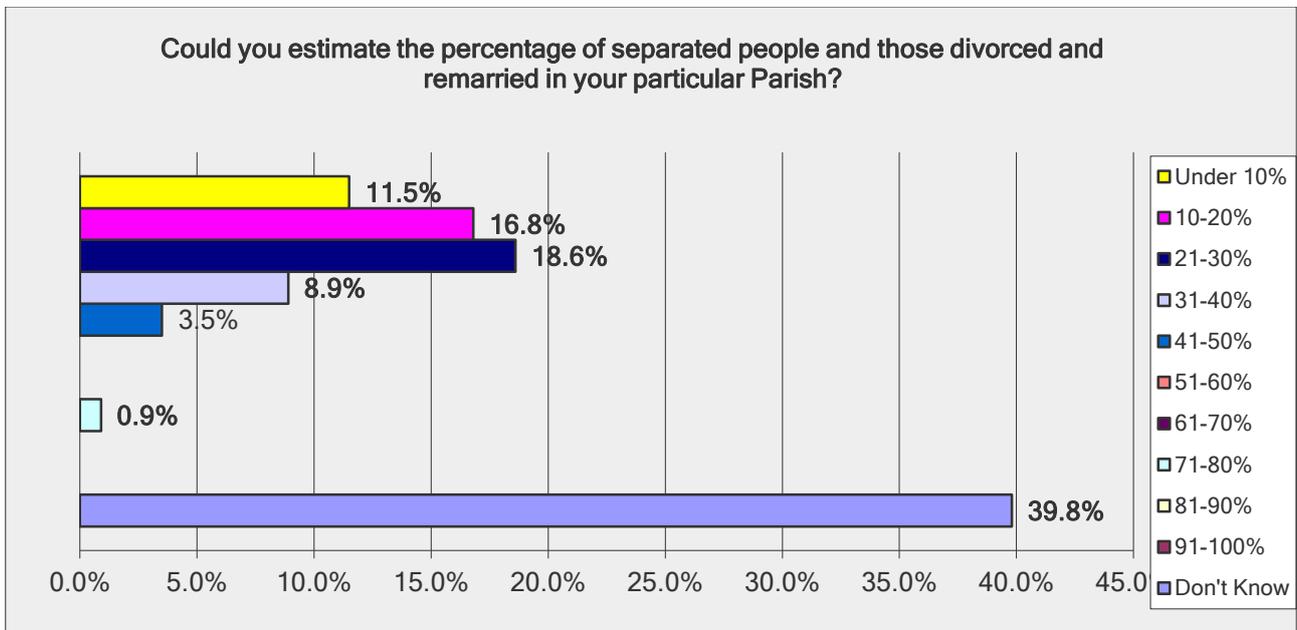
**Table 6: Separated couples and those divorced and remarried a pastoral reality**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
NO, this is not a pastoral reality	8.5%	10
YES, this is a pastoral reality	91.5%	108
<i>answered question</i>		<b>118</b>

When asked to estimate the percentage of separated people and those divorced and remarried that were in their particular Parish, again many did not know and found it hard to estimate (39.8%).

Comments (N=23) suggest that most people felt unable to give an estimate on this issue – they were simply guessing. Others suggested that very few people who were divorced would actually re-marry due to family responsibilities; they believed that they were more likely to cohabit.

<sup>6</sup> Number of respondents=118



**Chart 8: Estimate percentage of separated people and those divorced and remarried<sup>7</sup> in your parish**

Looking at the question of how Catholics, in relationships not recognized by the Catholic Church, feel in regards to the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, findings suggest that respondents felt that Catholics are aware their relationship is not recognized by the Roman Catholic hierarchy (74.3%). But they believed they were worthy of the sacraments regardless of whether their relationship is recognized by the Catholic Church (66.9%). Fewer felt that Catholics are indifferent to views of others about their relationship (42.7%).

**Table 7: Feelings in regard to the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N) <sup>8</sup>
Catholics are aware their relationship is not recognized by the Roman Catholic hierarchy	73.4%	91
Catholics are indifferent to views of others about their relationship	42.7%	53
Catholics feel marginalized	67.7%	84
Catholics suffer from lack of sacraments	62.1%	77
Catholics in same-sex unions do not believe their situation warrants denial of sacraments and still approach the Church for them.	54.0%	67
Catholics believe they are worthy of the sacraments regardless of whether their relationship is recognized by the Catholic Church.	66.9%	83

Comments by respondents suggest that the Church could be more compassionate towards people in these circumstances who are marginalized, alienated and isolated.

<sup>7</sup> Number of respondents = 113

<sup>8</sup> Respondents could tick all categories that they felt applied to them.

When asked whether a simplification of the rules regulating the nullity of the marriage bond could provide a positive contribution to solving the problem for those involved, over two-thirds (67.4%) of respondents suggested that this would be the case.

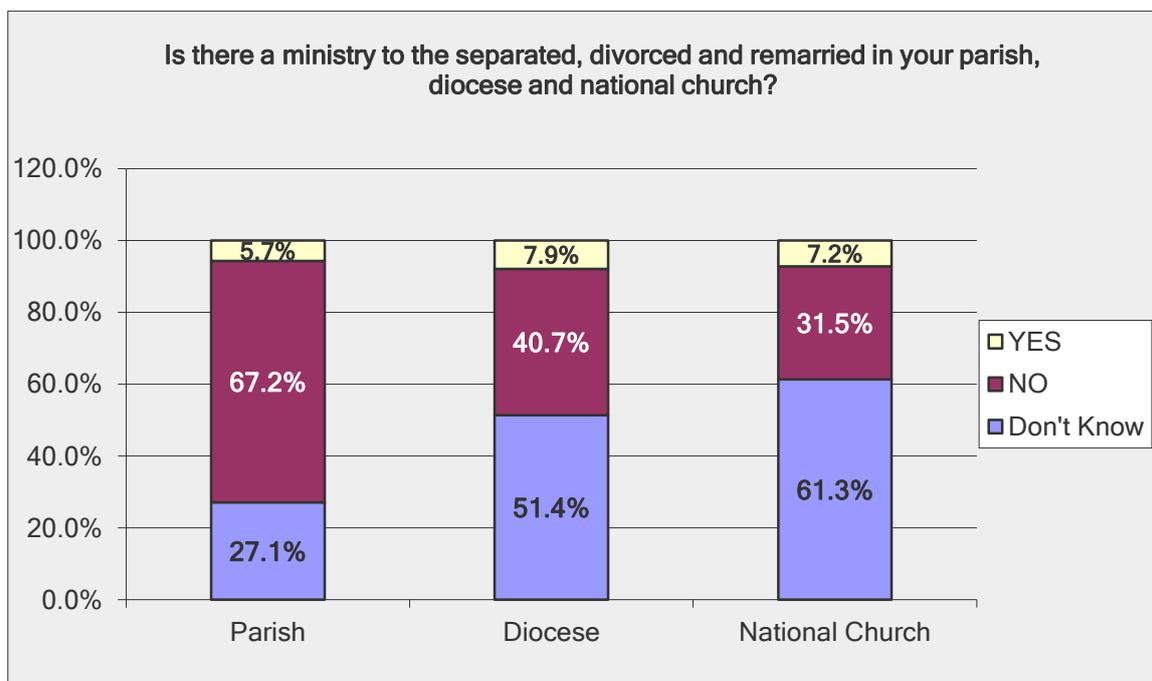
**Table 8: Simplification of rules provide a positive contribution**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
Would NOT be a positive contribution	32.6%	31
Would be a positive contribution	67.4%	64
<i>answered question</i>		<b>95</b>

Some of those who indicated that it would make a positive contribution suggest that stricter nullity rules could be enforced and nullity could become divorce ‘Catholic Style’. Others felt that divorce should be accepted because nullity would mean denying previous relationships and children, which they did not want to do. Many made reference to the level of bureaucracy involved and felt that if this was reduced this would provide a positive contribution.

When asked whether they thought there was a ministry to the separated, divorced and remarried in their parish, diocese and national church, respondents indicated that more of them (67.2%) believed that this was not the case in their parish but not as many in the diocese (40.7%) or national Church (31.5%).

Comments provided by respondents indicated that many people had not heard of or did not know about any such ministry. Others indicated that they believed that organisations such as Beginning Experience were of benefit to widowed, divorced or separated people. Others felt that people who separated, divorced or remarried were treated as ‘non-persons’ by the Church and that the Church lacks vision in this area.



**Chart 9: A ministry to the separated, divorced and remarried in your parish, diocese and national church**

## 2.6 On unions of persons of the same-sex

Respondents were asked to indicate if there was a law in their 'State' recognising marriage equality for same-sex couples. This question was part of the original questionnaire developed by the Church Reform Movement in the USA and was not totally relevant to Ireland, but it was decided to leave the question as is to see what would emerge in the findings. From the table below we see that two-thirds (66.9%) indicated that there was no such law in Ireland while a small percentage (6.8%) indicated that they did not know. Just over one-quarter (26.3%: N=31) indicated that such a law did exist in their 'State'. We must remember that as noted in an earlier section, 13 respondents were from outside the island of Ireland so in their state, this could be the case.

Comments from respondent suggests that some of those who said 'yes' feel that civil partnership is available and that same-sex unions are protected under law - this appears to be viewed as recognising equality. Those who said 'no' made reference to civil partnership and the proposed referendum in 2015<sup>9</sup>.

**Table 9: Law in state recognising marriage equality for same-sex couples**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
YES	26.3%	31
NO	66.9%	79
Don't Know	6.8%	8
<i>answered question</i>		<b>118</b>

Respondents were asked to indicate what they thought the attitude of their diocese, parish and local faith community was towards marriage equality and same-sex couples in a committed partnership. The table below provides a summary of the responses. For each of the six statements approx. one-fifth of respondents stated that they 'did not know' what their diocese, parish or faith community's attitudes towards marriage equality would be. Highlighting the largest percentages shows that attitudes of parish and diocese were considered to be 'negative' while those of the faith community were considered to be 'somewhat supportive'.

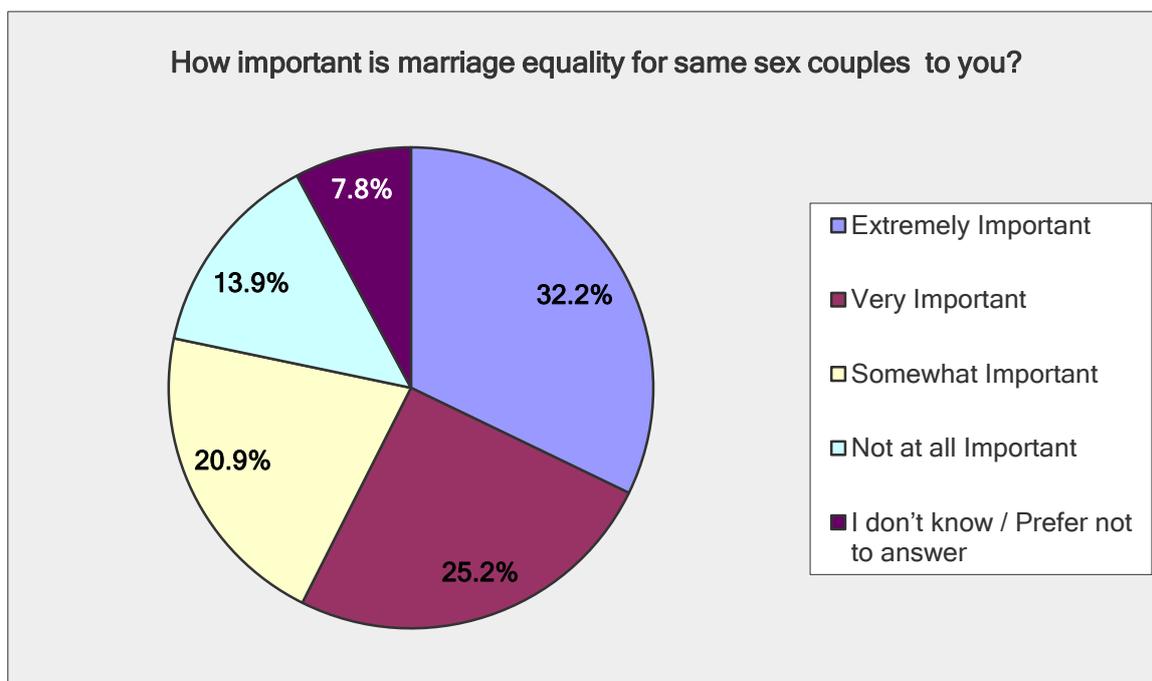
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<sup>9</sup> People in Ireland will get to vote on the issue of same-sex marriage in 2015 when the government plan to hold a referendum.

**Table 10: Attitudes towards marriage equality for same-sex couples?**

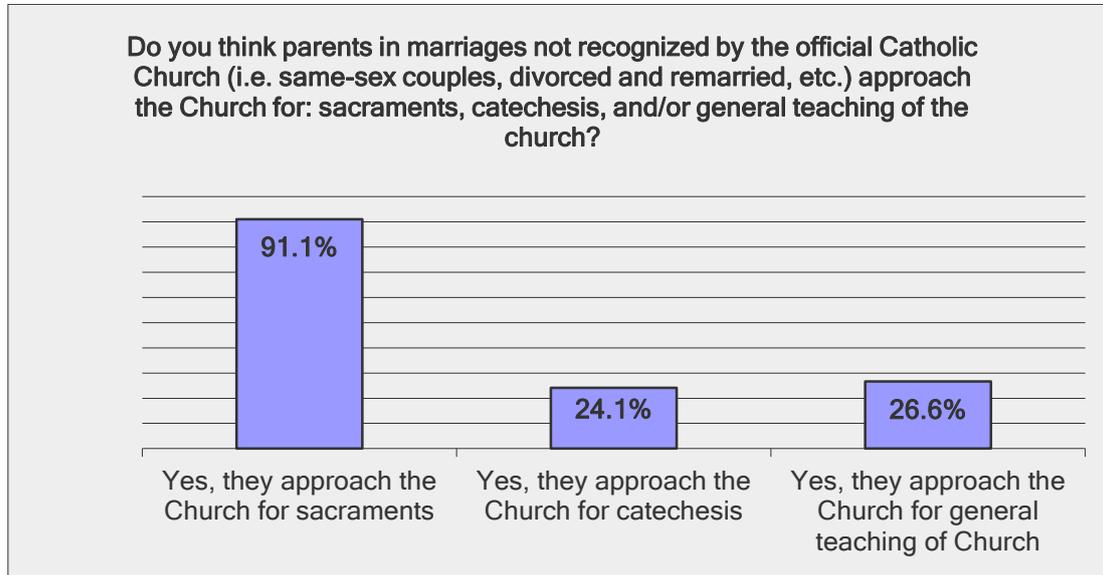
Answer Options	Hostile and condemning	Negative	Neutral	Somewhat supportive	Highly supportive	Don't Know	N
Attitude of my diocese toward marriage equality	27.1%	<b>38.1%</b>	4.2%	7.6%	3.4%	19.6%	<b>118</b>
Attitude of my parish toward marriage equality	12.0%	<b>42.8%</b>	7.8%	11.2%	6.0%	20.2%	<b>117</b>
Attitude of my local faith community toward marriage equality	2.6%	17.2%	16.4%	<b>30.2%</b>	14.6%	19.0%	<b>116</b>
Attitude of my diocese toward same-sex couples in a committed partnership	20.5%	<b>43.6%</b>	6.0%	7.7%	1.7%	20.5%	<b>117</b>
Attitude of my parish toward same-sex couples in a committed partnership	10.2%	<b>34.7%</b>	17.8%	11.9%	4.2%	21.2%	<b>118</b>
Attitude of my local faith community toward same-sex couples in a committed partnership	2.6%	17.10%	14.5%	<b>29.9%</b>	15.4%	20.5%	<b>117</b>

When asked how important marriage equality for same sex couples was to respondents, almost one-third said that it was 'extremely important' and one-quarter stated that it was 'very important'. A smaller percentage indicated that marriage equality was 'not at all important to them'. The comments provided by these individuals, suggest that they felt that, in Ireland, while marriage equality was not possible civil protection was very important.



**Chart 10: Importance of marriage equality for same sex couples**

When asked if parents in marriages, not recognized by the official Catholic Church, approach the Church for, sacraments, catechesis, and/or general teaching of the church, the majority (91.1%)<sup>10</sup> felt that yes, they would approach the Church for sacraments. Smaller percentages felt that they would approach the church for catechesis (24.1%)<sup>11</sup> and general teaching of the church (26.6%)<sup>12</sup>.



**Chart: 11: Approach Church for sacraments, catechesis and/or general Church teaching**

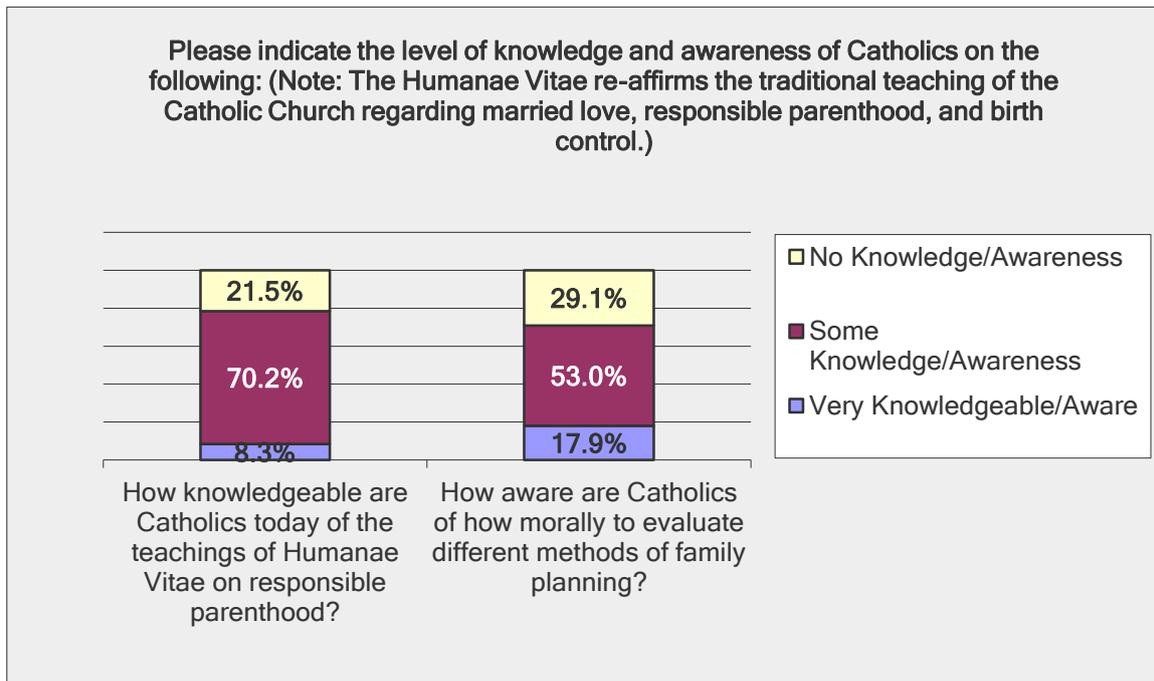
Respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of children and adolescents who are born and raised with parents in a same-sex partnership in their parish. While 113 people attempted to answer this question, over half (53%) gave a reply of 'don't know'. Others (45%) said that they thought under 10 per cent of children in their parish were born and raised with people in a same-sex partnership.

<sup>10</sup> 72 people answered this part of the question.

<sup>11</sup> 19 people answered this part of the question.

<sup>12</sup> 21 people answered this part of the question.

**2.7 The openness of the married couple to love, parenthood and family planning**



**Chart 12: Level of knowledge and awareness of the Catholic Church’s teaching on parenthood and family planning**

When asked about their perception about the level of knowledge of Catholics of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* on responsible parenthood, 70.2 per cent believed that Catholics had some knowledge or awareness. Just over one-fifth (21.5%) felt that Catholics had ‘no’ knowledge or awareness.

Looking at the level of awareness of Catholics on how morally to evaluate different methods of family planning, just over half (53%) indicated that they believed that Catholics had some knowledge or awareness while 29.1 per cent stated that they had ‘no’ knowledge. A further 17.9 per cent believed that Catholics were very knowledgeable on this issue.

When asked if they thought that the moral teaching of *Humanae Vitae* was accepted, over half (57.5%) felt that it was ‘not at all accepted’, while 42.5% felt that it was accepted in part. No one believed that the *Humanae Vitae* was ‘completely accepted’. Looking at the comments, we find that respondents believed that the *Humanae Vitae* was not accepted particularly in relation to contraception. Others felt that the *Humanae Vitae* is redundant and needs to be reviewed or ‘dumped’.

**Table 11: Acceptance of the *Humanae Vitae***

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
Not at all accepted	57.5%	69
Accepted in part	42.5%	51
Completely accepted	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		120

When asked about the importance of the availability of contraception to the respondents and their community over three-quarters stated that it was 'very important' while 12.8 per cent indicated that it was 'somewhat important'. Very small numbers indicated that it was not important.

**Table 12: Importance of the availability of contraception**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
Very important	77.8%	91
Somewhat important	12.8%	15
Not important	4.3%	5
I don't know / prefer not to answer	5.1%	6
<i>answered question</i>		<b>117</b>

Comments provided suggest that while contraception was not a concern for many of the respondents at this stage in their lives, they felt that it was of high importance for the younger people in their (and other) communities. They felt that the availability of contraception was an important aspect of a loving relationship and was preferable to unwanted pregnancies or disease.

Respondents were asked to indicate their experience on the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation and participation in the Eucharist and the experience of their 'loved ones'. As seen from the table below, very few people replied to the question about supporting the Church's teaching on family planning and only using methods approved by the Church. Larger numbers replied to the questions on participation in the Eucharist with 74.1 per cent indicating that they fully participate. With regard to the perception about their 'loved ones' and family planning, a large proportion (82.4%) indicated that they thought that their loved ones do not believe contraception to be morally wrong, requiring the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and they participate fully in the Eucharist.

**Table 13: Experience on the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and participation at the Eucharist**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
I participate fully in the Eucharist.	74.1%	80
My loved ones follow their consciences about family planning. They do not believe it to be morally wrong, requiring the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They participate fully in the Eucharist.	82.4%	89
I fully support the Church's teaching on family planning and use only methods approved by the Church.	4.6%	5
My loved ones fully support the Church's teaching on family planning and use only methods approved by the Church.	4.6%	5
<i>answered question</i>		<b>108</b>

Looking at the issue of differences between the Church's teaching and individual practice over three quarters of respondents (79.2% ) indicated that they support education about human sexuality and family planning in civic education. Almost two-thirds (65%) indicated that they did not support the Church's teaching on Humanae Vitae. Comments provided suggest that again, respondents believed that people today ignore Humanae Vitae and make decisions based on their conscience. Two-thirds (66.7%) indicated that they support alternatives to Humanae Vitae, including contraception.

**Table 14: Differences that are seen between the Church's teaching and individual practice**

Answer Options	Percent	Number (N)
I fully accept the church's teaching in Humane Vitae.	9.2%	11
I <b>do not</b> accept the church's teaching in Humane Vitae.	65.0%	78
I support education about human sexuality and family planning in civic education	79.2%	95
I <b>do not</b> support education about human sexuality and family planning in civic education	2.5%	3
I support alternatives to Humane Vitae, including contraception.	66.7%	80

**NOTE Re: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

The questionnaire contained many open-ended questions so that individuals would have the ability to provide more than 'tick-box' replies. They could expand their answers and provide fuller explanations of their views and help to inform the Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2014. In order to report on these questions and maintain confidentiality for those responding, the individual replies and comments of each respondent, were anonymized, compiled and placed in an Appendix. This separate Appendix accompanied the report which was sent to the Secretary to the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri, Secretary to the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family at the Vatican (October 2014). In this way, the opinions of each respondent were presented.