

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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SURVEY

It's the first in my lifetime. And I am an old guy. It's hard to believe but we are all encouraged to participate in a survey, and this time it is not about a political party, food product, or cause.

Our own Catholic Church wants our opinion. In the era of Francis, I guess that's not too surprising. But could you have imagined such a thing a year ago? Or a century ago? Or...well, you get the point.

The Pope asked the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops to "distribute the Preparatory Document (which includes the survey) to the Dioceses, and ask them to share it immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received regarding the themes and responses to the questionnaire..."

Clear enough directions, right? The memorandum is dated October 30. And the collection of responses is due by December 31, 2013. There are lots of questions and there's not much time, so we better get movin', don't you think?

At this point, I haven't seen any notice from my diocese about how to complete the survey or where I can find it, and the clock is ticking. Other dioceses must be in the same "where's the survey?" mode because I haven't seen much about it on the local level. Surely the Bishops aren't going to ignore this clear directive. Maybe we'll get our notice tomorrow. If not, contact your chancery office.

But just in case you don't get help in completing this first-ever survey, some groups have created versions of it so you can fill one out. So far I have seen three versions of the questionnaire.

So I thought what I would do is introduce you to all three, and offer my personal assessment of each one, with a rating scale similar to a movie review. Here's my star rating system: **. The scale goes from 1 to 5*, with five as the best.

1. The first version of the survey is the official one. The problem with it is that, unless you know the exact title of the document, it is hard to find online. You can get to it at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20131105_iii-

[assemblea-sinodo-vescovi_en.html](#) but the actual questions begin at numeral III. I tried to find an easy link to it on the Bishops' website (<http://www.usccb.org/>) but, strangely enough, I found no reference to it. Good thing a friend of mine gave me the exact title of the document.

Besides the difficulty in finding it, this version may be the hardest to answer. There are 38 questions plus one at the end for other comments and all the questions are open-ended. Many of them ask about how this topic impacts your parish which you may not know. Some of the questions presume an advanced knowledge of natural law. I don't know how you submit your answers.

On the other hand, this is the official survey and has a rather lengthy introduction. I give it a ** rating.

2. The second approach comes from *Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good* (www.papalsurvey.com) and they simplify the survey by condensing the content into four major categories: The Church and Family Life; Outreach to Divorced and Separated Persons; Outreach to Same-Sex Couples and Gay Persons; Being a Church of Mercy and of Welcome. These four categories are an accurate summary of the themes of the questionnaire, and are easier to answer than the official document. But these questions are also all open-ended.

I keep wondering how they are going to tabulate and collate all these open-ended questions but I hope they have a system.

This version rates *** because it condenses while it maintains the integrity of the survey.

3. Your third choice is produced and directed by *Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR)*, a coalition of many Catholic groups, a cast of thousands. (https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SynodOnFamilyUS?utm_source=Copy+of+Let+your+voice+be+heard+-+Synod+on+the+Family%21&utm_campaign=Teleconference+with+Donald+Cozzens&utm_medium=email)

They took the initiative to put some of the questions into a check box format so you can express your opinions in a way that tabulates answers numerically. Open-ended questions also remain. This survey needs to be completed by December 15 to give the compilers time to tabulate the answers by December 31.

This effort deserves ****. It is the easiest to use and gives the participant the confidence that their opinions on the multiple choice questions will at least be counted.

In the sequel to this questionnaire, I hope the Vatican will use the expertise of Gallup and the polling techniques of modern research experts.

Perhaps the greatest impact of this hurry-up survey is that it exists. Fill it out! Round up your friends! Have a party! Do it together! Promote it in your parish! In your diocese!

Our Pope wants to know our opinions. Wow!