

Survey on the Pastoral Situation With Respect to Partnerships, Marriages, and Families of the Catholic Church in Switzerland - Results

February 4th, 2014

Who Participated in the Survey?

- 25,000 responses (23,500 online, 1,500 returned paper questionnaires distributed by local churches), average age: 54, 53% women, 92% Catholic, 95% residents of Switzerland, two thirds have kids
- German language 87%, French 9%, Italian 4,5%. More than one third of the responses came from the Basel area.
- Most respondents are close to the Church (married in Church, give their kids a Christian education, participate in their local parish), but this does not mean that they are not critical of Church Teaching.

First Results:

- The evaluation of the responses is ongoing. But some clear trends are recognizable.
- 80% favor getting married in church and want to include religious elements in their lives
- Highest score of the survey is on the need to give kids a Christian education (97%)
- Faith plays a large part in family and education even though most are not able to express this. The approval rating for baptism is very high.
- generally, respondents are open to religion and faith but do not agree with Church Teaching on family, marriage, and sexuality.

Number One Issue:

- Broad consensus about not understanding and disagreeing with the official teaching not to admit divorced and remarried persons to the sacraments. Almost 90% are in favor of the church recognizing and blessing these partnerships.
- People expect from the Swiss bishops to overcome the current policy which is considered as excluding, non-merciful, un-Christian, and in explicit contradiction of the core messages of Christianity.

Recognition of Same Sex Partnerships by the Church - No Broad Consensus:

60% want the Church to recognize and bless same sex partnerships. But instead of a broad consensus there is increasing polarization.

The Church and the leadership of the Church face the difficult situation of finding a solution that does justice to these diverging convictions and to meet the pastoral needs of lesbian and homosexual couples with strong wishes for having a religious component in their relationships and having their relationships recognized.

Permanent Issue: Birth Control

The dramatic gap between respondents and Magisterium on this issue shown by the survey has been well known for a long time. The prohibition of artificial methods of birth control is far removed from the current practice and views of most Catholics.

Scepticism About the Church Teaching on Family:

Most Catholic claim to be familiar with Church Teaching on sexuality, partnership but show clear reservations and do not express an overall agreement.

Perspectives for the Church:

While there is strong criticism of the Church there is also a basic desire for religion and church having a part in partnerships, marriages and families. These two positions stand in relation and in tension to each other. They point to the urgent need to re-assess the status that the Church Teaching on the family has in the Church and in the pastoral activities.

The specific lived experiences and lived situation of the people stands in contrasts with efforts to hold up individual norms and laws of the Church as absolute. The demands of the Church for unchallenged acceptance and unconditional obedience to its norms and rules of behavior are damaging the efforts of the Church to impart to the people the more central and more important aspects of its message.

The knowledge about the disparity between the openness among many of the faithful towards a religiously imprinted partnership, marriage and family on the one side and their rejection and incomprehension towards large parts of the Teaching on the other side has to be taken into account when developing pastoral programs. Specifically, the survey shows bad marks for the marriage preparation courses. They are not considered helpful for marriage and family life.

The survey also shows that the Church is not considered helpful when it comes to crises in marriage and family life. It seems that the high ideals of the Church Teaching block the view of reality and make it more difficult to communicate with those most in need of support.

Widespread Concurrence:

A surprising result of the survey is the very high conformity in the responses from quite different groups: young and old, men and women, German-, French- and Italian-speaking participants. There are really no significant differences to be found in the way these groups responded. There is no evidence of a generational conflict, no gender conflict, no conflict

between the German-speaking and the French-speaking parts of Switzerland, no discrepancy between the different denominations and not significant difference between responses from Switzerland and responses from abroad.

Perspectives For Further Evaluations:

We are only at the beginning of the evaluation. In the further analysis SPI will focus on specific pastoral questions. It might be possible to identify target group specific differences that allow a better focus in the preparation of pastoral programs.

SPI:

The SPI is the Swiss Institute for Pastoral-Sociology (Schweizerisches Pastoralsoziologisches Institut). It is a research institute financed by the Catholic Church of Switzerland. It is located in St. Gall.

The SPI investigates the social, cultural, and especially religious transformations in today's society. The findings and results of this research serve as a basis for the development of concepts and perspectives for the pastoral planning and practices in the Catholic Church in Switzerland.

A main goal of SPI is to tie its research into the fundamentals in with the development of advisory services and concepts for the pastoral work in Switzerland.

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Translated by Bernie Aurin from German as published on the website of the Swiss bishops:

<http://www.bischoefe.ch/dokumente/communiqués/umfrage-zur-familienpastoral-ergebnisse>