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Belgian bishops put synod survey online, seek 'widest possible' comment

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Responding to a Vatican request asking the world's bishops to distribute among Catholics a questionnaire on issues like contraception, same-sex marriage and divorce "as widely as possible," Belgium's bishops on Friday posted the document online and are asking Catholics to submit answers by mid-December.

The bishops, one news service is reporting, want "the widest possible consultation" on the survey and are accepting answers by email and postal mail.

The bishops have posted the questionnaire on the website of that service, KerkNet, have posted it at another online news service, and will publish it in two of the country's weekly magazines. The answers, KerkNet is reporting, will be analyzed by the bishops with the help of experts in pastoral theology.

The European prelates are responding to an Oct. 18 request made by Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri, the secretary of the Vatican's Synod of Bishops, in preparation for a global meeting of Catholic bishops next October.

Called by Pope Francis last month, the Oct. 5-19, 2014, meeting is to focus on the theme "Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization."

Baldisseri sent a letter to heads of bishops' conferences globally Oct. 18, asking that they distribute a questionnaire on some of the topics expected to be discussed at the upcoming synod "immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received."

Recent Vatican statements have left unclear just how widely the Vatican meant the consultation of lay

Catholics is to go. While the U.S. bishops' conference has not said how it will specifically seek consultation on the matter, the bishops of England and Wales posted the questionnaire online as a poll.

The Belgian bishops did not post the questionnaire as a poll, asking instead that Catholics write out their answers and send them in by Dec. 15.

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