

More Francis Breeze Wafts Thru B'More

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 11, 2013 Distinctly Catholic
Fall bishops' meeting 2013

Cardinal Dolan announced that, after receiving a request from several bishops, he wanted to open for discussion the questionnaire sent by the Holy See in advance of next year's Synod on the family, and allow the bishops to share what steps they are taking in their dioceses to solicit the information and input that the Holy See requested.

Bishop Lynch was first to the microphone and he asks, "how best to solicit the information?" He notes that the questions did not lend themselves in their current format into language that could be readily understood. He specifically cited the language on natural law, which all the bishops would understand, but perhaps many in the laity would not. He asked if there might not be a national survey instrument. That has been suggested in these pages - the USCCB should hire Catholic University's Institute for Policy research or Georgetown's Center for Advanced Research on the Apostolate and ask them to conduct a nationwide survey.

Archbishop Sample, who bears a striking resemblance to Cardinal Ralph de Bricassart in "The Thornbirds," said he was asking for consultation with his archdiocesan councils, of both lay and clergy. He also asked how the conference would manage the input - especially if it comes in different forms. Another reason for a national survey.

Everyone is concerned about the limited time. Cardinals Dolan and +Wuerl indicate that the clock is ticking because there will be a consistory in February, and the Holy Father wants the cardinals to look at the results and the Vatican's dicastery that works on the Synods will be meeting at the same time. +Wuerl makes the point that the Holy See wants input at the very beginning of the process.

Cardinal O'Malley took the microphone to note the enthusiasm with which the people and priests in his archdiocese are greeting the survey. Cardinal DiNardo notes that the questionnaire seems to require more exact experiences of the Church's life, and he suggests that the bishops should consider soliciting the input of a smaller group of people, with more in-depth responses. Of course, given the way pastoral councils are selected, one cannot know if those groups are representative. Archbishop Chaput said that his archdiocese is also mounting an online survey and that he senses there is an expectation among the people that their views will be solicited. This seems to run counter to +DiNardo's intervention.

This is one of the most free-flowing conversations I have seen at a USCCB meeting, crossing the usual ideological lines.