

# Vatican considers historic easing stance on contraception and marriage as it concedes ordinary Catholics don't follow the rules

- 75-page working paper for synod in October says church's teaching on contraception and sex before marriage are perceived to be 'intrusive'
- Officials have said the 'problems will be considered' and they will not 'close our eyes to anything' when debate is opened later this year
- The report stressed a 'new language' was needed to communicate the church's vision of marriage and family life

By [James Rush](#) and [Associated Press](#)

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The Vatican has admitted most Catholics do not follow its teaching on sex and contraception as officials said they will not 'close our eyes to anything' when it debates the issues later this year.

A 75-page working paper for the synod of Catholic bishops planned for the Vatican in October to discuss family issues, also said the church must be less judgemental of homosexuals and, while still opposing gay marriage, should welcome children of gay couples into the faith with equal dignity.

The Church conceded its rulings on issues including contraception and sex before marriage were 'commonly perceived today as an intrusion in the intimate life of the couple' in the document, released yesterday.

While core church doctrine is not expected to change as a result of the debate, officials have insisted the 'problems will be considered.'



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**The Vatican has admitted most Catholics reject its teaching on sex and contraception in a document released ahead of a synod of bishops planned for October**

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The Vatican yesterday released the results of a questionnaire sent out to Catholics around the world about their understanding of, and adherence to, the church's teaching on sexuality, homosexuality, contraception, marriage and divorce.

The report summarised the responses of thousands of ordinary Catholics, clergy and academics and will be the working document for the synod in October.

It said 'a vast majority' of responses stressed that 'the moral evaluation of the different methods of birth control is commonly perceived today as an intrusion in the intimate life of the couple and an encroachment on the autonomy of conscience.'

'Many responses recommend that for many Catholics the concept of "responsible parenthood" encompasses the shared responsibility in conscience to choose the most appropriate method of birth control.'

Vatican officials were asked at a press conference if the church might alter its position on such topics in light of the responses.

'We will not close our eyes to anything,' said Monsignor Bruno Forte, a meeting organizer. 'These problems will be considered.'



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**The document said 'a vast majority' of responses stressed that 'the moral evaluation of the different methods of birth control is commonly perceived today as an intrusion in the intimate life of the couple'. Pope Francis is pictured during his weekly general audience at St Peter's Square on Wednesday**

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The report stressed a 'new language' was needed to communicate the church's vision of marriage and family life as it said the media and its own priests had failed to communicate the 'positive' aspects of the Vatican's document banning artificial contraception.

The document said: 'Some observations inferred that the clergy sometimes feel so unsuited and ill-prepared to treat issues regarding sexuality, fertility and procreation that they often choose to remain silent.'



Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, who is organizing the synod, said many lay Catholics were consulted in the preparation of the working document.

The document itself, however, acknowledged that the church had a credibility problem.

It said: 'Responses from almost every part of the world frequently refer to the sexual scandals within the church (paedophilia in particular) and in general, to a negative experience with the clergy and other persons,' it said. 'Sex scandals significantly weaken the church's moral credibility.'

The document did not recommend changes to the church's teachings on issues such as same-sex marriage.



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Reflecting Pope Francis' call for a less judgemental stance however, the report said gay men and lesbians must be treated with dignity, respect and spared discrimination.

'The episcopal conferences amply demonstrate that they are trying to find a balance between the church's teaching on the family and a respectful, non-judgmental attitude toward people living in such unions,' it said.

It also suggested ways to improve and expedite the church's annulment process to enable Catholics who divorce and remarry to receive the sacraments.

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Currently, such divorced and civilly remarried Catholics cannot receive communion because the church thinks they are essentially living in sin and committing adultery.

The document suggested creating more marriage tribunals to handle annulment requests, removing the time-consuming automatic appeals or shifting to an administrative, rather than judicial process altogether.

Francis has spoken out about the need for a merciful approach to the divorce-remarried issue, but it remains unclear how far he is willing to go to welcome these Catholics into fully participating in the sacramental life of the church.