

Synod on Synodality Synthesis,
Diocese of Fort Wayne–South Bend

1.1 Introduction

In the tradition of the Church, for a Christian community to be “in synod” means to be “journeying together” in a prayerful process of reflection, accompanied by the wisdom and power of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis has convoked a universal synod of the entire People of God to reflect on what it means for the Church to live out its synodality in today’s world. Through baptism, all the Christian faithful become brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus and temples of the Holy Spirit. This calls for a respectful process of listening to each other and discerning together what God is calling us to do as a Church.

This synthesis report is the result of a process of listening and discernment within the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. Listening sessions were conducted throughout the diocese in the winter and Spring of 2022 — with a special effort made to invite those who do not feel that their voices are heard or that they make a difference. Not only were there six regional listening sessions at the vicariate level, but a number of parishes, Catholic high schools, a Catholic college and a Catholic Worker House also conducted these sessions. These listening sessions usually began with Mass or Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in order to emphasize a prayerful listening to the Word of God and to the Holy Spirit. Larger groups would then break into smaller groups of 4-10 people led by a facilitator and a notetaker. These results were transmitted to the Diocesan Synod Coordinator. In most cases, participants reflected on the following 7 questions:

1. How is this “journeying together” to announce the Gospel happening today in your local campus ministry, university, religious congregation? What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?
2. How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? Whose voices are currently not being heard?
3. How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?
4. How is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What areas of mission are we neglecting?
5. What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations? What do we share and how do we journey together?
6. How is authority and governance exercised within our local Church (diocese/parish)? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice?
7. What is our experience of celebrating the Eucharist? What are some ways our parishes and diocese can place greater emphasis on realizing the infinite value of the Eucharist within our Christian life?

In general, the feedback from each listening session was very positive. Many people commented how much they enjoyed sharing their thoughts on various topics posed to them. It was a time in which many Catholic Christians could share with each other their joy of being Catholic. They often demonstrated a deep and authentic love for the Church and a desire to bring the Gospel to the world. Their ability to see the needs of the Church and their desire to improve various elements often demonstrated a strong commitment to the Christian faith. These sessions also

included non-Catholic Christians or Catholic Christians who were not active in the Church. They also provided excellent insights on ways to strengthen the bonds of community.

1.2 Youth Consultation

Of particular interest were the comments of youth from Catholic high schools in the diocese, which also included voices of many non-Catholic youth that would perhaps not otherwise be involved in this type of consultation. Questions to them focused on what was going well in their spiritual lives, where they were experiencing struggles and what voices in their lives speak for God, but are sometimes ignored.

Here are some representative responses for what is going well:

- I am not Catholic, but I say 3 Hail Mary's and talk to God every night.
- I've heard God several times.
- Everything is going well and I'm happy with my life thanks to God for helping me through tough times.
- When I was younger, I never thought a lot of going to church. Honestly, I thought it was pretty boring. As I grew up, though, I learned about Him and His miracles, and learned that trusting in Him is the key to being happy. Since I realized that, I have tried to be close to Him.
- I go to church every Sunday. I sometimes participate in readings and taking the gifts. I read the bible every Saturday. I'm planning to be in a bible study.
- Going to reconciliation is something that is going well in my Catholic Christian journey.
- My family prays every night and morning before eating. We all go to church together every Sunday.
- I am going to Mass every Sunday and attend confession once a month. I feel this commitment keeps me close to God.
- I am not Catholic (Lutheran), but the people around me are Catholic and are very supportive and love me just the same.
- Something that is going well on my Catholic Christian Journey is that I'm praying every night now. I didn't used to pray every night and I just recently have started to do it.
- What is going well is my love for him. Never in my life once have I ever felt anything but love for God.
- I am not Catholic, but I am Christian. I think that most things have been going well on my Christian journey. I now pray more often than I used to and I am getting a deeper understanding on the Church's history than I ever have before.
- Right now my Catholic life is the only thing going well in my life.
- I feel like I'm growing closer to God the more time I spend in silent prayer.
- I have started to see a pattern in Scripture where I will see examples of the reading or already have them and the readings answer my question.
- I have grown closer to my family in my journey because we all share the same faith and we can grow as a family by helping each other out.

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- I'm not afraid to ask God for help or guidance. I think what I'm also realizing is that God is doing things for me everyday and that he's doing things for the better well-being of me.
- On my Catholic Christian Journey I have been getting closer to God. I have been praying more and telling him about my day.
- I pray before any events. I enjoy praying to God for others.
- I think one thing that is going well is praying and just talking to God.
- I was baptized a Catholic, but after sophomore year, I realized I am an Atheist.
- I'm Agnostic.
- Prayer life; daily Rosary.

Here are some representative responses for where they are struggling:

- After I hear him, I always give up for various reasons (burn out, lack of faith).
- Believing everything I'm being told.
- Not knowing if I'm going to be accepted by others and not having much support from others because I'm Catholic.
- I have struggled to see eye to eye with some of the beliefs of the Catholic Church, but so far, I have done my best to try and believe.
- Going to church has been a struggle in my Catholic-Christian journey.
- Sometimes finding time to connect with God and making time to talk with him. Also, things have been super busy so we haven't been going to church every Sunday.
- Remembering that God will love me no matter what.
- Being nice to evil people.
- A struggle in my journey is keeping up with my duties. For example, I have not been going to church consistently.
- I haven't been to confession in a while.
- I am never excited to go to church, therefore that has been a struggle.
- One struggle has been dealing with people who do not believe in the Church casting judgment onto members of the Church because of their disapproval of some of the Church's past actions or political views.
- Sports have been a little because they sometimes get in the way of going to church.
- The struggle has been praying every day.
- It's hard for me to give up that time on my weekends to go to Mass, and I think I need to be pushed more to do so.
- I struggle with homophobia from other Christians.
- My parents don't always feel like going to church so on Sunday I can rarely go.
- What has been a struggle with my journey is feeling a connection with God and if he is really listening. I also know that it is hard to believe in him when times get hard.
- Giving up the things that are really hard for me. Finding time everyday for Jesus. Pushing myself everyday to get closer to him.
- A struggle on my Catholic journey is believing all the truths about Catholicism.

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- I have struggled with actually having faith in the Church and its rules and that the way that they teach, because I don't find it helpful that they say not to judge but do it themselves. I think it isn't helpful but makes me question the Church more.
- I've struggled with a few of the teachings of the Church that I don't necessarily agree with. Personally, I feel like they're morally wrong, but I'm learning to accept them.
- I struggle to believe what I can't see.
- One struggle I have had is accepting and understanding what it means to love Jesus before all else.
- It has been hard to understand that even with God, bad things still happen.
- I struggle to stay disciplined, prioritizing God and to love myself. I know disrespecting myself is disrespecting God and his creation.

Here are some representative responses for what voices in their lives speak for God, but are sometimes ignored:

- God is always speaking to us, but we just need to listen.
- Sometimes when we pray, the voice in our head, whether it's our voice or someone else, is God talking to us. Whenever he talks, though, what he is saying is always going to be positive. If its negative, it isn't him.
- God is speaking through everyone around us that is trying to help us. Some voices that are not being heard are priests because in today's society, since the Covid pandemic, Mass has seemed to become optional to almost 50% of parishioners.
- God is speaking to me through the people I meet and talk to. These people encourage me to do the right thing even if I ignore them. One voice not heard is my own. I often fail to listen to myself when it tells me the right thing to do.
- God might be trying to guide us on the right path through other peoples' voices. Sometimes I ignore my parents' guidance when I am frustrated or upset with them.
- The Holy Spirit, possibly the priest or teachers.
- I feel like God directs me and guides me to do what he wants me to do through the words of other people. I think I'm probably ignoring the words of my parents and teachers the most; even though I still listen to them, I still find myself disobeying them from time to time.
- God is speaking through these voices that we ignore through things that we may not enjoy as much so we can be tested on whether we'll make a sacrifice or not. Voices of the poor and needy and children aren't being heard.
- God is speaking to us with the Church.
- God is speaking to me through my parents with them trying to put me in the right path.
- God is speaking to us through the actual voice in our heads, and through the "voices." Someone could be asking God for a sign and then they see a billboard that really speaks to them, or even as simple as a bird in the sky. These are the ways we can hear God.
- I personally think God talks to me through nature or with signs of things.

- God is speaking to us through others and we ignore it constantly. I feel as though LGBTQ people are not being heard and I think others not in the community need to be educated that though it might not be ok to be gay, others in the Church shouldn't judge them as harshly as they do.

ADULT CONSULTATION

2.1 How is this “journeying together” to announce the Gospel happening today in your local campus ministry, university, religious congregation? What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

Two central themes emerged within the answers to this question. The first centered on the importance of the community and the essential nature of our shared spiritual experiences and the second theme on those social activities which draw a community together.

Many attendees indicated that it is important to focus on personal relationships in our parishes but also in our larger communities. All who responded to this question emphasized that our relationships with one another must be grounded in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Greater emphasis on understanding the Gospels and the guidance they offer to “journey” with one another was frequently stressed. Also stressed was the need for greater exposure to and teaching on important church documents that would help us more broadly understand our Gospel call. The document *Laudato Si* was offered as an example.

Attendees expressed a need for the Church to “break out of the box” and to be creative in efforts to journey and to serve one another.

Examples offered for these creative efforts included:

- invoking the Holy Spirit to guide and challenge us to understand one another more deeply and to serve our fellow parishioners thoughtfully and intentionally;
- learning about and strengthening our Catholic faith by reaching out to those we may not understand or appreciate;
- offering liturgies that are beautiful and reverent that will draw people of all ages, races, and cultural experiences to worship together and to experience God in liturgy as the center of parish life;
- stressing the importance of a strong devotion to Our Lady and all the saints in heaven for motivation and encouragement in our earthly journey;
- offering well-prepared and positive teaching on our Catholic doctrine, history, traditions, and truths of our faith — most especially on the Eucharist;
- offering many and varied opportunities for parishioners to get to know one another including Bible studies, small faith communities, evenings for prayer and adoration;
- and offering opportunities for the youth and young adults in a parish to come together socially and in prayer.

It is important to note that some attendees identified issues that they feel “work against” the building of community and a sense of journeying together. They identified the pain and difficulty of frequent pastor changes in the diocese as well as the sadness and division that they believe

have been created with the papal motu proprio *Traditiones Custodiae* which restricts the celebration of the preconciliar Latin Mass.

Nearly all attendees expressed the need for and the importance of human connection — especially for those who feel forgotten or feel that they do not matter, such as single adults, single parents and the elderly, those who are divorced, who have been in jail or prison, or who identify as LGBTQ. Said one attendee, “We have to not just make a place for them, but really make them understand and feel that they are a crucial part of the Church.”

2.2 How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? Whose voices are currently not being heard?

Attendees identified the following individuals as those not being heard:

- widows, widowers, and the homebound and those with special needs;
- those suffering with mental illnesses, with addictions and substance abuse disorders;
- youth (both the very young and those in high school) and young adults;
- the poor and those who live in poorer parts of towns;
- prisoners and those recently released from prison;
- Traditionalists (understood as those who have a deep appreciation for and attraction to the preconciliar Latin Mass) with regard to liturgy and sacred music;
- and, those who have questions regarding their sexual orientation.

Attendees expressed a need for the Church to speak the truth and to be clear about Church teaching while also being open to receiving those who are struggling and suffering. This is especially true regarding the teaching on gender and sexual orientation as too many who struggle with same sex attraction do not feel welcome in our churches. Expressed as a deep frustration by several attendees is the belief that those in leadership in our church are not teaching the “hard truths of our Catholic faith as much as they could, especially in defense of life.”

Several attendees shared their experience of being challenged by the sense in the Catholic Church that if you are not perfect, you are not welcome and will be excluded from the faith. The observation was offered that accepting people “where they are” while simultaneously encouraging others to live a moral and faithful life is a challenge faced by all Christians.

Finally, it was expressed that it will continue to be essential to listen to the voices of those who have left the Church and to sincerely ask them why they have left and then attend to their concerns, their questions, and their hurt. Most agreed that this is a very important step as we consider evangelization in our world.

2.3 How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?

Many attendees said that the liturgy of the Mass was central to their life of faith and felt empowered by the grace they encountered in order to bring light to the world. They receive strength from the Mass to be faithful to the Christian life. Many attendees brought up the

importance of the liturgical calendar. It was pointed out that the liturgical year brings a sense of rhythm to one's prayer life. Additionally, it brings unity amongst the Christian faithful when we all celebrate the same feasts at the same time.

A number expressed the need to understand more deeply the meaning of the Mass and the sacraments. There was strong sentiment of the need to “teach people how to pray the liturgy.” Perhaps providing “teaching Masses” was one suggestion on how to educate people about the liturgy. Others mentioned the importance of liturgies which engage and inspire the faithful and are not stale. Many expressed their appreciation for clergy who can explain the Scriptures well and connect them to daily life in homilies. Some also mentioned the danger of not connecting attendance at liturgy with their daily life.

The significant role of good, quality music at Mass was brought up by numerous attendees, particularly with a focus on the need for reverent and beautiful music.

Many attendees pointed out how important it is to pray throughout the week to bring their children to Mass and to emphasize daily prayer within the family as the domestic church. One person pointed out that “prayer takes effort — it's like building a muscle; it takes hard work and effort. In our culture, we want everything to come easy. Encouragement on prayer is important — that it can be challenging but well worth it. Prayer is essential, especially in a busy work-a-day world.” A common sentiment was the expressed need to find more silence in life in order to foster prayer. Some pointed to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in their parish as a means to find that silence.

According to some, physical manifestations of our faith, such as Eucharistic processions, are important to bringing back God into public consciousness.

2.4 How is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What areas of mission are we neglecting?

Many attendees pointed to the primary mission of the church as the salvation of souls, “to get to heaven and to bring as many souls as possible with us.” Essential to this and to every part of the mission of the Church is prayer and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Many agreed that prayer especially is an essential element in evangelization and our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Attendees also expressed a desire and need for Catholics to have a deeper knowledge and understanding of our Christian faith. It was stressed that as important as the learning is, the inviting of those we may not understand or appreciate is especially so. This invitation must include opportunities to serve others and to care for those who do not feel welcome. As important as our prayer and liturgies and teachings are we must be made more ready to receive others, to listen and to be in true conversation and dialogue.

Many attendees stressed that the core mission of the church is to take the Gospel to our world — especially to our young and again to those who do not feel welcome by any faith or Christian denomination.

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Examples of those with whom we could be more intentional in sharing the Gospel:

- parents who are trying to share the faith with their children;
- youth and young adults who are so heavily influenced by negative messages and behaviors in our culture;
- immigrants and refugees;
- those who are struggling with gender identity questions;
- the incarcerated;
- those who suffer in the aftermath of abortion;
- those who suffer with addictions;
- and people in our pews every week but who are disengaged with the faith and the Gospel call to evangelize and serve.

In many of the discussions there was identified a need for a greater understanding of the privilege and gift of being baptized and the responsibility of those of us who are baptized to carry the message of love and care and the truth of Jesus Christ to the world. To evangelize effectively we must be a humble people who know all are loved by God ... no exceptions.

Specific suggestions made by attendees to grow our awareness of what it means to be missionary disciples are:

- help all in the church to understand that we have a prophetic role in the church to proclaim the Gospel of “Good News” to all with our words and our actions;
- truly live the Gospel and witness what it means to love all unconditionally as Jesus teaches us;
- encourage our priests and deacons to offer practical and concrete suggestions of what this kind of love can look like in their preaching;
- be careful to avoid a clericalist mentality which overemphasizes the role of clergy;
- and teach that to be pro-life cannot mean only being concerned about the unborn, but standing for the dignity of every human person and denouncing all forms of injustice.

2.5 What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations? What do we share and how do we journey together?

Many attendees pointed out concrete instances of the shared relationship Catholic Christians have with other Christians throughout our diocese, especially through joint prayer activities and joint outreach to those in need. Examples included: National Day of Prayer, St. Vincent de Paul Societies’ mission endeavors, prolife endeavors such as the March for Life and Women’s Care Center, prayer group for pregnant moms, giving trees in parishes at Christmas, Easter egg hunt at Easter.

These events allow Catholic Christians to be in relationship with other Christians. It was pointed out that interfaith dialogue is important to strengthen relationships with other local churches. Finding similarities brings peace. Several attendees emphasized that our primary similarity is our relationship with Jesus. Focusing on the similarities builds bridges and reduces the mentality of us vs. them. Many pointed to the need to take advantage of the Sacred Scriptures as common ground needed to bridge the gulf between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians.

It was also pointed out that attendance of non-Catholic Christians at Catholic weddings or funerals, which happens frequently in our diocese, is a fertile opportunity to expose non-Catholics to the beauty of the Catholic liturgy, and it was further pointed out that clergy can especially be a welcoming bridge in these situations.

The relationships built among the school families is also an invaluable way of building bridges with non-Catholic families. It is not uncommon for non-Catholic young children to seek to enter the Catholic Church due to attending a Catholic school.

There were a number of recommendations of ways of building our relationships with other Christian traditions. Some attendees emphasized the importance of inviting non-Catholics to special masses especially during the Triduum or even inviting people to the stations of the cross.

It was suggested by several attendees to share events with geographically close churches. For instance, Catholic parishes could support or share fundraisers with other Christian churches that are geographically close. Or the Catholic parish could make sure to extend invitations to Christian churches to their fundraisers, non-spiritual events, etc. and if the invite is returned to make sure to attend.

Many attendees pointed out that often we feel ill-equipped to share the faith with our non-Catholic friends. Some noted that they have non-Catholic friends, but do not make the effort to witness to their Catholic faith. It was added that it's intimidating when Protestants are able to quote Sacred Scriptures better than Catholics. Some suggested the need for Catholics to be confident even if you don't have the answers — you can always say, let me find out the best way to answer that question.

Some related painful experiences with non-Catholics, especially in the workplace, verbally attacking the Catholic faith and trying to draw Catholics away from the Church. This seemed to be especially a concern of Hispanics who attended these sessions.

2.6 How is authority and governance exercised within our local Church (diocese/parish)? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice?

There was a general sense that the laity want to take co-responsibility for the diocese/parish, but there were also expressions of not knowing how that should be accomplished. It was pointed out that the priest is not the Church alone, we all make up the Church and finding ways to engage the congregation is important.

Many expressed their desire to assist their priests, especially to take the burden off in administration, so that priest can focus even more on his spiritual tasks. Many did point to parish councils and other parish structures as examples of co-responsibility being put into practice at the parish level. However, there was a recognition that it is usual for most parishes that a small group of parishioners volunteer for everything. The challenge is getting the majority more involved.

Regarding the diocese, people expressed their desire to be close to the Bishop. Many expressed how important transparency is in the governance of the Church.

There was a recognition of the hierarchical nature of the Church. However, some expressed resentment about that, thinking that the Church should be governed in a more egalitarian way. Others find stability in the hierarchical governance structure of the Church. A number expressed the view that women should hold more leadership roles in the Church.

2.7 What is our experience of celebrating the Eucharist? What are some ways our parishes and diocese can place greater emphasis on realizing the infinite value of the Eucharist within our Christian life?

The participants in these listening sessions clearly expressed a tremendous devotion to and need for the Eucharist. Many described the nourishment they receive from Holy Communion and the closeness to God and the joy and peace they receive. Some spoke of the connection between receiving Holy Communion and going back out into the world and becoming Eucharistic in the home.

An overwhelming number of participants expressed how much more catechesis is needed on the Mass and the Eucharist, especially to get people to see that the celebration of the Eucharist is much deeper than merely fulfilling an obligation. Distress was expressed that national surveys indicate that a large portion of Catholics do not believe that the Eucharist is truly the body and blood of Jesus.

Some brought up the need for increased reverence within the liturgy and in receiving Holy Communion, pointing out that receiving Holy Communion should not be casual. Attendees pointed out how important reverence is within Mass both as a way of glorifying God, but also as an external means of expressing who we are receiving in the Eucharist. Suggestions such as providing communion rails for those who wish to kneel for communion and encouraging receiving on the tongue were two things that a number of attendees brought up as means to show greater reverence for the Eucharist.

Some also mentioned the need for increased catechesis on worthy reception of Holy Communion and for connecting the worthy reception of Holy Communion with the practice of receiving the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Finally, many pointed to their experience of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as a pivotal spiritual practice in their lives and encouraged parishes to find ways to engage more parishioners in this practice.