

Diocese of Lake Charles

Diocesan Synthesis



For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission

INTRODUCTION

The two fundamental questions presented by the Synod of Bishops for the purpose of this process were, "How do we journey together as a synodal Church?" and "What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?" The diocesan phase by encouraging parishes to disseminate within their parish territory a series of reflection questions rooted in the two fundamental questions under the headings Communion, Participation and Mission. Leadership in the Diocese of Lake Charles requested that each parish within the Diocese encourage the formation of various Listening Sessions where everyone within the territorial boundary of the parish would have the opportunity to share their thoughts using the questions as discussion starters. Those who were unable to attend the Listening Sessions or did not feel comfortable with group sharing were invited to submit their thoughts in written form. The diocesan phase culminated in a diocesan listening session which took place on March 26, 2022.

It is important to begin by stating that the Diocese of Lake Charles has endured several natural disasters in recent years: two back-to-back hurricanes for which recovery is ongoing, a winter storm, a major flood and a devastating tornado. Each of these natural disasters occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMMUNION

Participants discussed many factors that are weakening interpersonal relationships—the busyness of life, the distractions of social media, cell phone use, computer and television screens. An apparent disregard for and/or lack of knowledge of Catholic Dogma and teaching among both practicing and inactive Catholics was also mentioned as a factor weakening communion within the Church. Participants welcomed whatever the Church can do to assist in the strengthening of interpersonal relationships to help build up families and communities. Organized social and charitable-outreach activities offered through the church were praised and suggested as a means to build relationships and encourage communion.

Though Covid restrictions significantly added to the weakening of communion among faithful Catholics, efforts by the clergy to reach out to parishioners were gratefully and warmly received. Participants expressed that the Eucharistic Processions in their neighborhoods provided a sense of connection to the Church and to each other. Even non-Catholics who witnessed the processions were moved by them. There was a deep sense of longing and sorrow for being unable to attend Mass and receive the Eucharist. Masses offered by Bishop Provost on television were of great comfort, and many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to hear his homilies each Sunday.

Many expressed a longing for church leaders to restore confidence in the Church by taking a clear, strong stance on vital Catholic values, particularly on issues of morality and the basic tenets of Catholicism, such as belief in the Real Presence and opposition to abortion. At the same time, some expressed concern about the clergy sexual scandals and transparency in the Church at large.

Division among some Church leaders was a concern frequently noted by participants. The faithful expressed a desire for guidance on how to navigate the many and complex issues openly disputed by some Bishops and the Pope. Participants expressed a need for leadership to educate and illuminate, not ignore or engage in church politics. They asked for the Church to speak with one voice.

The importance of cultural diversity was also emphasized by participants. They recognized diocesan efforts to welcome, provide a sense of community, and care for the spiritual and sacramental needs of the Hispanic community. Some expressed a desire to see more initiatives of this sort on the parish level. They also mentioned the value of the small but growing Filipino community and Vietnamese community, both of which meet monthly for fellowship and prayer.

These listening sessions and the experience of synodality was a source of great joy for all participants, who expressed that they felt needed and appreciated in this historic process. Some suggested that routinely asking parishioners for their suggestions and opinions either directly to the pastor or through the Pastoral and Finance Councils could help connect parishioners to their parish and increase a sense of community.

Participants also spoke of communion in terms of ecumenism. Many felt that the best avenue for ecumenism was in charitable works of mercy, which is seen so clearly at Catholic Charities and in our recovery from natural disasters. They expressed a warm sense of shared mission in doing the work of Christ together. There was positive feedback on joint prayer and activities such as the National Day of Prayer. Many expressed that with society becoming more secularized there is a need to support each other in our Christian beliefs and practices.

PARTICIPATION

Participants frequently listed the many opportunities they have for participation in the life of their parish. Involvement in religious organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, the Knights of Peter Claver, and Catholic Daughters; retreats such as ACTS; or in charitable organizations like the local Catholic Charities or food banks, were described as giving a sense of community within the Church and a sense of shared mission.

The participation of young people was also discussed. The Diocesan Youth Conference (DYC), Teen ACTS Retreat, Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) and working at Abraham's Tent and Catholic Charities were provided as examples. Some expressed the need to train ministers to help parishes that are struggling in youth ministry and to make religious formation relevant to their experiences as young people in the world today.

It was also suggested that parishes should encourage parishioners to use the gifts and professional expertise that they have gained from their work and life experience. Parishes can call upon them to use their experience and knowledge of their profession or trade in service to the community. The use of these gifts and talents is seen in parish Pastoral and Finance Councils.

Many from the diocese's historic black parishes participated in listening sessions and submitted ideas and suggestions in written form. A major concern raised was the need for vocations to diocesan priesthood from these communities. It was also emphasized that

the Church should be aware of the experience of being black and Catholic in the United States and research was provided to offer insight into this experience.

Many participants expressed a desire for more reverence during liturgies. There was a concern that too many people see the Mass as a casual social gathering, and there were many requests for teachings and explanations of the Liturgy of the Eucharist as a way to help Catholics and converts more actively engage the liturgy. Also expressed was a desire for improved catechesis on transubstantiation, more emphasis on preparation for reception of the Eucharist, prayers before and after Mass, and fasting before Mass.

MISSION

Participants mentioned a number of successful missionary outreach programs as well as a number of ways in which there are opportunities for more community outreach. The move by the Church to have parishes assign a mentor couple during marriage preparation to discuss relevant concerns of married life was mentioned as an important form of welcoming young couples into the community, particularly those who have been away from the Church. It was noted that more programs for young families, especially those with infants, young children, and/or many children, could help missionary outreach to these young families and help to strengthen relationships among them.

A concern was expressed for the poor who are living on the financial margins and are not parishioners. Particularly during a time when there have been several natural disasters, it can be difficult for parishes to extend their resources beyond the needs of their parishioners, and those who turn to the Church in their time of need are often directed to Catholic Charities. Participants spoke of the need for parish initiatives to address these issues on a local level as a means to strengthen direct outreach to the poor and others suffering financial difficulties.

Participants also addressed a need to be welcoming to strangers and to Catholics who may have stopped coming to Mass or who, because of their marital status or some other reason, are unable to receive Holy Communion. Also noted was a need for outreach to those who are newly initiated into the Church and those who have attended retreats, had

conversions, and seek to grow in their understanding of the faith. Many participants also addressed the need to ensure spiritual care for the elderly and homebound. This concern extended also to widows, widowers, and nursing home residents.

Participants spoke of the need for the church (locally, nationally, and beyond) to be more vocal in speaking out against social injustices of all types: abortion, immigration, death penalty, the general decline of Christian charity in civil discourse, etc.

A deep respect and admiration was expressed for the religious in the community, and participants expressed a desire to make known throughout the diocese the full extent of their missionary work and impact on our community.