

2021-2023 SYNOD ON SYNODALITY DIOCESE OF KANSAS CITY-ST. JOSEPH SUMMARY

The Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph approached the diocesan phase of the synod using the principle of subsidiarity. We assigned Captains within key offices of The Chancery to act as point people to identify, encourage and follow parishes, schools and other groups throughout the process. Our diocesan Co-contacts hosted an information session in November 2021 to activate our Captains and get them started on identifying team leaders within their service areas. For example, our Vicar General for Pastoral Affairs was responsible for activating our parish pastors while our Superintendent of Schools was responsible for activating our diocesan school principals.

The diocesan Co-contacts supported the Captains in activating our parishes, ministries and other groups to host synodal discussions by providing an online tool kit for key representatives of each team. Group leaders were encouraged to approach each Listening & Discernment Session using our suggested format but were also given the flexibility to customize their session to their group's needs.

The toolkit included a Facilitator's Guide and a Sample Session Outline to make it as easy as possible for our facilitators to lead the session. Materials for the attendees were also available as downloadable files in the toolkit including a session-opening video, synod themes worksheet and printed prayer cards, all available in English and Spanish. [*Appendix A*]

We structured our diocesan phase around the 10 Synodal Themes listed in the *Vademecum*. Each group was asked to vote on their top three themes and the three most commonly selected were discussed as a group. All attendees were also given the option to provide additional feedback on anything that was not discussed as a group through an online feedback form. [*Appendix B*] All 10 themes were discussed at some level throughout the diocese.

The online form additionally served as an outlet for those who were unable to attend a Listening & Discernment session due to illness, transportation limitations or other barriers.

We monitored participation through an online Team Summary Form [*Appendix C*] and collected input using an online Synod Summary Form. [*Appendix D*]

While our toolkit was internal for facilitators, we developed a public facing section on our diocesan website where individuals could link to the online input form, download handouts and view video from our bishop explaining the synod (available in English and Spanish), and see a list of public Listening & Discernment sessions planned throughout the diocese. The website included the Prayer for the Synod as well as links to the global Synod website. An Executive Summary of this document will also be posted on this web page, with an option to request the full 10-page summary. Visit kcsjatholic.org/synod2021-2023.

Listening & Discernment

Parish participation levels were low with just 27% of all parishes hosting a Listening & Discernment session of any size. Our school participation was extremely strong with more than 70% of our diocesan schools hosting a Listening & Discernment session with either staff, students or a combination of both. Group sizes ranged from four people to 350, representing parishes, schools and outside groups located in urban, suburban and rural areas of the diocese. An infographic highlighting participation can be found in *Appendix E*.

We kicked off our diocesan phase on October 17, 2021 with Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Kansas City, celebrated by Bishop James Johnston. We set the date for Listening & Discernment sessions to begin on December 1. We used those 6 ½ weeks to activate our Diocesan Captains and Team



Leaders. Our deadline to submit input for our diocesan phase was set for April 7, 2022, though we accepted input well into the first week of May by request.

The timing of the synod presented some challenges for many in our diocese. Launching in October placed us on the brink of the busy winter holiday season, complicated further by increasing transmission of the Covid-19 virus in our community through early February. Coming out of the winter surge, we were at the beginning of the busy Lenten and Easter seasons. While 16 percent of our diocese's Listening and Discernment sessions were offered virtually/hybrid*, most groups waited until it was safe to gather in person. We believe all of these factors contributed to the low participation rate of our diocesan parishes.

Our Superintendent of Schools hosted the very first Listening & Discernment session on December 4, incorporating it into an already scheduled planning day for diocesan school principals. We believe this greatly contributed to the schools' high rate of participation since our principals experienced the synodal process early and could take that knowledge back to their buildings to activate a synod process that would work best for their school communities. Our priests met as a group on April 7, so many were hosting synods without similar prior experience.

In reading through the summaries sent to us by the groups that held Listening & Discernment sessions a tone of discontent and concern is certainly present, though it is well balanced with bright spots throughout highlighting strong devotion to the Mass and the sacraments, outreach to those on the margins, and a universal desire to welcome more to celebrate in an authentic, Catholic way. The comments from the youth in our diocese are especially encouraging and profound.

We have identified action items led by the Holy Spirit in our conclusion. It is our intent that responding with these action items will continue the synodal process and encourage the faithful in our diocese to continue to express their needs and desires in living out their faith.

*Based on the 56 groups that completed the Team Summary Form.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK | TEN THEMES OF THE SYNOD

Feedback is listed based on the number of groups that selected each topic for discussion in their Listening & Discernment sessions.

#1 TOPIC: LISTENING

Slightly more adults than youth chose this category, but both were well represented. This topic was the great equalizer with discussion by nearly every group that participated, cutting across age, profession, ethnicity and those who may be considered to be on the margins. There are strong feelings related to this topic from both adults and youth in our diocese.

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- A commonly shared belief that the laity, young people, women, minorities (especially non-white Catholics), marginalized, and those on the periphery are not listened to in the Church. This was expressed across all age demographics, schools, parishes and non-Church related groups. A small number of the responses indicated that there is space for minorities and those on the margins to be heard through prayer and engaging with parish ministries and events.
- With a significant number of young people involved in our diocesan synod, their voice came through loud and clear. Young people don't believe they are listened to, but feel they have important thoughts to offer and want to be asked what they think within the Church.
- Upon reflection, many groups recognized where they could improve their own listening skills – paying more attention to the homily during Mass, actively listening to students and youth, listening to hear/understand not respond, seeking out opportunities to listen to those who don't usually have a voice (homeless, elderly, youth, minorities, persons with same sex attraction and other sexual identity concerns [identified as "LGBTQ" by our participants] and non-Catholics), being present, setting aside

ego, not giving in to fear, finding a shared interest with someone you disagree with, putting down defenses and making listening an priority.

- We can listen to God through our priests, religious, the Holy Spirit, the Mass, Adoration, in prayer, and in unexpected ways like dreams and the people God places in our lives. Prayer tools like the Rosary, novenas, and the *lectio divina* are all great ways to practice listening.
- Outside distractions make it difficult to be a good listener – electronics, social media, every day “noise” and busyness.
- To be good listeners, we must set aside the human tendency to want to be “right.”
- Listening is closely associated with being welcoming to all. This was a commonly shared belief of all groups participating.
- Concerns related to the lack of women in leadership roles at the parish level led to a shared perception that male clergy at all levels do not listen to the faithful and tend to prioritize the voices of those who are heavily engaged or give more financially to the parish. There is a shared impression that the unique gifts and talents of women are not appreciated or recognized.
- More compassionate teaching is needed in the church – listening to those on the margins, persons with same sex attraction and other sexual identity concerns, youth, women, minorities – love first, then teach.
- Listening without action causes people to believe they are not heard.

#2 TOPIC: SPEAKING OUT

There were slightly more groups of youth participants who chose this topic, but it was the second most popular for both adult and youth. The stronger participation from our young faithful may indicate a stronger comfort level with this concept than the others. This topic definitely resonated with those on the margins including women, non-Catholics, youth, persons with same sex attraction and other sexual identity concerns and those generally feeling disenfranchised from the Church. Respondents approached this topic from two distinct perspectives: how the Church speaks out in defense of Church teaching and the truths of our Faith, and how individuals feel about speaking out publicly and to Church leadership.

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- The Church can do more to speak courageously in defense of the teachings of the Catholic Church. We should not be afraid to cause others to “be offended by the truth.” They would like priests to be more courageous from the pulpit and all leadership to speak more boldly. They would like the hierarchy (bishops and priests) to listen to the Holy Spirit over trends and movements in the culture.
- Church leadership outside of the parish community should be more accessible; there is a desire for greater access to the bishop and our priests.
- Bishops and priests are most qualified to speak out because they have been ordained by God. There is a strong awareness of authority and their role in speaking out on behalf of the Church. The flip side of that is that some feel that Church authority is not diverse enough and does not create a culture where those who are not in positions of authority feel comfortable speaking up.
- The Catholic Church needs to spend more time speaking out about what it is for instead of what it is against.
- The Church can invite those who may be less likely to speak out and provide opportunities for safe sharing and discussion.
- Someone who speaks out and is not treated with compassion or respect may not give the Church a second chance.
- Participants believe they lack the education and confidence to intelligently answer questions or defend the Faith if they do speak out.
- People don’t speak out because they fear being judged. Other barriers to speaking out include fear of losing a job, retaliation, violence, rejection, confronting someone who is more powerful, offending others, or being “cancelled.”

- Requirements for speaking out include trust, strong personal relationships, validation, feeling valued as a person, being surrounded by others who agree with you, confidence, passion, encouragement, and sometimes only as a last resort.
- There is limited trust in local media, especially from younger generations.
- A small number of respondents feel there is a need for more opportunities to speak out – town halls, large group meetings and other venues for discussion.

#3 TOPIC: CELEBRATION

This topic had quite a bit more engagement from the adults who participated, and respondents closely followed the questions provided under this theme, primarily, “How can we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?” This was a topic in which our parish communities seemed to feel more ownership, rather than directing all of their comments to diocesan, national or global leadership. For parishes with schools, there is a lot of great brainstorming and ideas developing to better engage youth and their families. This topic was especially popular for those filling out an individual form online.

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- A desire to do more to attract families and younger people (youth, teens, young adults) to Mass.
- Better educate the faithful on why we do the things we do during Mass to increase engagement and understanding. Christmas, Easter and holy days are seen as high points during the year and there is a desire to emulate that feeling more often throughout the liturgical year.
- Homilies could be more engaging, instructive, relatable. Many expressed that they don’t learn anything or understand the homilies they hear during Mass.
- People are still feeling disconnected following the pandemic restrictions and social isolation. Discussion called for more fellowship, opportunities to gather together (and not just for food).
- Youth generally equate Mass with low energy, lacking excitement, engagement, and relevance to their lives. They are engaged by the music of the liturgy and when they have job to do – serving, bringing up the gifts, reading, etc. Several groups suggested that children’s Masses be held more than once a year (during Catholic Schools Week).
- A strong call to invite others to participate in the Mass – that there is a community of people out there who are just waiting to be invited. Some also shared that they can invite others through example and sharing what they love about the Mass.
- Church teaching and rules prevent some from feeling welcome at Mass or from participating in sacramental celebrations.
- Some participants see a conflict between the obligation to attend Mass and being excited, engaged and welcome/invited/wanted and appreciated.

#4 TOPIC: COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

This topic was primarily discussed by the adults who participated, with just a few of the student groups choosing this topic. Discussion centered around inclusion related to a variety of characteristics with the ultimate goal of welcoming more to return to the Mass. This topic had about the same level of interest as the next two topics, of Authority & Participation and Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission.

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- The need to be more welcoming to those who have stopped coming to Mass regularly or altogether.
- The effect that the Covid pandemic has had on Mass attendance. Several parish groups noted that the number of people attending has not begun to return to the levels from prior to the pandemic years.
- The need to reach out to people on the margins including people who have been hurt by the Church in order to help them return and know that they belong and are wanted. Specifically, invitations made by

Catholics stepping out of their comfort zone, listening to those outside the Church and to Catholics who are no longer active, having conversations and making a concrete invitation for them to return.

- Meet basic needs first and then make the invitation to return to Mass. There was a comment that aptly summed up these sentiments: “a Church that is seen to beckon everyone is necessary for the evangelization of the world, and for reconciliation with those who have left the Church.”
- Comments pointing out the commonly mistaken notion that simply being divorced put oneself outside of the possibility of participation in the life of the Church, citing non-practicing Catholics who once divorced thought they were excommunicated and/or could never receive communion again.
- The variety of ways that the local Church is perceived to fail to accompany people who feel that they are outside of the life of our local Church for a variety of reasons – living with a disability, persons with same sex attraction and other sexual identity concerns, those who cohabit without being married, those in a second marriage without having obtained an annulment, the poor, the elderly, etc.
- Most seemed to think that the local Church rejects those living outside of the life of our local Church; either by the character of her teachings or the lack of welcome and acceptance coming from leaders of the Church and even some members.

#5 TOPIC: SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

With the exception of two student groups, this topic was exclusively chosen by the adults participating. Given that responsibility is largely associated with being an adult, this isn't surprising. This topic had about the same level of interest as the previous listed theme Companions on the Journey and the next theme Authority & Participation. This theme was one of the three chosen by our priests to discuss (along with Dialogue in Church and Society and Discerning and Deciding).

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- The most frequently mentioned theme concerned discipleship, specifically missionary discipleship. A significant number of those who spoke about this mentioned the need to go beyond the ordinary parish population to share the good news with those outside the Church in the wider community.
- Several challenges to this being a reality included a lack of formation in discipleship, too much time/money/energy spent maintaining buildings and existing structures, not enough priests to go beyond maintenance, not enough laity empowered to be missionaries in their own community, competing worldviews (even in the Church), opposition to sharing the Gospel truth in a culture that claims that religion/faith should be private and not spoken about in public.
- Some used the language of activation to describe the need to wake up our fellow Catholics to the urgent need to live our baptism in a way that includes mission/sharing our faith in deeds and words. This was also described through observation that many parishes seem to show a lack of conviction that the mission of the Church is to evangelize and heal. This was described as “dormant” parishes where Sunday Mass checks off the box for many and there is lukewarmness, especially in relation to missionary activity.
- Several also mentioned the importance of personal prayer as a starting point for mission.
- There was some mention of concern that the places where the synod preparation documents mentioned missionary activity the language describing it read more like political activity rather than salvific mission.
- Several mentioned that they think that the Church has discouraged sharing the gospel message because overall we are concerned about what others think, one even went so far as to say that they have been encouraged by the Church to keep silent about their beliefs in their own parish and in the world.
- As a strategy for engaging in mission some suggested that the Church needs to be more welcoming of seekers and focus on accompaniment. An additional comment stated that the mission starts in the home, in our neighborhoods and communities related to how we interact with people daily, challenging us to be more inviting, welcoming, friendly, etc. with the people in our life who need Jesus Christ.

- There was a real divide revealed among the laity who participated in this process regarding authentic Church teaching. Some observed that they see a general lukewarmness in the Church, that the Church is afraid to act, that there is a fear of people leaving or not joining (because of hard teachings) and so the perception is we do not preach the truth. Others took this synodal process as an opportunity to speak about issues of the day like rejecting the patriarchal structure of the Church through ordaining women as priests, allowing (so-called) “gay” marriage, accepting the “gay” lifestyle by allowing active homosexuals to lead in ministry (and teaching in Catholic schools), and other issues of this kind. One person focused his/her comments on how the Church in America only seems to be interested in salvation and the issue of abortion. In contrast to this, one stated that we are neglecting our mission because of a lack of willingness to preach the true teachings of the Church.
- There was a similar divide revealed in perceptions about Young Adults. Some commented that they think the vast majority of them strongly favor social justice and accepting persons with same sex attraction and other sexual identity concerns (without inviting them to any sort of conversion). While others strongly think that the reason many young adults leave the Church is due to the rejection of tradition and Bishops who fail to teach orthodox faith.
- There were some comments about how the parish council (a synodal structure that already exists) can and should encourage and support apostolic and missionary activity in parishes.

#6 TOPIC: AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

This topic resonated much more strongly with the adults who participated than the youth. There were especially strong opinions from those answering the individual form online. Quite a few felt that this topic crossed over with several others on the list.

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- Many comments were made about the voice of the laity being heard, especially by clergy. One comment well sums up this input: on all levels the Church needs to dialogue with the laity in a collaborative manner and work to uphold the voice of the laity.
- Several parish groups pointed out a desire to eliminate the hierarchical model of Church organization entirely and replace it with a variety of ideas like synodal and collegial leadership of the laity over and above the clergy. Women’s ordination was also called for in these settings.
- Some pointed out the existing model for authority in the Church is given by the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) which speaks of the clergy and laity working together within their spheres of competency for a common goal. Pastoral councils are mentioned in these settings as existing models for synodality that function well, with laity having a voice and the pastor having the final say. Some mentioned that most members don’t know who is on the pastoral (or other) council(s) and therefore don’t know who to speak with about ideas or representation.
- Concern about the concept of synods as a possible avenue to a Protestant model of “Church by Committee” with things constantly changing based on the whims of the majority or even the vocal minority.
- Concern about pastoral councils not knowing what they are doing, not having a spiritual focus, and parishes that don’t have a pastoral council at all.
- Individual responses ranged across the above spectrum with some making statements asking for the ordination of women and less talk about abortion from our bishop, to some who expressed a need for less participation by the laity in the liturgy and asking for even stronger statements from bishops about abortion.

#7 TOPIC: DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND IN SOCIETY

This was another topic that seemed to resonate more strongly with adult participants. This theme was one of the three chosen by our priests to discuss (along with Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission and Discerning and Deciding).

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- Many of the comments from discernment sessions on this topic focused on internal Church conflicts and issues.
- There is a need for a social space for dialogue beyond *The Catholic Key* publication or social media, neither of which are perceived as facilitating dialogue or expression by the faithful.
- Comments about dialogue with society focused on the need to work towards healing rifts and misconceptions.
- Healing from historical wounds like racism and clergy sexual abuse was also mentioned. Defining comments included: we can and should make efforts to work against economic and racial segregation in Kansas City, especially among parishes, and in the wake of the scandal, Church leaders cannot seem to recover their moral authority with society.
- Input from priests included the need to evangelize through dialogue with society, the need to become a more listening Church, spend more time with sinners, need to dialogue with people of no faith, make space for those with questions (prior to RCIA?).
- Concern was expressed over placing the need for dialogue over respecting and maintaining our Catholic faith as some things are open for discussion and change and other things like doctrines on faith and morals are not.
- Some expressed a need for more dialogue with the marginalized in society.

#8 TOPIC: DISCERNING AND DECIDING

This topic resonated more with the adult participants but did have participation from four groups of students. This theme was one of the three chosen by our priests to discuss (along with Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission and Dialogue in Church and Society).

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- Many comments focused on decisions being made “top-down” or by an “in-crowd”.
- Some commented on a perception that there is not enough accountability or transparency in decision making.
- Some stated that they do not think that the Church does a good job of discernment, especially group discernment involving the laity.
- Priest input included some concern about a proper understanding of synodality and discernment, seeing this as an opportunity to listen better to the faithful and to pay attention to what people are interested in, and some questioning if this is going to make any difference.

#9 TOPIC: ECUMENISM

While among the seventh most popular overall, this topic was among the top five chosen by youth/students that participated. There were a slightly higher number of adults who discussed this topic, but that included younger adults, e.g. Seminarians.

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- Some students expressed misunderstandings about the nature of baptism, and participation in Holy Communion by non-Catholics.
- Some voiced positive ecumenical expressions like Christian sports programs for youth, shared mission activity like food pantries and support for crisis pregnancies and pro-life action.

- Many students expressed the need for the Church to listen to other denominations. They also frequently expressed the need to seek similarities rather than seeking conflict.
- Some observed that many teens today don't talk about religion/faith openly in public because it is so discouraged by the general culture.

#10 TOPIC: FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

This topic received the least amount of discussion of the 10 themes. Discussion on this topic was equal between adults and youth groups.

Some of the more well represented themes include:

- Almost all of the comments in this section were people's ideas about things the Church could do differently, rather than the specific theme related to forming ourselves.
- Some comments about synodality focused on negative perceptions of the Church rather than this theme.
- From this input there does not seem to be a clear understanding of what synodality really is among those who contributed comments to this theme.

CONCLUSION

In listening to the voices of our diocese expressed in this synod, and discerning where the Holy Spirit is guiding us, we identified more than a dozen action items for consideration as we seek to respond from a Curial level. The following ideas will be explored in the coming months:

- Establish a Diocesan Youth Council involving student representatives from diocesan elementary and high schools, and parish youth groups.
- Identify new opportunities to share Church teaching; debunk myths and misunderstanding. Be bold in addressing topics of high interest, cultural relevance. Help the faithful to truly understand the "why" behind the truths of our faith.
- Establish a Rural Life Office representing the unique needs of our rural parishes. Assist in engaging volunteers, mobilizing outreach efforts and adhering to certain diocesan protocols.
- Tool kit of liturgical tools – calendar, saint feast days, cultural activities and celebrations, ideas to attract different generations to the Mass, homily prompts and resources, historical evidence that emphasizes current Church teaching.
- Encouragement and incentives for parishes to establish more leadership roles for women (parish council, ministries, sacristan, acolyte, etc.).
- Diocesan Catholic Key magazine feature called "Synod Sound Off" in which experts address popular topics from the Listening & Discernment sessions, e.g. Women in ministry addressed by a priest and a religious sister.
- Engage the Marriage Tribunal and Office of Marriage and Family Life in clearing up the common misperceptions around divorce. Develop outreach and education to the divorced and re-married to invite them back to the Church and with the Tribunal, help them to explore the truth of their marital (or canonical) status in the Church, when possible.
- Establish a renewed effort to inform Catholics about what we are doing to accompany individuals on the margins. Reemphasize education about the authentic teaching regarding both the situations of such individuals and the best pastoral response for accompanying them.
- Engage parish leaders to learn about and to implement The Clear Path to Discipleship.
- Reach the faithful with encouragement, tools, and support to live their baptismal calling to engage in missionary activity in their daily lives, including Every Catholic a Disciple Maker starting in Fall 2022.

- Explain more widely and clearly authentic Church teaching on issues of the day. Ensure that existing outreach to those with same-sex attraction, sexual identity concerns, clinically diagnosed gender dysphoria and other similar needs are promoted and explained.
- Conduct a review of pastoral council norms across the diocese. Provide resources for pastoral councils to support spiritual growth and focus for the members. Provide support and guidance for parishes to form a pastoral council if they do not currently have one.
- Address the need for regular “town hall” like meetings in parishes so that the parish and community (including non-Catholics) may dialogue about needs and perceptions; the end goal is a better understanding at the parish level and therefore better providing for the real needs of the local community.
- Develop a process/norms for regular parish town halls including a discussion guide informed by the synod topics or others given by our bishop. These would facilitate the desires expressed by many and foster deeper communion in parishes, allowing for opportunities and forums for more serious and thoughtful discussion.
- Encourage the value of small groups, especially for dialogue among parish members, as very fruitful ways to build real companionship and serve one another.
- Work towards greater participation and transparency in important decisions for the Church along the lines of the current approach to evaluating deaneries using the Meitler Study method.
- Create alliances with other denominations to gain a better understanding of one another.
- Offer formation/education diocese-wide on authentic ecumenism as this theme seems widely misunderstood.

We appreciate the opportunity to extend our synodal practices and participate in a global effort to listen and discern the hopes and concerns of the souls in our diocese. We believe this synod process will inspire more discussion and missionary work led by the Holy Spirit as we seek to live out our Diocesan Vision: *One Family, Restored in Christ, Equipped for Mission*.

Submitted in faith and charity,

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