



## **Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon – Synod Synopsis, 2022**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2021, Pope Francis called for dioceses throughout the world to participate in a global Synod on Synodality, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*.

At a Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on October 24, 2021, Archbishop Sample announced the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon's participation in the worldwide Synod called for by the Holy Father. The Archbishop appointed a Diocesan Synod Coordinator to help organize and encourage a robust participation in the Synod, and a Synod Steering Committee was formed. At the express desire of Archbishop Sample, prayer and adoration formed the foundation of Synod participation, and a diocesan-wide prayer campaign began, invoking the Holy Spirit to guide local participation in the Synod. Discernment gatherings (listening sessions) were organized at three levels: parish, vicariate (regional), and diocesan.

During the parish phase, pastors, with the help of pastoral council members and others, organized the Synod discernment sessions. Archbishop Sample insisted, insofar as it was possible, that each parish discernment session begin with a Eucharistic Holy Hour, during which participants were asked to pray over the discussion questions. Institutions, organizations, and other groups were also invited to organize discernment sessions during this phase. This included, but was not limited to, religious communities, apostolates, schools, social service agencies and people of other faiths who were interested in the good of the Catholic Church. During this phase, all were invited to participate in the Synod. Those who could not meet in person were invited to offer input in writing.

The vicariate (or regional) discernment sessions were organized by Area Vicars and Archdiocesan Pastoral Council representatives with the assistance of the Synod Steering Committee. These regional discernment sessions involved selected representatives from those who participated in the parish level discernment sessions.

The diocesan discernment period, directed by Archbishop Sample, involved members of the Presbyteral (Priests) Council, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, the Synod Steering Committee, and selected leaders.

Approximately 175 Synod discernment sessions took place in the Archdiocese of Portland. Around 2000 people total participated.

Below is a general outline of the timeline for Synod participation. Pastors, pastoral council chairpersons, religious superiors, apostolate directors, and Catholic leaders were invited and encouraged to attend a virtual workshop organized by the Synod Steering Committee. The

workshop explained and provided written materials to help guide local participation in the Synod.

### Synod Timeline

October 2021 through August 15, 2022 – Prayer Phase  
January 20, 2022 – Virtual Orientation Workshop  
February and March 2022 – Parish (and other groups) Participation Phase  
April and May 2022 – Vicariate (regional) Participation Phase  
June 2022 – Archdiocesan Discernment Phase  
July 2022 – Preparation of Report & Submission to U.S. Bishops  
August 15, 2022 – Conclusion of Local Participation in the Synod

The preparatory documents from the Vatican for the Synod on Synodality provided a fundamental question to help guide local churches through the synodal process: *A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?*

In the spirit of that fundamental question, the Archdiocese of Portland presented the following questions to participants for their prayerful reflection and discussion during the Synod:

- 1. What in the church fills me with life? How is the Holy Spirit working in my life to deepen my faith and inspire me to be a better disciple and witness of Christ’s love to others?**
- 2. As a community of believers, what experiences of the Catholic Church have brought joys or revealed wounds? And how can these experiences help us grow together in faith and offer the hope and healing of Christ to the greater community in which we live.**
- 3. As a Catholic community, we are expressly enjoined to invite others into a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ. When we dream about how best to accomplish this, what steps is the Holy Spirit inviting the Church in western Oregon to take?**

These questions invited the members of the Body of Christ to *recall their experiences, re-read these experiences in greater depth, and gather the fruits to share* and discern what paths the Holy Spirit is opening for the local Church. To help keep the goal of discernment at the forefront, the Archdiocese of Portland used the term *discernment sessions* to describe the Synodal gatherings organized by parishes, apostolates, religious communities and other groups.

The following is a list of key themes that emerged from the parish and vicariate discernment sessions:

### **Life-giving elements of the Church**

- The Eucharist and the Sacraments
- Community
- Catechesis
- Prayer and Spiritual Life
- Service
- Youth & Young Adults
- Evangelization & Outreach
- Faith Formation
- Spirit of Welcoming and Hospitality
- Universality & Cultural Diversity

### **Wounds that need attention & healing**

- Clergy sex abuse scandal
- Divisions in the Church
- Divorce, Remarriage, and the Annulment process
- The pandemic and the Church's response
- Youth not practicing their faith
- LGBTQ issues
- Role of women in the Church
- Unfriendly attitudes of some clergy

## ***LIFE-GIVING ELEMENTS OF THE CHURCH***

The Synod affirmed the Church is filled with elements that are life-giving for the faithful. Catholics desire to live their faith more fully and prayerfully, grounded in the Eucharist and the sacraments, with a strong sense of community that is united in Christ, service oriented, welcoming, culturally diverse, focused on evangelization, and bolstered by good catechesis and faith formation.

### **THE EUCHARIST AND THE SACRAMENTS**

*What fills me with life? Where have I seen the Holy Spirit at work?*

Across western Oregon, the most common and almost universal response was the Eucharist and sacraments fill Catholics with life. The Eucharist is central to the life of Catholics. The sacraments are vital to the life of the community. Parishioners are heartened by receiving the sacraments and by seeing others receive them as well. The Eucharist is the heart of Catholic worship. Participants highlighted their deep appreciation for Holy Communion: “attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist are always a source of joy and peace.” The sacraments were called a “beacon of joy.”

Good liturgy is important. Quality, sacred music and music that appeals to all are important for celebrating the Eucharist. Gathering as a community in worship is life-giving. Celebrating the Eucharist should be “reverent” and “worthy.”

## **COMMUNITY**

Participants saw the Holy Spirit at work in *community*. Participants want active, vibrant, welcoming parishes where people feel loved, appreciated and valued. People want a sense of belonging. They want to be known, heard, and loved.

Participants expressed deep hunger for home groups, faith sharing groups, Scripture studies, charitable works, faith formation programs, social events, processions, pilgrimages, and parish picnics. Small faith groups and communities are seen as valuable to fostering connection and spiritual growth among parishioners. Parishes can be places that include and welcome everyone by providing guidance, education, respect and forgiveness. The Church’s social work helps build community.

Many wished to see Catholic communities foster a stronger sense of belonging to help and encourage people to become better disciples of Christ. Deeper connections are desired within the Catholic community and across the different cultures in the Church.

Community and connection are key to a life of faith. Community combats loneliness and disconnection. There is desire for a closer relationship with the parish family.

## **CATECHESIS**

Synod participants shared a great desire for *catechesis*. Many people expressed how grateful they are for opportunities to learn, study Scripture, understand liturgical and Church traditions, learn apologetics, and explore devotions. In recent years, there has been a significant increase of excellent online Catholic resources, which has made ongoing catechesis and faith formation more accessible than ever.

Clarity of Church teaching is desired and needed. Catechesis should be intellectually stimulating and uplifting. Many questions and misunderstandings about the faith would be answered by clear and sound teaching and directly addressing difficult issues through catechesis. Catholics are called to embrace the truth and beauty of the Church’s teaching, but they must be able to learn about and understand the faith. Catholics want to know their faith so they can live it more deeply and share it with others. Catechesis is needed for adults and youth to live out their faith, empower evangelization, build relationships and witness the Catholic faith in the world.

Synod participants spoke of the pain of seeing “people leave because they don’t understand.” One participant put it quite simply: “it’s hard to evangelize if you don’t know your faith well.” This explains why some participants mentioned the need to “evangelize even to our own parishioners, not just to the greater community.”

Good catechesis is needed in our Catholic schools. In some of our schools, there is a lack of Catholic identity.

Participants expressed a strong desire for *clarity* of Church teaching. Courage is needed to teach the truth in contemporary society. The faithful are strengthened when the Church is clear and bold in her proclamation of the truths and teachings of the Catholic faith.

## **PRAYER & SPIRITUAL LIFE**

Participants expressed gratitude for opportunities to pray and deepen their spiritual lives. An active prayer and spiritual life is essential to living the Catholic faith. Eucharistic Adoration, the rosary, and Marian devotions were specifically mentioned, along with music which “opens a portal to the soul.” One participant said that an essential first step for a community seeking to grow is to “pray and constantly pray.” Both communal prayer and private, devotional prayer are important for Catholics.

## **SERVICE**

Service is faith in action. It is seen as an essential aspect of Catholic life. Synod participants experience great joy in *service*. Participants observed: “the happiest people give to others and are given even more happiness in return.” Drawing connections between works of mercy and discipleship, another participant remarked that “[Jesus’] example of love and care, and his teaching about service and sacrifice inspire the people to act as his disciples.” One participant said: “in caring for the least among us, I feel most connected to God and most in tune with what Jesus taught.”

It was noted that social justice activities can be ecumenical, and that service is motivated by faith and the social teachings of the Church. Works of mercy flow naturally from the desire to bring salvation to the world.

## **YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS**

Youth and young adults are a high priority. They inspire others when they exhibit and practice their faith. There is great concern that the Church is losing so many youth. It is a wound for parents and grandparents to see their children and grandchildren no longer practicing their faith. There is deep desire to connect the younger generations to their faith and engage them in the life and ministry of the Church.

The Church needs to do a better job reaching out to young people. It needs to have activities to keep them active and engaged as members of the Church.

## **EVANGELIZATION AND OUTREACH**

Synod participants desire a Catholic community that evangelizes and reaches out. One vicariate noted: “every group reported the need to be more welcoming and to do more outreach, especially to lapsed Catholics and those in the broader community looking for a spiritual home and community.”

Personal conversion is needed to power evangelization. Training and formation are needed to equip the faithful to become evangelizers. “We can’t give what we don’t have.” Catholics want and need to be taught how to be good evangelists. Evangelization can begin with the people already committed to the Catholic faith who must be equipped to evangelize others. If we strengthen the people we have as members of the Body of Christ, they can be witnesses in the world.

Evangelization is the responsibility of all, both laity and clergy. There is a need for stronger collaboration between laity and clergy in the mission of evangelization.

Evangelization should focus on youth and young adults. Acknowledge the Church is shrinking and that new modes of evangelical outreach - such as social media - need to be used.

Outreach flows from joyful hearts that are full of love for Jesus. People see happiness and want to share in it.

## **FAITH FORMATION**

Ongoing faith formation at every level is a priority for Catholics. Catholics desire opportunities to encounter God. They want to be fashioned by their faith. They want to learn and live the Catholic faith more fully as disciples of Christ to be able to share the saving message of Jesus more effectively and bring others to an encounter with Christ.

Retreats, parish missions, guest speakers, and good homilies are all important for faith formation. Holy priests are needed to lead us in the sacramental life, provide spiritual direction, be examples, encourage vocations, and give people the message of hope, joy, and love. Good faith formation will increase vocations and improve evangelization. We need to expand and deepen family ministries.

## **SPIRIT OF WELCOMING AND HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality and welcome are critically important. Synod participants greatly desire the Church to be more welcoming, friendly, and attractive, especially to lapsed Catholics and those in the broader community looking for a spiritual home. Be a Church of “yes” and not a Church of “no.” Foster love and acceptance of marginalized people and support them.

## **UNIVERSALITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

Synod discernment sessions revealed an appreciation for the universality of the Church and the cultural diversity within parishes. Parishes benefit by being exposed to the richness of different cultures and ethnic groups in their communities. Having celebrations of the Eucharist available in different languages is important.

A deacon observed that “this is a great opportunity for discernment not only for the laity but also for the leaders of the church in western Oregon to reflect on how best to serve the Hispanic community, to pay close attention to a community that is constantly growing and that has not been given the attention it deserves.”

The topic of the Latin Mass stirred fervent sentiments to preserve its availability, especially in the face of universal restrictions of its use. While some concern was expressed it can be a source of division, other Catholics, who don’t necessarily desire it for themselves, felt it should be offered for Catholics who appreciate it.

## ***WOUNDS THAT NEED ATTENTION AND HEALING***

Catholics are carrying wounds from the Church that require attention and healing. There are deep hurts related to the clergy sex abuse scandal, divisions in the Church, the role of women, LGBTQ issues, youth not practicing their faith, the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of divorce, remarriage & annulment, and the unfriendly attitudes of some clergy. Listening is a first step toward healing. Catholics desire a Church that is forgiving, understanding, welcoming, and loving rather than condemning, rule-based and unfriendly. As the body of Christ, the Church is the source of healing all wounds.

## **CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE SCANDAL**

The clergy sex abuse scandal and cover-up continues to be a painful wound that needs ongoing healing. The wound of clergy sexual abuse was noted in nearly every discernment session. One participant summed it up this way: “experiences of joy and peace are in stark contrast to the hurt, despair, and yes, anger regarding the abuse scandal. To learn of the hypocritical and evil behaviors of certain clergy over the years and the intentional coverup by the hierarchy has caused the greatest harm imaginable. Our dioceses finally took action, but it was too little, too late for many young people who now reject the Church...The actions of Pope Francis meeting with victims and asking for forgiveness gives hope and will set an example for the future of all

in the Church.” Transparency by the Church is desired. Active listening will support healing from the sex abuse scandals. Some suggested allowing priests to get married.

## **DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH**

Synod participants desire unity in the Church and are hurt by its divisions. Catholics want one faith community centered in Christ. Divisions are experienced across political, ecclesial, and social issues. Even Church leadership is plagued by divisions. Confusion results from differing statements and pastoral approaches by bishops, dioceses, and the Vatican.

Politics seem especially divisive and prevalent and should not be allowed to divide our parish communities. Politics should be secondary to living our Christian lives under the banner of the Kingdom of God.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Church’s handling of it was a major source of division. Tensions within the Church have left a negative impression on some synod participants. One stated: “I was shocked at how much conflict and strife were in the various churches and schools I participated in.”

In building a stronger community, a spirit of unity is required, while still embracing diversity. We must talk to one another and respect and love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ if we want to offer hope to the world.

## **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

There was a good deal of conversation around the role of women in the Church. Women should be more involved in leadership in the Church, and the Church must find more ways to allow the gifts and talents of women to be utilized. One parishioner voiced her sadness at the “woundedness of being a second-class citizen in a church I love.” While there was gratitude for the progress that has been made to include women in the various ministries of the Church, some participants felt hurt that women are excluded from the priesthood. Though those sentiments were not shared by most participants, the vast majority agreed that the role of women in the life of the Church needs to be strengthened.

## **LGBTQ CONCERNS**

Another wound that emerged from the synod discussions concerned the LGBTQ members of the community. To many participants, the Church doesn’t seem welcoming. There were a number of calls for a more welcoming church. Others asked for the church to “clarify teaching on LGBTQ+ issues while being welcoming to all who wish to follow Jesus in discipleship and holiness.” This issue also intersected with concerns about youth and young adults, as their views are often influenced and shaped by cultural movements. Some participants remarked



that the church comes across as “too institutionalized, sometimes putting the needs of the institution over the needs of God’s people. Sometimes too rigid on rules and regulations.”

There is concern that those who identify with the LGBTQ community feel unwelcome and excluded in the Catholic Church. More acceptance, love and support for LGBTQ people is needed. Show them God’s love and mercy. Find ways to embrace members of the LGBTQ community without condoning life choices not in accord with God’s plan of salvation.

## **YOUTH NOT PRACTICING THEIR FAITH**

There is a great desire to evangelize the youth. Concern for the youth is strong. Parents, grandparents, and other Catholics are deeply concerned that so many of our children and young people are no longer practicing their faith. There is sadness and regret over young, fallen away family members. One parishioner asked: “Where is the next generation of believers coming from?” Another synod participant remarked that their “parent’s emphasis on the love of Christ was a positive influence to remain Catholic. Many younger people have left the Church when the focus is more on rules and doctrine vs. the love of Christ.” One parent was reassured “seeing how faith is integrated into [the] children’s education and having conversations at home about God, Jesus, and faith that are inspired from things they talk about at school.” There was general agreement that “catechesis is needed for adults and youth to live out our faith, empower evangelization, build relationships and witness the Catholic faith in the world.” This can begin, as one parishioner commented, by simply ““invit[ing] others into the lifegiving relationship with Jesus.”

## **COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The COVID-19 pandemic, or more precisely, the local Church’s response to the pandemic, wounded many people and created divisions. The shutdown of churches and enforcement of mandates and guidelines related to masks, vaccines, religious exemptions, halting of ministries and programs, not making the sacraments available, and other restrictions caused tremendous strife for the faithful.

One vicariate report included “the feeling of isolation when the parishes were closed, continued with the wearing of masks – don’t see faces, so there’s a disconnect.” Participants commented that as the months went by, an atmosphere of division grew. Some believed that the church’s response to covid was inadequate when it came to protecting the more vulnerable in the community, while others considered the church’s response an overreaction born out of fear.

Many people fell away during the pandemic. The Church needs to reach out to draw them back. Some got used to conveniently watching Mass online and have not returned to participate in the Eucharist in person. Others who have greater health risks still dare not to come back. Online Masses remain vital for the sick and homebound.

## **DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE & ANNULMENT**

There were wounds around the issue of divorced and remarried Catholics. Synod participants registered their concern and frustration with the annulment process. As one parishioner explained: “I’m becoming more and more disillusioned with the tribunal’s process and lack of communication...I LOVE the Catholic Church teaching and faith. However, it is becoming more difficult to “stay the course” when attempting to separate the church teaching from its administrative function/operation.” The annulment process takes too long.

## **UNFRIENDLY ATTITUDES OF SOME CLERGY**

The way clergy interact with the faithful has a powerful effect on them. Synod participants described deep hurts caused by the unfriendly attitudes of some clergy. Lack of good pastoral care by some priests is a concern. There is a desire for clergy to be friendly, positive, and encouraging when they interact with people. Priests need to set a good example for people to follow. Pastors are called to compassionate shepherding of the flock of Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **The Value of Listening**

Synod participants found the format and methods for the Synod gatherings to be life-giving. Participants expressed appreciation for the Synod’s principal theme of *listening*. They were grateful for the opportunity to share their opinions and feelings about issues important to them and the Church. Listening builds trust to heal wounds. Catholics have a deep desire to be heard, seen, and acknowledged. They know what it feels like to be ignored. With compassionate listening, the Church must acknowledge and help all by offering the healing power of Jesus Christ.

Participants desire to keep the momentum of the synod going: “we appreciate and want a continuation of this open listening, sharing and cross-parish/cross-community communication process.”

### **A Church of Communion**

In addition to the fundamental questions posed at the start of this synthesis, the preparatory documents laid out three dimensions to this synodal process: *communion, participation, mission*. The first theme – *communion* – was especially evident in a number of the discernment sessions and responses. First and foremost, *communion* was highlighted in the deep appreciation and love of the Eucharist. For many synod participants, all Catholic life flowed from this central reality of the Eucharist. In addition to this sacramental worldview,

participants also expressed the significance of communion through *community* and *belonging*.

The wounds that were described during many conversations also highlighted the importance of communion, albeit in a different way. We have been given vivid examples of what happens when communion is not pursued or preserved. For instance, many expressed the desire to feel connected to the community, like they truly belonged in the Church. But when that sense of participation is disrupted, the bonds of communion are weakened – which, in turn, slows down the missionary momentum of the Church.

There is a great deal of work ahead, but if we continue to give thanks to God “who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” we shall remain “firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, [our] labor is not in vain.” 1 Cor 15:57-58

*“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” – Ephesians 2:19-22*