



Report on the Synod of Bishops 2023

Diocese of Salt Lake City

JOURNEYING TOGETHER, A FIRST STEP

Participation by the people of God in the Diocese of Salt Lake City was a first step in living Synodality. The geography of the diocese encompasses the entire State of Utah (84,8999 square miles equaling 219,887 square kilometers). Much of the population (3.3 million) centers around several metropolitan areas, with the remainder in low or rural populated areas. We were challenged in numerous ways, but we also found a new dawn and a new hope in listening to one another.

Coming together for listening sessions was preferred in person, but video streaming sessions reduced the burden for some. The difficulty was in our participation rates. All parishes were asked to participate and yet only 60.4% held their listening sessions and submitted their results. Of the 300,000 Catholics in the diocese, 4993 (1.7%) people participated in 248 listening sessions (1.7%). However, if we consider that about 20,000 Utah Catholics go to Mass on any given weekend, then our participation rate in the listening sessions is 25% which is quite spectacular. This highlights the struggle to gain participation by the peripheries, and nominal Catholics. Participation from non-Catholics was extremely low.

The spiritual dimension of participation was often one of taking the first step, opening up, and then realizing the hope and possibilities. The *Intermountain Catholic*, our diocesan newspaper, reported on May 13, 2022 a similar sentiment heard many times over,

At St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Helper, parishioners were initially reluctant to participate in the process, notetaker Lenora Callor said. “When it first came out everybody was very, very hesitant. They didn’t understand what was going on.”

However, after parish organizers further explained the process, and they had been through a first session, several people wanted to participate in a second, Callor said. “The first session was, ‘Oh I don’t want to say anything because I’m afraid.’ Once they opened up and realized we weren’t there to judge them, we were there to listen to them, and we weren’t going to stop them in the middle of a sentence, they were very open.”

For the disenfranchised, marginalized, and those with more resistance, the listening sessions were met with less optimism. A wait and see attitude and wondering if anything will come of these listening sessions was also received.

Synodality calls us to journey together toward God faithfully. We see the need to learn to listen to one another better and work constructively and positively together for the good. How we are faithful in this journey is the challenge, and how we journey together is our evangelical call –



when both of these realities come together we walk in the light of Christ, grow in holiness, and build up the Body of Christ. Synodality gives rise to the future in how we continue to journey together.

WELCOMING

We recognize the desire and need to be more welcoming in every aspect. Those already within the Catholic community, but also those by association or interest sometimes feel unwelcomed. Although not universal, the experience of being marginalized (differences in culture, generations, ecclesiology, ideology, language, LGBTQ+, women, youth, etc.) is still a very significant reality for many people.

We need a generosity of spirit in how we view one another. From welcoming anyone coming through the door, to the deeper reality that each person is made in the image and likeness of God, we need to be generous of spirit with each person. This is how we extend dignity to one another, especially when we have differences. Welcoming begets the possibility of evangelization, growth, and a synodal walking together toward God faithfully.

Fellowship builds upon the foundation of being welcoming. When there is genuine fellowship among members of the faithful it draws in those who are members of the community, and especially those who approach, inquire, and visit. Fellowship builds up the spirit of welcoming in a cultural way. A starting point might be that ministry leaders, lay and clergy, should better know who their parishioners are so we can put a face to a name. But a culture of fellowship will have everyone knowing each other by name, not just the ministry leaders.

Fellowship is cultivated by more social time being planned, time for relationships to grow and be strengthened. A strong sense of fellowship leads to more participation in ministries, leadership, formation, and deepened friendships.

ACTIVE LIFE

Fellowship flows into the active life of the Catholic community. Our parishes and schools are thriving when we provide more activities that draw people together for dialogue, ministry, prayer, social time, and worship. How these activities come about from their inception, planning, and execution are a very telling indication of healthiness in the community. The pastor's ability to make things happen is unfortunately often seen as the measure of success in the functioning of a parish. Our activity and the intentionality and motivation behind it should come from the ground up, i.e. from the parishioners and not just the pastor or parish council.

Language and cultural barriers are a very real challenge. Predominately English and Spanish define the divide, but other languages and cultures are evident. In the healthiest communities, the activity and life of the parish sees a generous blending of the different cultures and languages.



Often this is recognized as a point of celebration. We must continue to work and be deliberate in bringing different communities of people together, and helping them to flourish throughout our ministries, leadership, prayer and worship.

We need more activities in adult faith formation, catechetics, Catholic schools support, understanding the liturgy, opportunities to dialogue, prayer, retreats, social events, spirituality, youth ministries, and “coming back to the faith” programs.

CATECHESIS AND FORMATION

The faithful often question their knowledge of the faith and struggle to articulate it. Society can promote what is contrary to our moral life and our living in the authenticity of the gospel. Our catechetical and spiritual formation are dearly needed in a greater way. Adult catechesis needs to flow into parents being the primary educators and catechists to their children. Some feel the Catholic schools should take the leading role, and so there is a division of where the primary emphasis should be located. There is a great appreciation for the Catholic schools and religious education in the parishes, but it leaves one wondering if the sense of responsibility of the parents is being lost. Parents and adults often struggle to manage adequate time for their catechetical and formational needs, let alone that of their children. There is sympathy for the reality of this struggle, especially for single parents who have a tighter squeeze on their available time.

There is a desire for faithfulness to the truth and this is cultivated in our formation of character and faith at every level and every age group. Better catechesis and formation leads us to carrying out our common mission in a better way. This mission is enriched by our witness to Christ as we grow in virtue, values, and the abiding witness of our faith. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we share in our common mission to invite others into a loving relationship with Jesus.

Formation in the liturgy extends to understanding and living what we celebrate. Knowledge of the liturgy is important, but it should lead to elevated prayer, spirituality, and a deepening of the Word within us.

ECUMENISM AND INTERFAITH

We need to be proactive in ecumenism and respect all Christian religions as we celebrate our shared common ground. “Other denominations have qualities that Catholics do not have and we need to be open-minded and nonjudgmental...avoiding any semblance of superiority.” Better catechesis and formation will help us learn to engage other Christians. We will have greater confidence in not compromising the tenets of our faith, while extending ourselves into common ground and mission. We need more opportunities organized by our parishes to engage others in ecumenical ways.



In Utah, we have a high proportion of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This interfaith relationship varies greatly. In the best of relations, it is familiar, warm, and loving. In the middle, it is tepid and at times indifferent. In the worst, it is skeptical, suspect, and sadly hateful. These realities are shared equally from both religions. Fortunately, positiveness is predominant and encouraged by both Churches. The negative speaks to a fearfulness and small mindedness, and we need to be on guard so that we may charitably advance the good. “No matter what obstacles we may face, we must always remember that we are Catholic Christians and...God loves us all.” We have found common ground with family values, a love for our respective faiths, and a desire to serve the wider community taking care for the poor and vulnerable. In many instances, we have shared in activities and fraternal care for one another.

COMMUNICATION, DIALOGUE, DISCERNMENT

We need to learn how to communicate and dialogue charitably, effectively, and without fear. There are contentious issues that often bring uncharitable or even hateful attitudes to the conversation. Some “people feel that the Catholic Church is a judgmental organization,” and it makes it difficult to maintain conversations that can become intense. Learning to honor our faith, God, and what is objectively true, while at the same time respecting contrary views is especially needed. Recognizing a person’s agency and freedom is important in exercising charity and affording others dignity. It does not justify their position or yours, it simply demonstrates respect.

“When people feel no one is listening to them, that their voice is not heard or ignored, they feel they are no longer a part of the Church.” The frequency and mode of communication are important, but an evangelizing emphasis in how we communicate is needed. Working toward better dialogue both internally and externally is needed. We need to find common ground, and better see our communication and dialoguing others as a tool for building up the Body of Christ and outreach ministry. We are encouraged to volunteer at events hosted by other faiths and civically to facilitate outreach and being better neighbors.

We must balance many desires, needs, and requirements. “When people feel like they are being heard, they better accept decisions being made.” When we are transparent we build respect and trust. When we pray together, we are authentic in our faith. “Our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God...sometimes the difficult decisions tend to leave some out, but we should try our best to include those people and see their side of things.”

Multiculturalism, especially between English and Spanish speakers, continues to be a barrier to dialogue and often causes multiple communities within a parish to be in isolation to one another. We should not be building bridges to separate islands of culture. Rather, we need to find ways to remedy the chasm and build up the community as one Body of Christ.

A better use of social media is widely encouraged, but a small minority would like us to reject it. Some see it as fundamentally important to reach our youth and young adults.



AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

There is a recognition of the Church's hierarchical structure and governed authority, led by priests, bishops, and the pope. "...The teachings must come from the top to preserve the unity of the Body of Christ." And yet, there is a tangible sense that those who do not agree with the teachings want to democratize the Church or label it outdated, archaic, or closed-minded. These two positions are at odds.

"Some [priests] feel the need to hold all the power, and others are open to sharing....Authority figures should want to promote the formation of the laity to participate together with the priest in strengthening the Church....The Church should not make people feel unwanted or unnecessary, that they have no role in the community. All people are important and cared for in the eyes of God." It was remarked that "the heart of a parish is beating through the service, and Christian love of its leadership and members," but only to the degree that unity is realized and lived out.

There were two realities of participation presented to us: those who feel left out, those who feel more autonomous. "Why are more lay people not entrusted in participating at higher levels? There should be more effort preparing lay people to manage and operate parishes, so that priests may focus more on ministry." "The priest has too much authority in the parish. He will go in a few years and the parishioners will stay. His renovations and changes will be left for them to deal with." The contrary position asserted, "We pretty much govern ourselves. When we need further guidance, we consult the pastor. As a council, [we] evaluate problems and try to work out a suitable response that will help the church grow." It seems a lot is hinging on the leadership style of the pastor that a parish has assigned to them.

YOUTH

The youth were recognized many times over as a focal point of concern. We need to take greater care for them, build up our catechetics, formation, service opportunities, and social programming for them. They are the future, but they are also the now. Many societal messages bombard them and entice them to leave the faith. Synodality requires us to listen to them too, that we may better serve and understand them.

We need to better serve our youth in our liturgical celebrations with tools like Children's Liturgy of the Word, music specific for them, and make the liturgy more accessible to them. "We may need diocesan guidelines to ensure expectations are being met." These efforts should lead to the youth ministering and participating actively in the liturgy and ministry.



WOMEN

During the discussion on “Speaking Out,” there was enthusiasm by women to earnestly participate and at the same time “the nagging experience of the past that despite so many promises, their voices will not be heard.” The feeling that women are treated as second class and that they “might be heard, but not listened to” is tangible.

There is a frequent and strong sentiment that women need a more prominent and respected role in the Church. Some view the Church as a “male-dominated Church” that is reluctant to change, with a remedy being that women should be admitted to ordination to the diaconate and priesthood. There is a sentiment that the Church needs to “evolve,” because society has evolved. The desire for women deacons and priests arose in fourteen listening sessions and tacitly another three times. This came up in our discussion on authority and participation, as well as others. Two appeals to authority outside the deposit of faith (scripture and Tradition) were made: other Christian faiths and society. “In other Christian religions, there are women and/or married priests, ministers or pastors...the secular world is embracing diversity, inclusion and equity, but the Church resists these initiatives in expanding the priesthood.” Nonetheless, a male only clergy is painful for some, and there is sincerity in these appeals.

The contrary opinion was also offered,

I believe that it is important for the Church to listen to we[sic] who are women. However, I believe that just as in a family, in the Church women and men have different roles, but one role is not better than another. In spite of the opinions of modern culture, there are different strengths and weaknesses in men and women, and we need to celebrate those differences, not pretend they do not exist. I am speaking as a highly educated woman who had a successful career. I do not think Jesus wanted women to be ordained as priests, otherwise he would have named his mother or other faithful women disciples as Apostles.

There is a recognition that women could be doing more to support women. In some sense, that the older women could be mentoring the younger more. Diversity among the women is being questioned within the Diocesan Catholic Conference of Women. One woman commented, “Our CCW is mostly older white women. What are we doing to reach out to the younger women, women of color and different ethnicity, women who have disabilities?”

“Leadership within the church has to be shared in a more spiritual, healthy, encompassing and promising way by women and men. The Church has to be more forthcoming about removing the obstacles that block all its people (laity, women, teachers, and men) and consider their value to the Church. They contend this is not a primary issue of ordination. The church can do much in the many areas that do not require ordination. At baptism, we are marked indelibly as children of God, and by the Holy Spirit are called to service to the Church. What then is that work – and by whom? Can the Church not better define this? Can the Church not better open its windows



and doors? It cannot – should not - hold anyone back from the work God calls us. No one is to be excluded – even in this imperfect world.”

LGBTQ+

This was a minority topic in our listening sessions, and yet frequently brought up in many of the sessions in passing regarding our need to be more welcoming. The LGBTQ+ community struggles in feeling welcomed, but very much wants the Church to hear its voice. It is difficult to address so many of the aspects of concern in the life the Church mentioned above, when there is first a struggle to feel a part of the local community, the Church, the Body of Christ. So often, there was a recognition that we need to do a better job of welcoming the LGBTQ+ community, recognizing they are made in the image and likeness of God. A need to be authentic and faithful as Catholics in what we believe versus the desire for the Church to change some of its belief and teaching contributes to the pain of feeling unwelcomed, e.g. gay marriage. Notice the desire is not stated as “outside desire,” because the struggle is not one of those outside the Church alone, it is both for those inside and outside the Church. The LGBTQ+ community is not only those who represent a letter in the acronym, but parents, siblings, fellow heterosexual friends, family and parishioners.

On the topic of “Listening” a reflection by the *Catholic LGBTQ+ and Allies* listening session recognize that “gay people are perceived as being different from others sitting in the pew even though they see themselves as being no different. Because of perceived differences, people may not be willing to listen to us. [and they pondered] How do we address those perceptions?”

When considering these differences, it begs the questions, “Is acceptance dependent on a gay person staying under the radar? What if the person comes out?” There is not an agreement of what acceptance means. One may view it as based on the dignity of the person, or another may view it as accepting a lifestyle or different morality. When there is uncertainty there can be more apprehension in feeling accepted and even coming out publicly as gay.

SECULARISM AND SYNODALITY

We are challenged in our formation of synodality by our resistance to change and cultural secularism. Resistance to change results from an attitude of not seeing the need to adapt to the needs of others, shared goals, or new methodologies and this can lead to ineffective evangelization or even a lack of evangelization. Resistance due to cultural secularism leads to an attitude of a “me society,” selfishness, and an inward movement toward pride. Indifference to outright rejection of religion profoundly affects us as Catholics, and negatively impacts our families, priorities, values, and especially the youth. If we are to meet these challenges in a positive way, “the Church must offer greater hope, [which articulates] a gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Formation in synodality should elicit a positive effect of caring for one another, being filled with generosity, kindness, and love. If we are formed well, we will be more accepting and welcoming



of others while being steeped in authenticity of faith. We will not be diverted by conflicts and divisions, and instead grow in understanding of each other. This takes a bit of humility and sincerity of heart, so that we may serve others, bring hope, and illuminate the glory of God in our journeying together.

There is a desire to be heard, and how we listen matters. Trust is the hallmark. Yes, we definitely need to organize better, to plan and to increase communication. However, we can cultivate trust when we collaborate, work for effective listening, and are respectful in our discussions. Trust is relationally built, and parish events that bring us together help us better see and understand one another.

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION

It is our sincere desire that we offer meaningful feedback to the bishops and especially to the pope. The purpose of the participation of the people of God has a world-wide aspiration, but it is keenly observed on the local diocesan level. As we embark on soaking in the heartfelt responses given, it will take effort and time to genuinely embrace the Spirit at work in the voices that offered to speak. It will take patience to work diligently with the final outcome of the Synod that we may be in greater communion with the Church. Nonetheless, much of the fruit gained can begin to inform our directions and new horizons. Let it not be the fruit of the forbidden tree, but the fruit of holiness in the truth of God. To journey together toward God faithfully will lead us to greater evangelization realized in our communion with God and one another, our participation in the life of the Body of Christ, and our mission to baptize all nations.

There were many good and noteworthy comments given to us in our listening sessions. Although it is impossible to include them all, we did our best to articulate the predominant sentiments while taking care for minority positions. Our four most discussed topics (in order of popularity) were:

WELCOMING: Our number one topic and area of concern was our need to be more welcoming. This is both internally and externally. It was not a surprise that this came up, but it was a surprise how it was raised more often than any other topic, by far! To be more welcoming is something that has been encouraged by many leaders over the years, and yet we struggle in a significant way to make our churches, schools, and other institutions more welcoming. It is the first essential building block to a healthy community, and yet it is not usually given much attention. When people feel welcomed, fellowship can begin to blossom and increased participation of the members of the community follows.

FORMATION: There is an immense desire to increase our level and frequency of formation at all age levels. Formation through catechetics, the conscience, virtue, and communication skills were all elicited. Many want to know their faith better, feel more grounded, and yet there is the



challenge of making time for formation, making it a higher priority both communally and personally.

WOMEN: Women want their voice to be more than heard, and there is a considerable feeling that women are being blocked or held back in various ways. How women are treated is often the notable issue, e.g. not feeling their opinions matter, feeling second class, not being allowed in certain ministries or leadership roles in the community. In some cases, this could be tied to ordination and pastoral governance, in other cases it could be regular ministries and operations of the parish.

YOUTH: The care for the youth and their future was of very high value. Why are we not placing a higher importance on our youth? The recognition of the Catholic schools was evident, and we pour a lot of resources into them. Conversely, on the parish level, youth programming garners nowhere close to the same level of support. These do not need to be opposed, but it is clear that much more is being called for in the education, formation, and building up of our parish youth programs. We need to better learn how to “serve” our youth.

It was surprising that young adults (ages 18-39) were not brought up, but only a few times. This is a part of the community that is greatly missing in many parishes, especially the single young adults. Did we not discuss them much, because they are out of sight and out of mind? Did we not discuss them much, because they themselves were scarcely participating in the listening sessions? Is this another part of our communities that we need to learn how to serve better?

REMARKS BY THE MOST REVEREND OSCAR A. SOLIS

I am happy and very grateful to receive the report of the synthesis of our concluded Diocesan Synod Listening Sessions. When our parish communities joined Pope Francis and all the Catholic Churches throughout the world last November in launching the Vatican Synod on Synodality 2021-2023, it was a leap of faith. I wondered how our diocese would be able to carry out such a gigantic endeavor of gathering parishioners during this pandemic.

By the grace of God, collaboration of the clergy and the faithful, and the able leadership of the Diocesan Synodal Team formed and worked under the leadership of Fr. John Evans, our USCCB contact person, we were able to “journey or walk together” as a community of faith in a process of Christian dialogue, engagement, and accompaniment. A great number of parishioners representing the diversity of our Church: clergy and laity, men and women, young and old, active and disengaged, disenfranchised and those on the peripheries, and even a few from the ecumenical groups, opened their hearts to the urgings of the Holy Spirit, and participated for a couple of months in the listening sessions organized throughout the diocese.

The participants, in a spirit of prayerful listening and discernment, shared their joys and hopes, as well as their difficulties, frustrations, and disappointments with their church amidst some



skepticism, uncertainties, lots of hesitation and unfamiliarity with the process. The information we heard and received expressed very well the sentiments and aspirations of the people of God today and for the future of our local church.

This Summary Report will be submitted to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for further study together with the reports from other dioceses in the country and will be sent to the Holy Father. Also, the report will be made available to the faithful of the diocese in order for us to listen and to learn from what has been presented so we can all consider the summary prayerfully, and openly respond to where the Holy Spirit is leading us in shaping our local church now and in the coming years.

Pope Francis said, “the purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts (and) give strength to our hands.” We have responded to his call and our mission goes on.

Thank you for your contribution to our diocesan consultation for a “Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.” It was a grace-filled moment for us to learn to listen to each other. We have experienced profound dialogue, friendship, and unity, a manifestation that the Spirit is alive, and God is in our midst. Let us continue to journey together and move forward the kind of church we want and love. May God bless us along the way!

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