

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, AND MISSION
REPORT FROM ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA PARISH
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, USA
DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO
MARCH 2024

The parish community of St. Ignatius Loyola Church is honored to participate in the Synod on Synodality (For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission) called by His Holiness, Pope Francis. It is the first time the laity have been involved in a Church synod to such an extent, and we are elated to be a part of this process.

St. Ignatius of Loyola Parish is a large suburban parish located in Sacramento, California. The parish serves 2,800 families. The parish community is predominantly Anglo, with significant numbers of diverse populations. Since its founding in 1954, it has been a Jesuit parish with a progressive culture.

A comprehensive survey exploring the themes of the Synod was sent to all parishioners in the fall of 2021 as part of the Diocesan Phase of the Synod. Over 400 responses to the survey were received. In 2022, *The National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America* was published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This marked the completion of the Diocesan Phase of the Synod.

The U.S. Catholic Conference invited Catholics in the United States to respond to two questions that arose as a result of the General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality in October 2023. We have been asked to consider, reflect on, and dialogue regarding the following:

- *Where have I seen or experienced successes - and distresses - within the Church's structures, its organization, its leadership and life that encourage or hinder the mission?*
- *How can the structures and organization of the Church help all to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?*

Our parish community held three in-person dialogue and listening sessions in March 2024. The first of the two questions listed above was used as the focal point of these synodal sessions. One hundred seventy participants gathered over the course of the three sessions. They sat at round tables, each with a trained facilitator and a scribe, and each participant was given the opportunity to speak for three minutes, uninterrupted, on the question before the group. That was followed by a period of time in which participants had the opportunity to respond to or ask for clarification regarding what

another participant had stated. The group at the table then determined the key points that surfaced in the table dialogue and shared them with the entire group of participants. In addition, the parish's Xavier Ministry team held dialogue and listening sessions with our homebound parishioners. It is worth noting that at the facilitator training session, the question was asked as to whether the dialogue in the table groups should focus on the global Church or on our parish community. The answer was "Yes." We encouraged participants to express themselves as the Holy Spirit guided them.

What follows is a summary of the key points that surfaced during the three synodal sessions and input from our homebound parishioners. Our parish community will continue the synodal process by addressing the second question listed above in the fall of 2024.

The key points reported by each table at each session were collated, tabulated, and organized into five categories:

- Structure and Sacraments
- Community and Communication
- Inclusivity
- Youth and Young Adults
- Women in the Church

Each of these categories is divided into the global Church and the local church, and within each of those areas the key points are listed under the two headings stated in the question on which the sessions focused: successes and distresses. In addition, the number of times that similar key points were reported in each category is noted. To respect the integrity of the participants and the process, the responses listed below are recorded in the language with which they were presented to the large group at each session. No edits were made by the drafters of this report; thus, some responses may seem underdeveloped, with ideas not completely fleshed out. Some comments reflect an unnuanced understanding of global Church issues versus local Church issues.

CATEGORY ONE: STRUCTURE AND SACRAMENTS (57 times listed as a key point)

Global Church

Successes:

- Pope Francis and his openness to change and inclusion
- The global aspect of the Church
- The universal aspect of Mass
- Catholic rituals
- Eucharist is food for the journey

Distresses:

- The sexual abuse scandal and the power of the hierarchy of the Church; the Church thinks the scandal is behind us, but it is not
- The teaching of the Church should be infused with mercy
- The movement toward conservatism in the Church hierarchy, and the rise of the conservative Catholic movement in the Church, is worrisome and of concern
- The need to be able to trust the Church again
- More unity with other denominations is needed
- Renewal of the Catholic liturgy
- Church leadership is not representative of its parishioners; we need married priests
- Church leadership and its legalism is slow to respond to changing culture and the needs and issues of the day
- Move from too much form and function to a more meaningful experience
- The return of Mass in Latin vs. native language(s) is of concern
- We are having a hard time showing the relevance of the Church
- Bankruptcy concerns due to the sexual abuse scandals
- Catholic schools: elitism, bullying, ridicule of fellow students
- Critics of Pope Francis are disrespectful; this is disappointing
- Criminalization and demonization of abortion rights advocates is wrong
- We need the spirit of Vatican II again
- Faith formation is needed; what does it mean to be Catholic today?
- The Church is at a crossroads; how do we help with the transition?
- The need for reassessment of the annulment process
- The need to get away from “hateful rules” about Catholic marriage and divorce
- Adjust sacraments to be less rigid in implementation
- The Church should not create stumbling blocks for the reception of the sacraments
- Annulment/divorce process
- Procedures and protocols in the sacramental life of the Church are restrictive, difficult, and time consuming
- Rules and exclusions regarding receiving the Eucharist

Local Church

Successes:

- We love this parish
- Parish Pastoral Leadership
- The clergy in this parish
- Adaptability during COVID
- Liturgy, music, homilies
- Priest engagement (e.g., the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday)
- Pleased with the variety of ministries offered in this parish; our parish ministries have improved
- Our Parish Pastoral Leadership and staff model collaboration and respect
- When I remarried, the pastor was very kind, and I thought he was a good priest
- We need to pray and emphasize adoration

Distresses:

- The church administration/Pastoral Council: diverse representation of the parish is needed; free the pastor from business administration
- Need to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying when we are in church
- Do a teaching Mass, including church etiquette
- Help people respect the Mass
- We need to improve the music at Mass
- The person in charge of Confirmation years ago was rude and alienated my son
- People need to be more spiritual
- Focus on recognizing that Jesus is everywhere and in everyone and how this is articulated in our programs and how we are
- Make faith formation a priority in family life

CATEGORY TWO: COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATION (37 times listed as a key point)

Global Church

Successes:

- Pope Francis' message of mercy and reconciliation
- Universal/global community traditions

Distresses:

- Open communication is needed, especially diocesan to parish and parish to parishioners
- Increased communication needed, particularly with and by the diocese.
- Lack of communication and connection to the Synod process
- We need more inclusive language
- Communication: Do we live a life of Christ that others will see and then want to be part of our community?
- Be more open to testifying about what the Church has done for us – a way of evangelizing
- The Catholic Church needs to foster community
- Listening needs to be a priority
- The business of modern life and the values of the world pull us away from the Church

Local Church

Successes:

- Engagement with parishioners (e.g., the Synod sessions)
- Reaching out to the unhoused and underprivileged (e.g., St. Vincent de Paul Society)
- Thankful that our Parish Pastoral Leadership chose to have our parish participate in the Synod process
- The Jesuit approach and modern themes in homilies are excellent
- Our parish is welcoming and has an emphasis on community
- Engagement and community (nourishing relationships)
- Our church community
- Our school community

- Our parish is on the cutting edge to improve our community
- We appreciate our parish's Jesuit identity
- The Feed-A-Family program
- Xavier Ministry (bringing communion to the homebound or hospitalized)
- Increased awareness of ministries and parish life is needed

Distresses:

- More ongoing formation and community-based/grassroots activities are needed
- Work on connection and community building
- Reach out to school parents and evangelize them
- Enhance formation to promote more openness and a more welcoming atmosphere
- Create communication opportunities
- People should come together and be together
- Find out the needs of the parishioners (e.g., those who cannot drive at night) and have a way for people to sign up to respond to those needs
- Respect of COVID health guidelines
- Educational resources needed for all stages of Catholic life

CATEGORY THREE: INCLUSIVITY (35 times listed as a key point)

Global Church

Distresses:

- The Church is not fair or inclusive toward divorced Catholics
- Communicate belonging and focus on a welcoming spirit
- Sacred Humility: Christ is in them and Christ is in us
- Need for inclusivity: different cultures, divorced Catholics, immigrants, LGBTQ+
- The Church is not welcoming to the people who left due to the sexual abuse scandal
- Handling of divorce and support for divorced Catholics
- Outreach to and Inclusion of women, LGBTQ+, divorced Catholics, middle-aged people, those without children

- Need to reach out to those in need; be less judgmental and better prepared to help
- We need to engage the marginalized
- Prioritize social justice principles

Local Church

Successes:

- Our parish is welcoming of all and asks what others need to feel welcome
- Integrating Filipino traditions and celebrations
- Connection with the elderly
- Many are coming to our parish or coming back
- Diversity of our parishioners

Distresses:

- Sense of alienation: LGBTQ+, divorced, non-English speaking
- Addressing the needs of the homeless and hungry needs to expand
- Making everyone feel welcome and included

CATEGORY FOUR: YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS (23 times listed as a key point)

Global Church

Successes:

- Catholic education

Distresses:

- How to bring young adults into the church
- Finding ways to bring young adults and children into Church participation
- Need to get young people back to the Church
- The Church no longer inspires young people; “graying” of the Church
- Catholic schools are instrumental in growing faith, but many families do not go to church, so it contradicts what they learn in school

- How to get young people to come back to the Church; they see it as too strict, too conservative, etc.
- Investment in youth – empower young people
- Focus on keeping youth in the Church (Future of the Church)
- How to engage young adults: meet them where they are

Local Church

Successes:

- Our Catholic school

Distresses:

- Improve outreach to children and families
- We want to see our children and grandchildren come back to church
- There are not many youth/young adults; retention of youth who have gone to Catholic schools is not great
- Have teenagers help older people with technology
- We need to connect our youth to the present
- Lack of participation and involvement of youth and young adults
- Young adults (ages 20-40) – we have to engage them with programs and activities
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CATEGORY FIVE: WOMEN IN THE CHURCH (19 times listed as a key point)

Global Church

Distresses:

- There is not a prominent positive use/engagement of women in the Church; women should be in leadership positions (priest, deacon, other leadership roles)
- Empower women
- Increase the role of women in the Church; give them a voice
- Inclusion of women, LGBTQ+, divorced Catholics
- Respect for women; invite women into ordained ministry
- Need to elevate the role of women in the Catholic Church
- Lack of women in leadership and ministry; not welcoming to women in leadership and ministry
- Openness to ordination of women
- Women are not represented

SUMMARY: KEY IDEAS

Below are summary statements of the key ideas that were expressed and shared multiple times during the three in-person listening and dialogue sessions with our parishioners and the input from our homebound parishioners. The comments listed as bullet points above were augmented by the notes taken by the scribes at each table to help create this summary.

- Church leadership and its legalism are slow to respond to changing culture and the needs and issues of the day. The Church needs to move from too much form and function to a more meaningful experience of love and mercy.
- The procedures and protocols in the sacramental life of the Church are restrictive, difficult, and time consuming. The annulment process and the treatment of divorced Catholics needs to be addressed.
- We must listen to the Holy Spirit, stay open to the answers we receive, and continue our dialogue and journey in synodality. This will best occur via clear, consistent, and frequent communication and a focus on building community.
- The Church needs to be inclusive to all, especially women, minority groups, and peripheral populations, including members of the LGBTQ+ community and divorced Catholics.
- We are a dying Church if youth and young adults are not engaged and active members. Youth and young adults need to be listened to, reached out to, and involved in the life of the Church.
- Patriarchy and clericalism are no longer effective structures for the Church; the People of God are the Church, and the laity should be involved in all roles in the Church. The role of women in the Church needs to be expanded into leadership positions, including ordination.

Our parishioners continue to talk about their experiences as participants in this synodal process, including conversations with members of the Synod Steering Committee. Two items have consistently emerged in these conversations:

- Surprise and shock that this process is not widespread and occurring in all parishes.
- An overwhelming sentiment that these synodal sessions must continue. As one of our female participants stated, “I have been waiting thirty years for the Church to ask me what I thought.” Participants are eager to continue this journey to becoming a synodal church community.

Respectfully submitted by the Synod Steering Committee of St. Ignatius Loyola Parish, Sacramento, California:

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