

Synthesis of the Synod on Synodality

June 30, 2022

Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles

Introduction

In response to Pope Francis' call for an international Synod on the theme of synodality, or *journeying together*, Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI requested a period of consultation with the People of God in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. An opening Mass for the Synod was celebrated on Sunday, October 17, 2021, with representatives from the presbyterate, religious orders of men and women, and members of the lay faithful present. A period of local consultation then followed through mid-June, 2022.

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee is comprised of ten counties in southeastern Wisconsin, covering 4,758 square miles and a population of 2,354,807, of which 533,962 are registered Catholics at 189 parishes. Due to the geographic size of the archdiocese, with significant urban, suburban and rural populations, a multifaceted approach was employed in order to reach as many people as possible. Consultation formats included:

- An online survey tool, available in both English and Spanish, which allowed for anonymity if desired
- Parish listening sessions, organized by parish facilitators or teams
- One-on-one conversations with both Catholics and non-Catholics
- Consultation with the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council as well as the Archdiocesan Synod Implementation Commission, which organized the local 2014 Synod for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee
- Listening sessions and consultation processes on college campuses
- Zoom listening sessions held by both Catholic and non-Catholic apostolates and groups
- Consultation sessions with residents of senior residents and assisted living facilities
- Discussions with priests, deacons and lay pastoral workers/lay ecclesial ministers
- Specific listening sessions for Black Catholics
- Listening sessions held in Spanish
- A process was developed for members of the deaf community

The Consultation Process

The archdiocese sent an invitation to all parishes and priests, inviting them to participate in whatever formats best fit their particular communities and parish members. Parishes were also encouraged to reach out beyond their parish walls to their neighborhoods, and most especially, to those they served who otherwise might not be reached. Training sessions were offered, along with materials that could be customized for each parish, organization or apostolate.

In the online individual process, a number of demographic questions were asked in order to assess the reach of the diocesan consultation. Analysis showed a healthy balance between men and women, as well as a variety of age groups over the age of 30. All ten counties of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee were well represented. Most of the respondents to the online survey identified as white and non-Hispanic; specific listening sessions were held for Black and Hispanic groups in order to gain greater feedback. Most of those who participated in the diocesan consultation were baptized Catholic. Many practiced their faith regularly; a smaller number had joined another denomination or had stopped practicing their faith for a variety of reasons, most notably anger with the Church over the revelations of clergy sexual abuse of minors, frustration with Church teachings in the area of sexual ethics, personal experiences of being turned away from parish communities in times of need, children growing into adulthood, and waning practice during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Additional questions were asked about the participant's relationship with God, with the Church, and how the Church might assist them in growing in their faith life. The vast majority of those who participated spoke of a close, loving relationship with God. Participants spoke of daily prayer through the treasured prayers of the Church, conversational prayer, prayer with sacred Scripture, and in the liturgical life of the Church. Many expressed hunger for greater formational opportunities in their parish communities and apostolates, including the desire for Bible studies, adult formation opportunities and faith sharing groups.

The following Synodal questions were asked in the online format:

- What are the two biggest challenges facing people in southeastern Wisconsin?
- Where and how is the Gospel being lived and preached effectively in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee? When do we journey well together? What examples do you see?
- In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, when are times and occasions when the Gospel is NOT being lived out and preached effectively? When do we fail to listen or fail to journey with people? How can we grow?
- How can the Catholic Church better journey together with you and others? What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together?"
- If you could share one thing with Pope Francis, what would it be?

The consultation and listening processes employed by parishes, apostolates and groups varied depending on the nature and makeup of the group, the gifts and focus of the

group, and the wisdom of those who organized the sessions. Many employed the process outlined by the USCCB, which included questions around:

- The fundamental question: How is this “journeying together” happening in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together?”
- Listening
- Speaking Out
- Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission and Sharing Authority and Participation
- Discerning and Deciding
- Celebration
- How are we hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit today?

Overall, 1,842 people took part in the diocesan phase of consultation in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee:

- 1,042 people participated in the online individual participation process
- 69 individuals submitted feedback through letters, emails and phone calls
- 731 people participated in group sessions, held in person or via Zoom, in parishes, organizations and other apostolates

Great enthusiasm was expressed in and through the process, along with significant cynicism from participants that their voices would be heard.

Key Themes of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee Consultation Process

One: The Church’s Social Mission

One of the ways the Church journeys well with people is in and through its social mission, particularly through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and the Church’s outreach to the poor. The vast majority of participants responded “highly agree” or “agree” to the statement, “I believe the Catholic Church helps those in need and those on the margins.” In the narrative responses, participants spoke highly of the human concerns and outreach ministries in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. High praise was offered for Capuchin Community Services, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Charities, Kinship Community Food Center (Riverwest Food Pantry), Franciscan Peacemakers, St. Ben’s Community Meal, the Knights of Columbus and the Christ Child

Society. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee has a richness of outreach ministries, including pregnancy resource centers, food pantries, meal programs, outreach to the homeless, ministries to senior citizens and the sick.

Two: Catholic Education and Christian Formation

Catholic education was identified as another way in which the Archdiocese of Milwaukee journeys well with people. The archdiocese is blessed with 85 Catholic elementary schools, 16 Catholic high schools and 5 Catholic colleges and universities. Seton Catholic Schools (Milwaukee), Siena Catholic Schools (Racine) and St. Anthony School (Milwaukee) were identified as important Catholic schools that serve many children of families who live on the margins. Catholic schools remain an essential ministry of the Church's mission of evangelization, where children of all backgrounds and faith are welcomed and families are supported.

At the same time, the vast majority of Catholic children are not enrolled in Catholic schools. More than ever, parents need the support of the Church in raising their children in the faith. Concern was expressed about the quality of catechetical resources, reflecting a desire for greater support of parish Christian formation programs.

Processes and programs that help adults deepen their faith life are both appreciated and desired, particularly Bible studies, small faith-sharing discipleship groups, and formational opportunities. Younger people are less likely to show up for parish programs and events; the Church does well to use technology to meet them. Fr. Mike Schmitz' "Bible in a Year," podcasts and phone apps were identified as positive ways to utilize technology.

Three: Families

Many of those that participated in the diocesan consultation expressed concern that they see fewer young families, children and youth at Mass, and participating in the life of the parish. Parents grieve that their adult children have formally left or no longer practice their Catholic faith. Grandparents worry that their grandchildren are not baptized. People expressed that they do not know how to bring their children and grandchildren back to the Catholic faith, and feel helpless.

Parents of young children expressed how challenging Sunday Mass can be. Some parishes make great efforts to welcome families of young children. The Church can do more to assist families of young children, particularly families with children under the age of five.

Some parents spoke of how difficult it is to motivate their teenagers to attend Mass and to participate in Christian formation. Candidates for the sacrament of Confirmation continue to drop. Greater emphasis should be placed on engaging youth and young adults in the faith. Efforts such as Brew City Catholic and Cor Jesu were praised as drawing young adults more deeply into Catholic identity and discipleship.

Many noted the profound effects of abortion on the family and on society, recognizing that women who live in poverty and women of color are disproportionately more likely to feel supported in an unplanned pregnancy. Abortion has contributed mightily to the creation of a “culture of death,” in which the intrinsic value of human life from conception to natural death is disregarded. Participants called upon the Church to care for women and children through pregnancy, and provide supportive communities and assistance for women with young children, most especially single mothers.

Four: Liturgical Life of the Church

Concern was expressed over dwindling Mass attendance, and that Mass attendance at many parishes has not rebounded after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The parishes of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee reflect the diversity of cultures and religious expression. People experience God in liturgy in different ways. For some, traditional Latin Mass, a return to devotional practices, and the use of sacred music helps them encounter the sacred. Frustration, confusion and anger was expressed about recent Vatican instruction to limit these practices, while little is done to limit liturgical abuses in other parishes.

Others are deeply concerned that they see a return to devotional practices, and worry that the liturgical reforms of Vatican II are being rejected. Regardless of individual preferences, there was general agreement about the importance of liturgy being celebrated well, with care and advanced preparation by the celebrant and the ministers.

Homilies were identified as of significant important to our participants. Many commented on solid preaching by their priests. Others were frustrated by poor preparation, highly theological content “as if from a textbook,” and lackluster delivery. Some participants want to hear from the pulpit about social issues and how they, as the lay faithful are to engage in these issues. Yet others felt that social issues and politics have no place in the liturgy, and should be altogether avoided. Many recommended ongoing training of clergy in homiletics.

Five: Racism

Milwaukee, along with its surrounding communities remains one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States. This is reflected in neighborhoods, in schools, in the media and in our parishes. Members of our Black Catholic communities recall with pain the closing of Catholic parishes and schools on the north side of Milwaukee in the 1990s, as Catholic populations declined in the city. This substantially reduced the evangelization efforts in the urban communities with the strongest presence of African Americans. At the same time, Milwaukee’s community of African immigrants is growing, creating more diversity in our parish communities.

Milwaukee is also home to many Asian-Pacific Islander groups. Some groups are longer-established, such as the Filipino, Vietnamese, Hmong and Laotian communities. Other groups are newer to the United States, including refugee groups from Burma

(Myanmar). St. Michael Parish, Milwaukee and the northern Sheboygan parishes were praised for embracing the Asian-Pacific Islander groups.

Over 30 parishes in the Archdiocese have an established Hispanic ministry, which is one of the largest growing populations in southeastern Wisconsin.

The majority of participants in the diocesan consultation raised racism and racial justice as one of their top two concerns. Particular concern and care was expressed for the Black community, as participants across all demographics recognized that their brothers and sisters of color face disproportionate barriers and lack of support.

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic brought about a rise in racism toward persons and groups of Asian descent.

Racism, and the desire for racial justice was one of the top concerns raised in the 2021-23 Synod consultation process.

Six: Violence and Crime

Participants across all demographics and from all geographic areas expressed concern about growing violence. In our urban areas, gun violence has increased at an alarming rate, with record numbers of children and young people shot, often by other children and youth.

Reckless driving was also identified as a major concern, particularly in the urban areas of the archdiocese. Children, young people and innocent bystanders are often the casualties of reckless driving and street racing.

Some participants noted the impact of intergenerational poverty, incarceration, lack of affordable housing, joblessness, educational barriers, safety concerns, substance abuse, mental health issues, and abuse and trauma in our urban areas, and how that creates an environment in which violence flourishes.

Seven: Care for Those on the Margins, and Calls for Integration into the Life of the Church

When responding to the questions, *“In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, when are times and occasions when the Gospel is NOT being lived out and preached effectively?”* and *“What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening?”* many participants regard those who identify as LGBTQIA+ as among those marginalized in the Church.

There were some who articulated that they feel the Church is “out of touch” with the world, and that they believe this is a key issue on which there is a disconnect with young people, who see this as preeminent social justice issue and largely distrust institutions. Still others articulated understanding and support of the Church’s teaching on human sexuality, that marriage is between a man and a woman, and sexual activity is a gift from

God to be lived out within the sacrament of marriage. Many do not understand the Church's teaching on human sexuality. Greater pastoral care of, outreach to, and accompaniment of the LGBTQIA+ community is needed.

The disabled, particularly children, were identified as another group on the margins of the Church. Barriers remain to full participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, as well as access to Christian formation and Catholic education. Parents of disabled children, particularly those on the autism spectrum or who experience other neurodiversity, feel unsupported by the Church in their efforts to raise their children in the faith.

Greater efforts are needed to care for those who suffer from mental illness, the effects of which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting greater isolation. We are growing in awareness that mental health and mental illness cuts across all ages and stages of life. Clergy and pastoral workers are on the "front lines" of pastoral care, and would benefit from training and resources.

Racial and ethnic minorities, the homeless, women, the incarcerated, those returning to society from incarceration, immigrants and refugees were also identified as groups who are on the margins of the Church.

Eight: Clericalism

Clericalism was a concern that was consistently raised in both the online participation process and in the group listening sessions. The Church fails to journey well and proclaim the Gospel when clergy misuse their authority and fail to minister to their people well, including when:

- Priests are struggling with mental health issues, clericalism or abuse their power, and the concerns of the laity fall on deaf ears
- Priests impose their own personal liturgical styles on a new parish community, especially when radically different from the community's style
- Parish and diocesan leadership do not reflect the diversity of the Catholic Church or resemble those whom they serve
- Parish, diocesan, and global Church leadership listen only to certain voices, particularly those who agree with them, excluding the complexities of the lived experiences of people
- There is a lack of transparency about parish finances
- Priests openly disagree with Church teaching, causing confusion and scandal, particularly on moral issues

Participants ask that clergy be consistent in their moral teaching. They feel as though they are receiving conflicting information from the Holy Father, the bishops and their

local clergy. They see a lack of communication at all levels of the Church, and believe that Church leaders disagree with one another and offer conflicting messages.

The role of women in the Church was a fairly consistent theme in the feedback we received. While some participants called for the ordination of women and married men, more expressed the desire to see women serve in leadership roles in the Church that do not require ordination. This includes the desire to see women lead Vatican and diocesan offices, and have greater inclusion in decision-making.

Many also noted the importance of calling forth the gifts of the lay faithful, and utilizing their gifts and talents, as well as their educational and professional skills.

The Church would do well to deepen the human formation of seminarians, as well as the ongoing human formation of clergy in:

- Collaboration with the laity
- Appropriate shared leadership
- Working with women
- Communication skills
- Conflict management

Nine: Division and Lack of Civil Discourse

Many participants noted increased impatience, general intolerance and a lack of willingness to listen to and hear one another in society. Some commented on how personal beliefs about political elections and the Covid-19 pandemic have shattered families and friendships. There is a general increase in demonizing those who do not share the same opinions.

Growing divisions in society, and the lack of ability to talk with one another in a civil manner have spilled over into the Church. Many affirmed and expressed appreciation for the 2014 Archdiocesan Synod, and the 2021-23 Synod on Synodality. We fail to journey well when we fail to call upon and listen to the Holy Spirit, and we do not see the full dignity of one another as a beloved child of God.

Ten: The Sexual Abuse of Children and Vulnerable Adults

In addition to racism, the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults was raised as a place where the Church has deeply failed. Many believe that Church leadership does not fully understand the harm done to victims/survivors and their families, and to the People of God as a whole. While some recognized the efforts the Church has made in sexual abuse prevention, many remain scandalized by the reassignment of priest-perpetrators, and the cover-up of child sexual abuse. Trust has been shattered. Participants called for greater transparency and accountability on the part of Church leaders.

A number of victims/survivors and their families took part in the local consultation process. Some say they have not healed from the abuse they suffered, and are not sure

they ever will. Even if abuse occurred decades ago, victim/survivors describe feelings of pain, anger, shame, sadness, and isolation. Many describe feeling ignored or excluded in the Church, treated as a legal liability rather than as a beloved brother or sister in Christ who was deeply injured.

Participants called for:

- Greater accountability and transparency from Church leadership
- Deeper pastoral care for and accompaniment of victims/survivors of sexual abuse, and their families
- Training for priests and pastoral workers in trauma-sensitive pastoral care

Additional Note: Ecumenical and Interfaith Dialogue

While small in number, some individuals of other faith traditions offered feedback as part of the Synod on Synodality. The importance of ongoing ecumenical and interfaith dialogue was noted, as well as the desire to work together on common issues and concerns facing our communities.

Our Jewish brothers and sisters noted, “The 2023 Synod should affirm the Catholic Church's commitment to Chapter Four of *NOSTRA AETATE*. This chapter transformed the Church's understanding of its relationship with Jews and Judaism. This statement is yet to receive full implementation in global Catholicism as the rise of antisemitism continues in many places. Hence, following upon the commitment it made to the Fundamental Agreement with the State of Israel, we should all publicly denounce this growing expression of antisemitism. It should also look inwards into its formational programming and liturgical expression for any vestiges of the centuries-long tradition within the Church, a tradition that Pope John Paul II clearly termed sinful.”

Conclusion

The process of diocesan consultation for the 2021-23 Synod on Synodality was fruitful for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. While some were distrustful that their feedback would be heard or noted in the report, many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to take part in this dialogue. Many expressed their deep love for the Church.

In 2013, Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI called for an archdiocesan Synod, which began with his pastoral letter on ecclesiology, *Who Do You Say That I Am?* On Pentecost weekend 2014, over five hundred delegates and observers gathered together representing parishes, priests, deacons, religious communities, seminarians, schools, institutions of higher learning and health care facilities, as well as youth representatives and observers from religious denominations who have collaborated with the Catholic Church for the common good of our society. From this Synod, eight pastoral priorities emerged:

Catholic Identity

- Liturgy
- Cultural Diversity

Evangelization

- Evangelization
- Formation
- Catholic Social Teaching
- Marriage and Family

Stewardship

- Stewardship
- Leadership

Many of the themes noted in this Synthesis for the 2021-23 Synod on Synodality dovetail with our local Synodal pastoral priorities. As we conclude our diocesan consultation process, we recommit ourselves to these eight pastoral priorities, as well as to:

- The protection of children, youth, and adults from any type of abuse or mistreatment, especially sexual abuse
- Catholic education
- Hispanic Ministry
- Black Catholic Ministry
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministry
- Asian Pacific Ministry
- Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
- Parish Planning
- Vocations

The Church would benefit greatly from providing more opportunities for dialogue and listening. Synodality – the process of journeying together – is an opportunity for us to work together – clergy, religious and laity – in proclaiming the saving message of the Jesus Christ in our world.