

May 21, 2022

Diocese Synod Assessment

1. Overview of the demographic of participants. How were the consultations carried out?

The consultation was carried out in one afternoon on Sunday, April 24, 2022, at the parish hall. A box lunch was served prior to the conversation beginning.

--The total number of participants was 29: 1 person < 20 yrs.; 1 < 50 yrs; 27 >60 yrs. (While we have 200 families as registered parishioners, many of those are only part-time or summer residents of Cape Cod. The population of the parish is largely retired.) The number of participants was roughly what was expected. 4 who rsvp'd did not end up attending, but 4 attended who did not rsvp. None of the participants came from outside of the parish. The racial composition appeared to be 27 Caucasian, 1 Portuguese, 1 Latina.

2. Summary of responses to the Fundamental Question: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together:” How is this “journeying together” happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together?”

Participants were fairly unanimous in feeling that their “journeying together” occurs at Mass, which they truly enjoy, but no where else. This is a result of a few things: OLOL is perceived as a “seasonal parish”; COVID and the ensuing health enforcement actions (as well as being an older parish in fear of coronavirus spread) put a stop to communal gatherings for the past two years; there is little awareness of the possibilities for engagement in the parish; “journeying together” isn’t truly happening because we are missing or excluding members of the body of Christ—LGBTQ members, divorced/remarried members, members who believe in birth control, etc.

The Holy Spirit invites us to grow in “journeying together” through days like this one. There was joy in having the opportunity to have the discussion and for coming together to begin to build/re-build the parish community. There was a sense of urgency for action that was driven by the Holy Spirit (per the participants).

3. Other themes that came from the consultations

There is a universal thirst for community and opportunities to interact. There is an urgent call to provide opportunities to get to know each other through social activities and follow-ups to this synodal conversation. As one participant put it, “it’s the people who bring the journey together”. There is a desire to increase our awareness in the community, as well.

The second major theme was anger at the hierarchy of the Church, but a love of our parish. It was a clear delineation in the minds of participants. The hierarchy is seen as being out of touch with the lived experiences of the flock, and judgmental rather than loving.

Lastly, people want to become a more welcoming and vibrant community but are not sure how to do that.

4. How well has this consultation allowed the Parish Community the opportunity to listen and share their experiences of Church?

Participants seemed quite pleased to have been asked for their opinions and for the opportunity to discuss their feelings about the Church and our parish. We were all impressed with how respectful everyone was of others' beliefs and opinions, and how open and honest people were. We made it clear from the beginning that this would be a safe space and that people's rights to speak uninterrupted would be enforced. I believe we set the tone early and it worked. This is evidenced in the desire to come together again for future discussions such as these.

5. What practical suggestions do you have for your faith community to continue the synodal journey and be a more listening, discerning and participatory Church?

We must find ways for people to feel welcome in the parish, as there seems to be little hope in the Church-at-large becoming more welcoming and participatory for all Catholics. This will begin immediately with complete transparency to the parish of the questions and generalized responses to the synodal conversation, as well as immediately re-instituting opportunities to gather socially to get to know each other better. Coffee and donuts after Mass will resume (pending any new masking requirements), and a fundraising social event is already being planned. Participants want to see action resulting from their desires, and deserve it as a result of them giving their time and honest engagement in this process.

6. What practical suggestions do you have for the diocese to support parishes in becoming more synodal?

We offer a few suggestions, listed below. However, in the Diocese's desire to "journey together", there were missed opportunities in the synod packet and questions. Referring to those on the peripheries, "including women", truly misses the fact that women make up the majority of people in the pews, on parish councils, and as active ministers at Mass. Additionally, using language that further removes the laity from the clergy, i.e. "parrhesia" reinforces a kind of clericism that the Pope has advised strongly against. One hopes that, in the future, there would be more inclusive and thoughtful preparation and communication of concepts that would otherwise be used to unite rather than segregate.

Suggestions:

1. The Diocese should develop a plan to offer information on annulments and clear and specific steps people can take to pursue this. This needs to be done in a positive way that will result in people making peace with the Church and returning to the Mass and Eucharist. (Perhaps proposing a parishioner in each parish who can be a guide to people seeking an annulment.)
2. The Diocese should lead and promote interfaith dialogue or making people more aware of existing opportunities for this dialogue.
3. Better processes should be developed for hearing the laity's needs and input by those who are in the position to implement change. Perhaps the synodal model might be used to bring together not only members of individual parishes, but also clusters of parishes and even all Fall River parishes. Talent and the opportunity to enrich the church are being wasted, as are the opportunities of journeying together.
4. The Diocese should interact more with the parishes. When this occurred at St. Peter's, the diocesan representatives asked good questions and bonded with all who were there. Perhaps, once or twice a year there could be a visit and a listening day/night with parishioners.

For comments and questions please email OLOLSynod@gmail.com