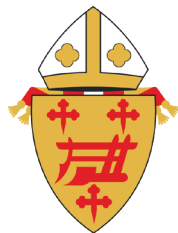




SYNTHESIS OF THE

Synod on Synodality

Local Meetings



— ARCHDIOCESE OF —
CINCINNATI

ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI
OHIO, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
OCTOBER 2021 TO MARCH 2022



ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

April 20, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you may know, last year Pope Francis opened the Synod of Bishops, “For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission,” a two-year process of prayer, listening, dialogue and discernment regarding how the Church can better enlist all the People of God, journeying together, to carry out its sacred mission of proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples. This process will culminate in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. All dioceses around the world have been asked to contribute feedback and perspective ahead of the Synod addressing the overall question, “How is this ‘journeying together’ happening in your local Church?”

In January and February 2022, we conducted numerous meetings in support of the synod process. These meetings were held in every deanery across the archdiocese as well as by several prayer groups, religious orders and universities. In total we had over 1,700 participants. I am very grateful for the time, passion and commitment participants put into these meetings. Truly, the Holy Spirit was at work. I am also grateful for the team of coordinators who oversaw putting in place all the necessary details to conduct these meetings.

There were many ideas and thoughts expressed in the meetings, and this report, which has been submitted to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), is a synthesis of these. In our quest to be a more synodal Church, the archdiocese, while not advocating for or against any of the ideas, will be examining them to discern what steps might be taken locally even before the 2023 Synod takes place in Rome. Some of the ideas and issues identified could be subjects of discussion as the Families of Parishes are implemented as the next step in the Beacons of Light pastoral planning process.

Synodality is all about walking together in pursuing the Mission of the Church and collaborating with the People of God on ways the Church can do this. With that as backdrop, the following pages contain the key themes that emerged from our local meetings.

Yours in Christ,

Deacon John Homoelle

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2021 the Archdiocese of Cincinnati began the journey of planning and conducting local meetings as part of the diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality. The Archdiocese covers a large geographical area, comprised of 19 counties, 210 parishes, and roughly 450,000 Catholics. Organizing a series of meetings such as this in a short amount of time was no small matter, but, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, things came together. In terms of the process that was used, these were the milestones:

1. Deacon John Homoele was appointed as contact person for the archdiocese in accordance with the *Vademecum* on the synod issued by the Vatican.
2. A decision was made to organize meetings at the deanery level to cover the synod questions in the time allotted.
3. Synod team members were identified whose responsibility, under the direction of Deacon Homoele, would be overseeing the scheduling and execution of these local meetings.
4. Awareness of the synod was raised through the following means: the archdiocesan website, a local radio interview, multiple articles in *The Catholic Telegraph* (the official magazine of the archdiocese), emails to parish leaders, bulletin announcements, petitions in the Universal Prayer at Sunday Masses, pulpit announcements, and inserts in parish bulletins. These spoke to the purpose of the synod, the meaning of synodality, the proposed questions to be considered, the underlying themes, and the practical details of meeting times and locations.
5. There was a period of prayer and discernment to help understand how to best address the fundamental questions being asked through the synod and the ten themes underlying the questions.
6. With this goal in mind, four topics were developed to lead the discussions. These are treated in more detail below.
7. The meetings were conducted in the first months of 2022.
8. Synod team members summarized the findings of each meeting.
9. All meeting findings were then compiled into this document.
10. This document was vetted by the entire synodal team for completeness and accuracy.
11. The document was then presented to Archbishop Schnurr for approval.

To elicit the participation of as many of the People of God as possible, we discussed ways to increase participation with the staff of the archdiocesan Office for Persons with Disabilities, the chaplains at local universities, and members of local charitable organizations who minister to the elderly, the homeless, the poor, immigrants, migrants, etc. We also reached out to the staff of the Office for Hispanic Evangelization and pastors whose communities have a high percentage of Hispanics. Two of the local meetings were conducted in Spanish. Additionally, to assist the deaf and hard of hearing,

American Sign Language interpreters were present at two of the local meetings.

At each meeting participants reported a strong feeling that the Holy Spirit was present. To fuel this, each meeting began with the *Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus* prayer followed by a moment of silence to allow the Holy Spirit to make Himself “at home in our hearts.”

In order to more systematically address the two fundamental questions of the synod and the ten underlying themes, after careful and prayerful discernment, the synod team chose to simplify this complex series of ideas into four topics:

1. Describe an experience you’ve had of a group working together, respecting everyone’s contributions, and growing in unity, so that you felt the Holy Spirit was really working among you.
2. What do you think the mission of the Church is, and what parts of our mission do you feel we are

neglecting? What would make us more effective in fulfilling our mission?

3. What voices are not being heard in our parish, Church, or community? What is preventing people from speaking up, and what is preventing us from listening?
4. How do you think we can improve participation and transparency in the life of our parish, Church, and community? What are some first steps we can take in this direction?

With this structure and these topics in hand, the work of the meetings began. Altogether, approximately 1,700 people participated in the meetings.

Despite the many efforts taken to reach out to all segments of the People of God, there was an under-representation of younger people. See Addendum 1 for the demographic breakdown of the meeting participants.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Twenty-four meetings were held over the course of two months. From these it became quickly evident that there was a great deal of creativity, passion, and enthusiasm for the process but also a high level of cynicism that anything would come of it.

The following points stand out as common discussion themes across many of the meetings. They then, represent the key takeaways:

1. In all cases there was high praise and gratitude for having this synod and for providing a platform where people could express their thoughts. In fact, many expressed a desire to keep this concept active.
2. While there was hope that something would come out of this, there was a great deal of cynicism and doubt that anything would. Participants stated that

such skepticism is based on past experiences with the hierarchy as measured by perceived lack of feedback, lack of interaction with the laity, and lack of change from thoughts and ideas that have been provided. Recognizing that many in decision making positions may not have the authority to undertake the recommendations made, many said that this could be circumvented if such decision making became less “top down.”

3. Participants believed that there are ideas that came out of these meeting that do not need to wait for the actual synod in order to be enacted (many of these suggestions can be reviewed in Addendum 2). They are looking to the Archbishop to lead this effort but are skeptical that this will happen.
4. There is a critical need for an effective means to

re-engage the youth and young adults in the faith. This is a tall order but one that perhaps begins by evangelizing them in the manner by which they communicate today – social media.

5. Also mentioned was a key need to catechize parents so that they truly can be the first teachers of the faith by their words and deeds.
6. Many stated that women occupy no decision-making positions in the Church. Although women play major roles in the everyday operations of the Church, many believe that, without being in decision-making roles, their input on any issue is not seriously considered.
7. The Church is struggling with the LGBTQIA+ issue. The participants themselves were split on this matter. On the one hand, some say that we should accept them *and* their lifestyle choice. On the other hand, there are those who ask how can we as Church accept such lifestyle choices that are clearly in conflict with divine and natural law.
8. Priests need to be relieved of their administrative responsibilities so that they can minister more fully to the sacramental and spiritual needs of their parishioners. This was a widely held comment. Lay people stand ready to help.
9. People are clamoring for clergy to be consistent in moral teaching, from the top down. They receive conflicting direction from the pope all the way down to the local clergy, particularly on hot-button moral issues.
10. Homilies
 - a. The people want homilies to be effective and relevant to today's life and issues, i.e. how can what we hear today help us to grow in our spiritual lives, in life's challenges, and in advancing the Mission of the Church?
 - b. The homilist should be a good speaker. If a priest realizes that he is not a good homilist, then in humility he should delegate that to someone else who is - perhaps a deacon or with proper training, lay people, male and female.
 - c. Homilies should catechize, teach pastorally (avoiding the use of Church jargon), and speak to the hot-button issues that exist today, e.g. racism, abortion, contraception, homosexuality, cohabitation, etc.
11. People connect with God in the liturgy in different ways. For some (a small minority) it is the liturgy that was used prior to Vatican II. For others (the vast majority) it is the liturgy in the vernacular that was promulgated after Vatican II. Some of these people feel separated from the celebration when Latin is used in this liturgy, while others have no problem with it. There was general recognition of the various ways in which liturgy can be validly celebrated. Pastors need to be sensitive as to what will spiritually feed their parishioners the best in the celebration of the liturgy.
12. There were many different definitions given for the Mission of the Church. This represents an opportunity for catechesis. It would be helpful to not only define the mission clearly but also to provide examples of living it in our everyday lives.
13. Many lay led organizations and parish groups have done much to invite the Holy Spirit into the work of the people – e.g. Cursillo, Christ Renews His Parish, St. Vincent de Paul Society, bereavement groups, women's groups, men's groups, food pantries, etc. The Church would do well to promote all the good that it is doing in the world through its various ministries.
14. The marginalized are often ignored. Examples include the incarcerated, the poor, the homeless, the addicted, the elderly, refugees, and immigrants. In addition, mention was made that it is difficult for a deaf person to go to confession when there is no priest who can sign. Blind people also have no braille-based books to follow the Mass.
15. There are many who consider the ordination of women to be a matter of social justice. Women comprise fifty percent of the world's population but zero percent of the priesthood. Although it has been declared definitively (cf. *Ordenatio sacerdotalis*)

that priestly ordination is to be limited to men, the debate as to whether this is an infallible teaching or not continues to raise questions that need to be clarified by Rome. This issue remains a major sticking point with a segment of the participants. Civil, frank, and open discussions should take place so that both sides can be heard.

16. The participants want more transparency in all areas of Church communications: financial matters, handling of sexual abuse, changes in liturgical practice, or any other areas where the laity as a royal priesthood can contribute before any decisions are

made.

17. We need to establish avenues to make people feel more genuinely welcomed when they come to Mass or any other function.

For a more extensive list of contributions made in support of the key takeaways listed above see Addendum 2. Participants hope and believe that many of these ideas can be enacted without having to wait for the conclusion of the synod meeting in Rome.

SYNOD MEETING EVALUATION BY PARTICIPANTS

Whenever an undertaking of this magnitude occurs, it is good to assess how the participants evaluated the quality of the meetings. Overall, on a scale from 1 to 5, the rating was approximately 4.0. See Addendum 3 for this analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SYNOD TEAM:

1. The participants indicated a desire to be more involved in the up-front input and ultimate decision-making process of the Church. How to do this is a matter of further discernment.
2. *Christifidelis Laici* (*The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People*), a post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope St. John Paul II, is rich in speaking to the role of the laity. It would be extremely valuable for the attendees of the synod in Rome to revisit this exhortation prior to the beginning of the synod meetings of 2023. This could also serve as the basis for a future local synod.
3. This experience had the potential to be a very powerful tool in growing the Church. Based on input from the participants, such meetings should continue to be held.
4. Feedback is critical to credibility. The participants, and indeed all the Catholics in the archdiocese, would benefit from a response on next steps including things we might possibly do now.
5. Accordingly, it is recommended that those items listed in the "Key Takeaways" section and Addendum 2 be examined by the Archbishop to discern which ideas could be initiated in the short term, i.e. prior to the start of the 2023 synod in Rome.
6. It is strongly recommended that this document be reproduced in its entirety as a link on the archdiocesan website under the Synod tab. Many of the participants asked for and are expecting this. It is also recommended that a summary version be provided as an article in a near-term edition of *The Catholic Telegraph*.

CONCLUSION

These meetings were clear indicators that the laity stand ready to assist the hierarchy of the Church to make it better. The lay faithful have many untapped gifts that they can bring to the Church. Synodality is a way for clergy and laity to work together to better advance the message of salvation to all in the world by more fully embracing their priestly, prophetic, and kingly calling. Much fruit can be harvested from these meetings and future meetings like them.

ADDENDUM 1

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

BY AGE

Age	Percent
<19	0.74
19-24	12.62
25-34	10.85
35-49	13.58
50-65	23.84
>65	38.38

BY GENDER

Gender	Percent
Female	57.73
Male	41.67

LGBTQIA+: 0.6% of participants

BY ETHNICITY

Ethnicity	Percent
European	86.48
African	1.83
Hispanic	10.47
Other	1.22

BY VOCATIONAL STATUS

Vocation	Percent
Married	55.84
Widowed	7.59
Single	24.47
Divorced	2.47
Religious Order	4.94
Clergy	4.26

ADDENDUM 2

CONTRIBUTIONS

PREFACE

Because of our common baptism, the vocation of each member of the People of God has priestly, prophetic, and kingly dimensions. Given this, the contributions expressed in the local meetings were arbitrarily placed under these three classifications around the two foundational synod questions. These are not inclusive of all contributions but do represent the overall essence of them. Many of the contributions not listed here were captured in the key takeaways.

PRIESTLY CONTRIBUTION (FOCAL POINT: PRAISE AND WORSHIP)

How is the Church Journeying together today in living and advancing its mission?

1. Through small faith sharing groups, retreats, Fathers Accountable to Healthy and Enduring Relationships, MOM's group, serving those in need, Christ Renews His Parish, men's groups
2. The community's participation in the Mass – a feeling of the presence of the Holy Spirit
3. Retreats
4. Many of the lay ministries that we have – Mary Name sodality, Vacation Bible School, prayer groups, and Bible study groups
5. Medical professionals guided by divine inspiration
6. Working together is a joyful Spirit-led experience when everyone is viewed as being important in everyday life
7. Prayers incorporated into athletic competitions
8. Funerals
9. Personal fasting
10. Lighthouse community
11. Healing Masses

12. Socializing and fellowship opportunities after daily Mass

13. Prayers for the dying

14. Christmas and Easter bags for the homebound

What steps is the Holy Spirit inviting us to take in order to better journey together going forward?

1. Teach Catholicism from the pulpit.
2. Revise the Eucharistic Prayer with fewer words, let the beauty of the ritual speak.
3. For new pastors, take time to learn what makes the parish tick and what appeals to the people before making any changes. These changes should also be done in collaboration with parishioners.
4. Make churches more accessible for persons with disabilities where this has not already been done.
5. Make liturgy more welcoming.
6. Young people want new and exciting opportunities to worship.
7. Offer morning and evening prayers from the Liturgy of the Hours; priests don't need to lead this, just support it.
8. Teach how to pray and the forms of prayer in common language from the pulpit.
9. Have seminarians go to local schools to give witness to the faith.
10. Incorporate familiar music in the Mass so people can participate more fully.
11. We need more reverence in the music, to sing traditional songs and feel heaven in the Mass.
12. Institute youth Masses where lectors, musicians, ushers, distributors, and servers are all youth.



PROPHETIC CONTRIBUTION (FOCAL POINT—EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS)

How is the Church Journeying together today in living and advancing its mission?

1. Vacation Bible School, prayer groups, and Bible study groups
2. Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults
3. Youth mission trips
4. Theology of the Body
5. KAIROS
6. Alpha program
7. Cursillo
8. Men's groups in Prison

What steps is the Holy Spirit inviting us to take in order to better journey together going forward?

1. Re-identify and emphasize what it means to be Catholic. Clarify and catechize on the Mission of the Church.
2. Educate the laity on the basics of Catholic Social Teaching.
3. Educational opportunities for the laity in helping to carry out the Church's mission.
4. Better faith formation for our children.
5. Programs to better engage the young adult population.
6. Recognize that our youth communicate differently than older generations and modify our means of catechesis to fit their mode.
7. Listen fully to the youth who believe that what they say doesn't matter.
8. Better catechesis on annulments and addressing the LGBTQA issue pastorally.
9. More faith formation opportunities for adults 18-25.

10. Mission outreach for fallen away Catholics.
11. A deeper dive on the "why" of our beliefs rather than just stating them without explanation.
12. More Spanish speaking priests.
13. Use the synod information to identify areas where catechesis is most needed and not change Church teaching that has existed since its beginning.
14. More college ministry.
15. Helping people to overcome the misconception that listening and hearing what someone is saying is only confirmed if that suggestion or thought comes to reality. In other words, overcoming the belief that: "if you did not do what I suggested, you weren't listening!"
16. Clergy needs to be less distant and more personal.
17. Christians from other denominations can come together, respecting our differences but leveraging our commonalities in accomplishing more collaboratively the mission of the Church.
18. Better catechesis on explaining that Church was made hierarchical by Jesus and that the Holy Spirit, not man, guides its teachings.
19. Better catechesis done pastorally around hot button issues such as LGBTQA, abortion, contraception, and chastity.
20. Form Catholic school teachers to be able to better teach the faith to our children.
21. In parallel, teach parents the rudiments of our faith so that they can be examples of the faith to their children.
22. Preach against the threat of relativism diluting the message of Christ and his Church by making things that are against God's laws and his Church's inspired teaching look like moral goods.
23. Return to the original form of the Sacrament of the Sick. From the 9th century the RC Church permitted the laity to bestow an anointing analogous as to how they bring the Eucharist. Confession, if possible, would have to be done by a priest.

24. Teach how we can live out the mission of the Church more effectively.
25. Teaching on how to make the Church and beliefs relevant in a world plagued by instant gratification and busyness.
26. As a means to be heard, conduct surveys for parishioners on issues, resulting in focus groups on those issues identified, with results going to the archbishop.
27. Catechesis and education on Vatican II and its documents and implications. Perhaps a parish mission.
28. Ministries for parents to help them in taking the lead on being responsible for and involved in their children learning and living the faith genuinely.
29. People want the true Catholic faith taught – not watered down.
30. Laity needs to be evangelized (such as why the Church teaches what it does), equipped and empowered to bring Christ to others.
31. Getting back in concrete ways the concept that there is such a thing as objective truth and consequently objective rights and wrongs.
32. Catechesis on Church rituals and the reasons behind them, especially to newer Catholics, minorities, and those who don't often attend liturgies.
33. Bring in motivational Catholic speakers who can effectively speak to their faith and help people to intellectually and affectively have a positive experience that helps them in their journey of faith.
2. St. Vincent de Paul, Mary Name sodality, food pantries
3. Parish dinners for those who do not have a place to go on holidays
4. Working together with youth at parish or other events
5. Mission trips to help the poor
6. Activism such as Right to Life marches
7. Catholic schools
8. Stephen Ministry
9. Rise-up Against Hunger program
10. Health Centers
11. Merging of schools
12. Helping those in need
13. Catholic charities
14. Catholic hospitals

What steps is the Holy Spirit inviting us to take in order to better journey together going forward?

1. Simplify the structure of the Church where more voices can be routinely heard.
2. Find a way to make Catholic education more affordable.
3. Listen to the marginalized, women, minorities, nones, LGBTQIA+, and welcome them.
4. Overcome those things that prevent people from speaking up – fear, apathy (no one listening, won't be heard anyway, nothing comes of the feedback, they will do what they want to do anyway, lack of knowledge.)
5. Be better listeners: better training for priests' listening skills, create a forum for listening.
6. Learn to recognize that God reaches out to everyone in their own way.

**KINGLY CONTRIBUTION
(FOCAL POINT—CARE FOR OTHERS
AND THE WORLD)**

How is the Church journeying together today in living and advancing its mission?

1. Community outreach: communion service to home bound



7. Be more synodal in making Church and parish decisions. Invite more laity to contribute.
8. Help divorced people to feel like they are part of the Church.
9. Phone ministry to call lapsed Catholics and invite them back to the Mass and parish.
10. Look to non-Catholic entities who are successful in building communities and examine or implement their practices so far as they do not violate dogma, doctrine, or canon law.
11. Remove the fear of not being listened to or being judged.
12. Be more conscious of the Hispanic members of our Church.
13. Offer support groups to people who are hurting – abortions, miscarriages, divorce, sexual addiction, etc.
14. Train seminarians to be able to listen and be open to where people are at.
15. Overcome judgementalism.
16. Employ personal connections and invitations as a good way to pull youth and others back into the Church.
17. Be willing to step out of our comfort zones to reach people with whom we typically do not interface.
18. Suggestion boxes in the Church buildings for those fearful of speaking up in person.
19. Put faith (i.e., Mass and reconciliation) before Catholic sporting events.
20. Need to do a better job of educating the people as to what the Church has done to root out sexual abuse issues. Involve lay people in this education. Problem – lack of trust on what is said.
21. Install welcoming committees that not only greet people at Masses but also call on new parishioners and those who no longer attend Mass.
22. Survey people who are known to no longer practice the faith for the reasons why, but in a non-judgmental and non-threatening manner.
23. Speak pastorally to what self-righteousness looks like and then work on ways to eliminate it. This attitude turns many people away, particularly the youth, divorced and homosexuals.
24. Drive out any racism from the Church. So many minorities do not become Catholic because they do not feel as if they will be accepted due to the color of their skin.
25. The Church needs to be more pastoral in the world and the messages that it delivers.
26. The hierarchy of the Church needs to be willing to change. The method can be changed without changing the message.
27. Training in friendship/neighborhood evangelization to teach people how to invite and welcome others.
28. Help people to figure out their gifts and how to apply them to various ministries.
29. Establish forums where the laity can openly discuss their concerns, ask questions, allowing the clergy to ascertain the pulse of the parish/archdiocese, and respond accordingly and pastorally.
30. Publicize what changes over the centuries were introduced into the Church by the laity, especially women.
31. Create a “council” composed of strictly laity (men and women equally) that meets with the archbishop quarterly to discuss issues and develop action plans to address them. This is separate from the archdiocesan pastoral council.

ADDENDUM 3

EVALUATION RESULTS

CONDUCTED VIA SURVEY MONKEY TO ALL ATTENDEES

PERCENT OF ATTENDEES RESPONDING—20%

Rating -->	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Wtd. Avg.
Scale -->	1	2	3	4	5	
I found the topic discussed to be relevant	6.5	9.2	20.3	32.3	31.7	3.7
The time allowed for each topic was sufficient	5.3	7.7	21.7	39.3	26.0	3.7
The scribe included the main items brought up at my table	5.4	4.8	14.1	35.8	39.9	4.0
I liked the format of the meeting i.e., 6-8 people per group	3.7	3.7	13.7	35.5	43.4	4.1
Everyone had an opportunity to speak at my table	2.5	4.7	9.2	30.7	52.9	4.3
I believe that my meeting was truly Holy Spirit led	8.2	11.0	28.5	27.3	25.1	3.5
I believe that I was truly listened to at my table	3.5	3.8	15.8	34.5	42.4	4.1
The meeting was well planned and conducted	5.3	10.0	17.2	30.3	37.2	3.8
The collaborative experience is a powerful way to become a better Church in the world	11.4	9.5	17.7	23.4	38.0	3.7
I would like to see more of these opportunities in the future	7.1	6.0	14.1	26.7	46.1	4.0
I expect to be able to read the report that is written in summary of the meetings	1.3	2.4	6.0	15.4	74.9	4.6
I hope to see some things that the archdiocese can implement before the actual Synod takes place in 2023	5.9	4.6	15.7	16.6	57.2	4.2
Overall Average						4.0