

REGION XIII

INTERIM STAGE SYNTHESIS

Synod of Bishops 2021-2024

Cheyenne
Colorado Springs
Denver
Gallup
Las Cruces
Las Vegas

Phoenix
Pueblo
Reno
Salt Lake City
Sante Fe
Tucson

Introduction

Region XIII is located in the Western United States and is a diverse and rich populus of many languages and cultures. Eleven of twelve archdioceses and dioceses participated, with 6,494 people and 419 listening sessions.

Deeper reflection on the responses by the dioceses brought about an awareness of sincere desire. A desire that is rooted in hopefulness. A desire that yearns for the spirit of synodality to bear fruit found in unity through a shared responsibility for the mission of the Church. Shared between the leadership of both clergy and laity. “The increased involvement of the laity was mentioned in almost every document.”¹ The language of the Synod preparatory documents was not evident, but the spirit of journeying together, ministering together, and accompaniment as a way of serving were articulated in many ways. There is hope in continuing to move away from any vestiges of clericalism, and continuing to develop collegial models of the clergy and laity ministering together.

There is a humility that must be embraced for the genuine and honest synodal temperament to take deeper root. On-going formation within the organization and structure of leadership is essential. However, to follow, flourish and grow in the Spirit, we must cooperate with the grace that God grants us and continue the work of human development to better recognize the dignity and good of all people. This is to say, refining ourselves as a Church and individuals. There is a virtuous path to be gained, and it will be discovered in the synodal journey marked by charity, faithfulness, friendship, mercy, and great, great hope.

There is also a tangible longing for greater clarity and stability in how our leadership communicates. To be in flux is difficult when there is a desire to give truth to the world. “There was a spectrum of understanding and a different view [of] how the Church moves with the world. That some wish for us to be solid rock,...and others long that we might be [a] living vine, that we might be able to move and grow, and absorb change in a complex world and still bring the truth of Jesus Christ in proclamation.”² If that proclamation is to succeed, communication of the faith and mission must be communicated well and in a timely fashion.

Toward the right margin for each topic below, there is a percentage indicating how many dioceses included it in their responses.

Where have I seen or experienced successes—and distresses—within the Church’s structure(s)/organization/leadership/life that encourage or hinder the mission?

Co-responsibility and Synodality

73%

There is a clear desire for the laity to participate in ministry, leadership, and the life of the Church through a more distinct co-responsibility for the mission of the Church in the world. The local community is most vibrant when leadership, both clerical and lay, creates greater unity in a synodal fashion. When leaders are collegial it is more possible to embrace the spirit of koinonia that jointly contributes gifts that enliven the Body of Christ. Additionally, there is a desire by the laity for the clergy, at all levels, to be more present beyond the sacraments.

“What does the church mean by synodality? If we believe that the Church is mother, then the Synod is feminine. Women are relational; we bring and nurture life.”³ The synodal experience is in opposition to clericalism, as the concept of walking together calls us to open ourselves to the possibility of bringing new life to the Church.

“Clericalism continues to be distressing since it is perceived as working in opposition to collegiality, co-missioning, and co-responsibility of the laity.”⁴ This can lead to the “Church not recognizing the gifts and dignity of all the baptized.”⁵ Better formation of the clergy in styles of leadership, synodality, and working for co-responsibility in parish life are needed. Requiring parish pastoral councils in canon law could be an important step in structuring clergy accountability and promoting co-responsibility and synodal leadership models.

Eucharist and Worship

45%

The Eucharistic Revival is a positive experience for many. The Eucharist as the source and summit is where “we experience the living Body of Christ in each other,”⁶ and the Revival is helping to heighten this awareness. “The universality of the liturgy world-wide is an important success....When one doesn’t know the language of the celebration, one can still know the structure and deeper meaning behind the actions and parts of the Mass. This is not to say that other forms of the celebration, i.e. Latin Mass, do not have value, but celebrating in the vernacular is very helpful to being drawn into what is faithful, holy, and reverent. The distress comes when the opposite is true should the Mass appear to be rushed or a reverence appears to be lost. Another distress is when some seem to think reverence can only be gained in their preferred way of celebrating Mass.”⁷

Leadership Communication

73%

Poor communication by the Pope and bishops is causing confusion. When the bishops publicly disagree among themselves or with the Pope it causes distress. Consistency brings about greater confidence. Poor communication forces the faithful to “fill in the blanks or develop their own version of the truth.”⁸ Church documents can often be difficult to understand, and the secular media are often the first to interpret or relay the information.

Dignitas Infinita is an example of clear and good communication, but it has taken five years to bring it forward, while the social discord has been growing rapidly. When communication is at its worst, it can begin to affect the mission of the Church and the engagement of the people.

Effective communication becomes more difficult with the loss of credibility. “The Church is experiencing a loss of credibility in the world for a variety of reasons....[we are] dealing with a ‘huge loss of credibility because of scandals, especially the sex abuse scandal. And that loss of moral authority, tragically, has led to a loss of the Church’s ability to have a prophetic voice, because people just don’t want to listen anymore.’”⁹

Social Teaching **27%**

The Social Teaching of the Church is an important success in how we live out our faith. It provides the framework for a positive structuring to live the Gospel. How we care for human life, the dignity of every person, the care for the poor and vulnerable are just the beginning. These efforts in how we live in society are important unto themselves, but also give great witness and lived hope. It is also an ongoing area where we can always improve.

Annulments **36%**

The process of annulments is seen as too burdensome. Often, they are too time consuming, and costly. More so, they can be a painful process for those involved.

How can the structures and organization of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?

Co-responsibility In Mission **73%**

The baptized desire greater co-responsibility and to be more involved in the mission of the Church. A spirit of accompaniment is directed toward those whom we minister, but should also be directed between clergy and lay ministers as well. “Listening to others will have its challenges. We will find disagreements, we will find the need for greater discussion, we’ll find a troubling in our souls, we will at times, be presented with such hopeful possibilities. But, we cannot know these things if we are not present to each other.”¹⁰ There is a desire for both the clergy and the laity to be accountable to co-responsibility and the spirit in which it is carried out.

Welcoming, Friendships, Mercy, and Hope **73%**

Accompaniment is rooted in being together, and for the people of God to be present to one another. We journey together to God faithfully. The togetherness that is a hallmark of accompaniment is how we invite one and all to enter the conversation, join in prayer, worship, and actively listen to each other. Some of the people of God carry heavy burdens, do not understand the faith, are returning to the faith, or are in need of a merciful invitation.

There is hopefulness that we can become more welcoming when we better recognize the infinite dignity of each person. Less the idea of separating ourselves from “those people,” and more the idea of realizing that we are all called to the table of the Lord, to faithfulness and holiness, to newness of life, and for those who need healing. Dignity will extend kindness, mercy, respect, and the glory of God manifested. This is how we welcome, build friendships, and grow in hope.

Formation

82%

One of the most discussed sentiments across our region is the need for better formation of every type, for both pastoral leadership and laity. Formation is needed for catechetics, ecumenism/interfaith, evangelization, spirituality, young adults, youth, welcoming, and various other ministries. Formation for the clergy specifically was often mentioned.

“Formation is key to growth in a parish,”¹¹ and is important to improving how we practice accompaniment, co-responsibility, and a genuine spirit of welcoming. Formation helps us to gain confidence, knowledge, methodology, and more. What is often lacking is the mentoring process¹² within formation, and with on-going formation. Accompaniment should lend itself to mentoring, refining, and helping each other to grow.

On-going formation of the clergy will be beneficial. The clergy face many difficulties in the practical realities of ministry, such as priest shortages, multi-cultural and multi-lingual environments, and clericalism among some. How a priest interacts, preaches, and leads has a profound impact on the people. The Diocese of Pueblo reported a common reality in the West, “the number of missionary priests continues to rise in our diocese, now at 70%, from nine countries. Far fewer parishioners see a priest that looks and sounds like them. It is difficult for foreign priests to understand the parishioners as well. On the other hand, when a foreign priest is prayerful and kind, he is gladly accepted.”¹³ This sentiment is present when any clergy (international or local) crosses cultures and languages. When clericalism creeps in, or co-responsibility and accompaniment are squashed, there is real heartache and distress. The people want to love their clergy, but also want to be loved by them. They want to experience the love of God working through their bishop, deacons, and priests. On-going formation of the clergy can help with meeting the demands of diverse ministry, but more so, address “how” clergy care for and relate to the people of God.

Women

36%

Women expressed concern about being underrepresented and undervalued. Involvement of women in this synodal process has been a positive experience. However, “care should be taken to include the voices of women in this structure and in other structures of the Church.”¹⁴ Some want women to have more than a seat at the leadership table and see their exclusion from holy orders as a detriment. “Ongoing concern was voiced again on the role of women in the life of the Church, with many favoring women deacons and the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making roles at all levels of Church hierarchy.”¹⁵ “While it is a good first step to acknowledge women’s voices and invite them to be present at the

table for conversations that will impact the entire Church, there is little accomplished if attitudes towards the worth of women's experiences and insights remain dismissive."¹⁶

Youth and Young Adults

45%

The formation and mentoring of the youth and young adults is a high desire, as we see many of them leaving the faith, or just not showing up any more. A "desire for better catechesis and programs to serve the youth, pre-confirmation and post-confirmation"¹⁷ is especially needed. We need to listen to them more and encourage their involvement in ministry. It is important that we cultivate "our youth in community service and participation in Church."¹⁸ It is interesting that the youth are often brought up in the conversation of inclusion, which indicates they feel excluded.¹⁹ A lot of energy, finances, and resources are poured into Catholic schools, but we do not have the same efforts for the youth in our parish programming.

Technology

27%

There is a desire for better implementation of technology in catechesis, formation, and social networking. This is important to our youth and young adults; thus, it should be important to the leadership of the Church. Better use of technology will also help in the organization and structures of the Church, especially in areas of leadership communication, on-going leadership (clerical and lay) formation, and formation of the faithful.

Conclusion

The synodal process beckons us to better listen to one another, and this can be challenging. There are many cultural issues at work in the world and this is reflected in the Church. "It seems we need to be more aware of those issues...that raise up polarization in society...It's a huge challenge to priests every day that people have all this access to teaching that is allegedly from Catholic media or even Catholic bishops and cardinals that are an alternative to the Magisterium."²⁰ Our synodal listening is inevitably affected by this idea of an "Alternative Magisterium" that is developing among some of the faithful.

Another challenge is our responsiveness to the deepest desires presented. We are not listening to no end and there is the possibility that some fruit will be born into action – action that extends mercy, builds unity, expands hearts and minds in faithfulness, ignites hope, and more. What is our actual responsiveness to our synodal listening? In this current process, it is to provide feedback to the delegates of the Synod. In the parish or school, in many instances it may be more relational than consultative. When there is desire for change, it may or may not come, but a definitive response should be given in a reasonable amount of time.

The challenge of modeling synodality and listening needs to flow from the leadership, the bishops, and the Pope. "The idea that when bishops don't stand together it confuses and upsets the faithful....We look to our priests, and our deacons, and our bishops to be strong

leaders and to show us that pastoral care we so deeply need. When people don't feel that, they don't recognize that, it hurts the Body...We are all feeling that...and it reminds me that we have a whole lot of work to do."²¹

In a positive vein, many of our bishops have embraced the synodal activity on the diocesan level. One participant remarked, "I'm impressed with how I've seen most of the bishops handle [the synodal process] and how they went to these sessions and actually listened. It was amazing to me."²² Many bishops, pastors, and other leaders have already incorporated the results of their local listening sessions into pastoral planning, ministry, and other activities.

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End Notes

- ¹ Diana Waggener, Diocese of Cheyenne, Co-responsibility
- ² Michelle Montez, Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Communication
- ³ Diocese of Cheyenne, Feminine Church
- ⁴ Archdiocese of Las Vegas, Clericalism.
- ⁵ Archdiocese of Denver, Clericalism
- ⁶ Ibid., Eucharist
- ⁷ Diocese of Salt Lake City, Eucharist
- ⁸ Saint Andrew Parish, Diocese of Salt Lake City, Leadership Communication
- ⁹ Diocese of Colorado Springs, Loss of Credibility
- ¹⁰ Michelle Montez, Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Accompaniment
- ¹¹ Diocese of Phoenix, Formation
- ¹² Diocese of Tucson, Mentoring
- ¹³ Diocese of Pueblo, Clergy Formation
- ¹⁴ Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Women
- ¹⁵ Archdiocese of Las Vegas, Women
- ¹⁶ Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Women
- ¹⁷ Diocese of Las Cruces, Youth
- ¹⁸ Diocese of Reno, Youth
- ¹⁹ Diocese of Tucson, Youth
- ²⁰ Bishop Steven Biegler, Diocese of Cheyenne, Alternative Magisterium
- ²¹ Diana Waggener, Leadership Discord
- ²² Deacon Dan Tomich, Diocese of Colorado Springs, Bishop Engagement