



This report isolates highpoints gleaned from the discussion and written responses of the 66 total participants, which are organized using the three typical categories of the General Secretariat of the Synod's "A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report" (28 October 2023).

The **CONVERGENCES** identify specific points that orientate reflection, akin to a map that helps us find our way.

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

Successes

- Collaboration of laity and clergy in promoting community life in parishes and in restructuring parishes: When lay leadership is trained and able to lead with competency in their area of responsibility, and inspired by the love of God, parish life seems to work more smoothly and effectively. The restructuring of parish staffing has, both by choice and by necessity, occasionally promoted the discovery of new charisms practiced by both clergy and laity. The vast majority of parish leadership (staff and volunteers) in our parishes are women.
- Catholic schools: Our diocese has twenty primary schools, four high schools and one university. Their presence increases the Catholic presence in their communities and provides for a solid formation for youth in the faith.
- Lay formation programs: Over the course of the thirty years in which our diocesan Institute of Lay Formation has been in existence, around 700 lay persons have been formed.
- Increase in parish hospitality: A welcoming parish finds ways to invite people in their imperfection into the community. They continually seek out new volunteers. They balance welcoming people into the community with the piety called for in the celebration of the Sacraments.
- Increase in women's roles and parish diversity: The make-up of parish staffs and key volunteers, especially catechists, are women. About half of the diocesan staff is female.
- Social service ministries: The presence of Catholic Charities, St. Vincent de Paul Society, and other parish-based ministries make positive impacts on our communities. However, since these services focus on those persons found on the peripheries, they are frequently unknown to many in the community.
- Constancy in sacramental ministries and church's teaching: When the faithful are hearing similar messages regarding the gospel from the Pope, bishop and pastor, parishioners have greater confidence in knowing and living the faith.

Distresses



- Steep decreases in youth-to-middle-aged participation in sacraments and parish life: Despite best efforts, it is distressing to see so many people leave the Church. The Church is in competition with busy scheduled, especially sports, in the lives of families. Parents do not frequently see

themselves as “the first and best of teachers.” Our diocese has seen a 37% decline in Mass attendance in the past fifteen years.

- Polarization among Roman Catholics: A small but vocal group bemoaned the restrictions on the Latin Mass. This group experienced distress by the disrespect shown to the Eucharist by many, priests included. All those who declared that irreverence at Mass was a distress were also distressed by the restrictions on the Latin Mass. On the other hand, others experienced distress by the growing rift between adherents of the Latin and Novus Ordo Mass rituals. Aside from liturgical differences, much of the polarization between Roman Catholics seems to fall along political lines.

- Pressurization of priesthood with fewer clergy, increasing responsibilities, and effects of scandals: pastors are often spread thin—taking care of multiple parishes and being required to take part in many administrative tasks—in such a way that they are not always able to be present to teach and sanctify the people of God.

- Ambiguity regarding “evangelization” and “synodality”: Pope St. Paul VI first coined the term “New Evangelization” about sixty years ago, and Catholics in our diocese are still adjusting to what that means. Now, “synodality” has become a term frequently heard but often misunderstood in its definition, purpose, and implementation. The ambiguity in both areas is exacerbated by the following point.

- Poorly catechized adults, parents, and formators in parishes: Lifelong formation is sometimes offered with great success to those who participate, but the level of participation is sadly low.

- Overtly judgmental and rigid priests and parish ministers: People understand the difference between being challenged toward conversion and being embarrassed. The latter can happen too often. Looking back, decisions to restrict access to churches and the Eucharist during COVID continue to be painful for some.

Of particular note, the annulment process received significant comments. Many said that the annulment process can both give healing and peace, as well as shame and rejection (regardless of the decision). The process is not seen by many as ensuring justice, but as Machiavellian. It is lengthy and can often leave people hurt in such a way that they sometimes will leave the Church entirely. In my own experience, I see this partly as an issue of the organization of the Church: when ministers of the Diocesan Tribunal are lacking, it is easy to lack empathy and to prolong the process. When this happens, the old adage is fulfilled: justice delayed is justice denied.

- Loss of parishes: In the past ten years, our diocese has reduced from 116 parishes to 94. Catholics in rural areas often experience the merging of parishes and feel abandoned.



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?

- Utilizing the structures of the Church to promote organized formation was repeatedly expressed as a deep desire. More engaging formation of 1) parents alongside or as part of family catechesis, 2) clergy and laity for collaboration, and 3) youth for faith development: We offer many good opportunities outside of catechetical sessions, including retreats (e.g. Camp Summit), mission trips and conferences (e.g. NCYC, Steubenville). Strong witnesses to faith as catechists are most helpful. Sacramental preparation programs engage both youth and their parents. RCIA gives life to the Church when catechists and sponsors are trained and understanding of the wide variety of backgrounds each candidate comes from.
- Increased hospitality into parishes and social outreach out of parishes: the challenge often faced in experiencing this increase is that the long-time volunteers are aging out and younger volunteers are not replacing them.
- Newfound ways of supporting priests: Administrative support and ongoing formation (particularly in preaching and human formation) is especially desired.

The **MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION** summarize points about which it is necessary to continue deepening our understanding pastorally, theologically, and canonically. This is like being at a crossroads where we need to pause so we can understand better the direction we need to take.

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

- What is constancy and development in Roman Catholic teaching? There are several reasons for this question to be considered. The Church has to find ways to adapt to the reality of many sources of information, both accurate and inaccurate. Many Catholics are also unaware of the varying levels of teaching that come from the Vatican and do not always realize the difference between dogma and theological opinion, between doctrine and pastoral practice.
- How can parish closings and restructuring generate community life and individual charisms? This has more to do with practical considerations than canonical processes and the protection of rights. If anything would be helpful regarding processes, it would be in realizing that needs (e.g. insurance, climate) are different throughout the world. Best practices in helping parishioners grieve and then move into the life of another parish are helpful.
- How can Catholic organizations attract non-participants? Parishes in particular are often seen as strong in building the community that is present (but not the faithful and non-Catholics who are not present).



- How can the Catholic Church move responsibly past its abuse-era? Some question priorities within Church life, especially when those priorities appear to be driven by legal counsel and insurance carriers in ways that are contrary to the mission of the Church.

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?

- How can laity and clergy increase collaborative practices? Our diocese already has a long-standing tradition of pastoral and finance councils being active in parishes. Volunteers abound. However, too little happens in the parish if not instigated or driven by the pastor.
- How can women's roles in parish leadership and priestly formation increase? We have a propaedeutic and discipleship seminary present in our diocese. Aside from their professors and apostolic work supervisors, is there a role for women in the formation of priests?

The **PROPOSALS** indicate possible paths that can be taken. Some are suggested, others recommended, others still requested with some strength and determination.

The sixty-six participants collectively did not propose paths forward. Their concluding written comments show that participants were most grateful and enthusiastic for the opportunity to dialogue and to discuss. Without clerics' collective input, dialogue and discussion gained in the interim process will be muted, and planning for our own diocesan Synod 2025 will be impeded.