

SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM

SYNOD 2021 -2023

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission
Diocese of Knoxville (USA) – Diocesan Synthesis

INTRODUCTION

Vatican directive. The Diocese of Knoxville received a Vatican directive on September 7, 2021, that set into motion a process that may be unmatched in recent Church history and will culminate in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops led by Pope Francis in Rome in 2023. The preparatory document on *For A Synodal Church: Communion / Participation / Mission* outlines a course of action that the Vatican calls both “a gift and a task” for dioceses and “invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission.”

Global scope. The Vatican’s choice of words is intentional, and the reference to “the entire Church” isn’t figurative. Pope Francis’ desire is for Catholic leadership to hear and understand the words and thoughts of the faithful from around the globe and that includes the people who reside in the territory of the Diocese of Knoxville.

Overview of diocese. The Diocese of Knoxville, a mission diocese erected in 1988, is about 2.8 percent of the general population of our territory, representing almost 68,000 registered Catholics, though this number is much greater given the number of unregistered Catholics, many of whom are undocumented workers (Note: Tennessee has the third-fastest growing Hispanic population in the nation). The Diocese of Knoxville currently has 51 parish churches, one mission church and 10 schools. The religious vitality of the diocese is fostered in general by the fact that a solid majority of people in East Tennessee state that religion is “very important” to them and profess to be a practicing Christian. In the rural areas this is particularly true. Despite being a small minority in a part of the state referred to as the “buckle of the Bible-belt,” Catholics are proud to express their Catholic faith and generally were open to participating in the diocesan phase of the Synod.

DIOCESAN SYNODAL PROCESS

Synodal co-Leaders. On September 14, 2021, Bishop Richard F. Stika appointed Chancellor Deacon Sean Smith and Catholic Charities Executive Director Lisa Healy to serve as co-leaders of the synod process for the Diocese of Knoxville. Deacon Scott Maentz and John Steger were assigned as survey developers and data managers. On November 1, 2021, Deacon Smith and Lisa Healy announced members of the Diocesan Synod Team and group coordinators who would help fulfill the first phase of the Synod.

Diocesan synodal team. The very diverse Diocesan Synod Team was comprised of 26 members (10 males and 16 females) made up of Catholics and non-Catholics. The members included priests, deacons, woman religious and the laity. These members consisted of representatives from the African, Anglo, Filipino, Latino and Vietnamese communities and contained specialists in the areas

of schools, youth/young adults, charitable services to the marginalized and homeless, immigration, and cultural diversity.

Developing synodal process. A training session for the Diocesan Synod Team took place on November 11, 2021, followed by two lengthy meetings (November 11th and November 16th) where the Team discussed / planned / developed / finalized the participatory process for the Synod. To maximize the number of participants in the synod process, the co-leaders and the Diocesan Synod Team decided to develop comprehensive on-line surveys. The surveys (available in multiple languages) included questions on the *Vademecum's* ten themes, as well as numerous questions on current "hot button" issues. The team developed a separate on-line survey for Catholics (50 questions), Non-Catholics (37 questions) and the people in crisis/homeless (4 questions).

Synodal training. The Diocese of Knoxville is composed of four deaneries. The diocesan co-leaders provided a comprehensive synod training class for all the parish / school / group coordinators in each of the four deanery locations. The training program contained numerous curriculum elements including synodality / journeying together, marketing / advertising the survey participation and listening sessions, planning/leading/executing listening sessions, etc.. The training sessions for the aforementioned coordinators occurred in-person (as well as on ZOOM) on November 22, 2021, November 29, 2021, December 6, 2021 and December 13, 2021 respectively.

Survey dates. The on-line surveys were available for completion beginning November 23, 2021. Listening sessions at each parish began on December 6, 2021. Access to the on-line surveys was closed February 2022.

CATHOLIC SURVEY RESULTS

Cross section of diocese. A total of 4,693 people, approximately 13% of the diocese's Catholic population, completed the Catholic Survey of which 71% considered themselves lifetime Catholics, 20% converts and 9% reverts. The survey respondents consisted of 61% females and 39% males. With regards to marital status, 74% of the respondents were married, 19% single, 5% divorced and 1% living with a partner. With regards to race, 88% of the respondents were White / Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 1% Black / African American, 1% Biracial, and 1% Asian / Pacific Islander.

Journeying together. The majority (over 75%) of the respondents felt their parish / school / organization works well journeying together (synodality) and offers activities and ways to feel welcomed and involved in their community of faith. Over 85% felt their parish / school / organization attracts and welcomes newcomers. Many of the respondents felt their local church leaves certain groups on the margins. Specifically, 39% felt the LGBTQ+ community is not well served, while 29% felt the Church could do a much better job with serving the homeless. Other groups that respondents felt have been left on the margins include those with mental disabilities, single mothers and fathers, homebound individuals, the unemployed, youth and young adults, undocumented immigrants, widows/widowers and seniors.

A listening Church. When it comes to the subject of “Listening”, 63% of the respondents felt their parish / school / organization alerts members with opportunities to dialogue by respectful listening and sharing of ideas and values that have to do with race, religion, human rights immigration, the economy conflict / resolution and the environment (12% disagreed and 24% were unsure with regards to the aforementioned). Forty four percent (44%) of the respondents felt the local church listens to women, youth and young adults regarding their ideas and concerns, while 23% disagreed and 34% were unsure. Additionally, 51% of the respondents felt cultural differences, foreign languages, and political ideologies limit our ability to listen, especially to those who have different opinions of their own (16% disagreed and 33% were unsure with regards to the aforementioned). Finally, more than half of the respondents (68% and 60% respectively) felt they were able to openly speak their thoughts to the local church and that the parish, school and / or organization encourages members to become involved in conversation and special civic projects with members of other faith communities to support interfaith relations.

Living the faith. Realizing that “walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist, 81% of the respondents attend Mass every Sunday, while 16% only attend Mass 1-3 times a month. Two percent (2%) never attend Mass and 1% only attend Mass on Christmas and Easter. Fifteen percent (15%) of the respondents attend Mass daily. Regarding the “Real Presence”, 94% believe in the real presence with 2% not believing and 4% being unsure. Eighty four percent (84%) of the respondents felt the Eucharist is the source and summit of their Catholic life while 8% disagreed and 8% were unsure.

Liturgy. Since synodality is also about liturgical experiences, the respondents were queried on liturgy and liturgical ministries. Several elements of the Mass that were important to the respondents – 92% said the Eucharist, 67% said the homily, 64% said gathering and praying together, 43% said the music and 38% said silence. Overwhelmingly (83%), the respondents felt that their parish offers vibrant liturgies and encourages parishioners to serve in ministries such as lectors, acolytes, musicians, cantors, choirs, ushers and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. Fifty seven percent (57%) of the respondents felt the Mass should be celebrated in the vernacular (local language) while 37% felt that those who prefer the Traditional Latin Mass should be afforded the opportunity to do so (65% were unsure).

Participation in Church life. A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. Forty five percent (45%) of the respondents felt parishioners were able to provide input regarding decisions on scheduling, projects and parish activities and that priorities were not simply seen as “top-down” decisions (35% were unsure and 20% disagreed with the aforementioned). Forty four percent (44%) of respondents felt that parishioners have a sense that their voice and participation make a difference and that many are eager to get involved while 36% were unsure and 20% disagreed. Regarding diocesan decisions and the concept of involving parishioners and members of the local community in that decision-making, there was an equal split of respondents who agreed, disagreed and were unsure of the diocese allowing or facilitating parishioner/local community involvement (34%, 34% and 32% respectively).

Immigration. The belief that one of the Church's missions is to receive and welcome with love and respect human persons from outside the United States was shared by the grand majority of participants (86%) - with 6% disagreeing and 8% not sure. Of the reasons given for immigrants being allowed to come to the United States, 76% felt they should only be allowed to enter/remain if they comply with the laws of the United States; 65% if they are fleeing war / persecution / national disasters; 62% for work; 61% for study and 57% for reunification of family. Sixty-Five (65%) of the respondents felt unaccompanied minors, children who have grown up in the United States and persons arriving because of human trafficking should be allowed to remain in the United States and pursue a pathway to citizenship. Sixteen (16%) of the respondents disagreed and 19% were unsure.

Care of creation. When asked about the environment, 37% of the respondents felt their local church actively promoted the care of the environment, while 11% said their local church does not, 24% said sometimes and 28% were unsure.

Celibacy and ordination. The issue of clergy came up routinely in the parish listening sessions and was a component of the on-line surveys. Fifty-Five (55%) of the participants felt that in certain circumstances or in certain parts of the world where celibate men are in short supply and access to Mass is extremely limited – the ordination of married men should be considered. Twenty-Eight (28%) of the respondents disagreed and 18% were unsure. Forty-Nine (49%) of the respondents were in favor of women being ordained permanent deacons, while 37% disagreed and 14% were unsure. Additionally, although not in a clerical perspective, 92% of the respondents believe the role of women in the life and mission of the Church is necessary and irreplaceable. Only 4% disagreed and 5% were unsure.

Clericalism. When it comes to clericalism, 45% of the respondents felt that clericalism arises from an elitist and exclusivist ministry received as a power to be exercised rather than as a free and generous service to be given (27% disagreed and 31% were unsure). Sixty-Four percent (64%) of the respondents did not think that one or more of the priests assigned to their parish exhibited signs of clericalism (15% indicated one or more of their priests did exhibit clericalism and 21% were unsure).

Marriage. Pope Francis' exhortation on family life, *Amoris Laetitia* (On Love in the Family), called on Catholics to reflect on the beauty and joy of conjugal and family love. Consequently, the Diocese of Knoxville included this important subject within the on-line surveys and the topic was highly discussed in many of the listening sessions. The following thoughts were shared: an overwhelming majority of respondents (86%) felt marriage, as instituted by God, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of one man and one woman joined in an intimate community of life and love. Eight (8%) disagreed and 6% were unsure. Sixty-Nine (69%) of the respondents felt same-sex unions contradict the nature of marriage while 18% disagreed and 13% were unsure.

Same-sex attractions. With regards to homosexuality, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (90%) felt that men and women with homosexual tendencies should be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity and that every sign of unjust discrimination against them should be avoided (10% disagreed or were unsure). On the other hand, 56% of the respondents felt

homosexual acts are acts of grave depravity, intrinsically disordered and are contrary to natural law, with 34% disagreeing and 10% being unsure.

Sacredness of human life. The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred from conception to natural death and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of its moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. An overwhelming majority (88%) of the respondents felt human life must be respected and protected from the moment of conception and must be recognized as having the rights of a person (only 5% disagreed and 6% were unsure). Furthermore, the same 88% felt that the embryo is a person and must be defended in its integrity and tended and cared for in the same way as any other human being (only 5% disagreed and 7% were unsure).

Beginning of life teachings. Contraception and in-vitro fertilization were topics included in the family and marriage sections of the on-line surveys and listening sessions. Thirty-Two (32%) of the respondents felt that Catholic married couples should not use contraception in any form because it seeks to prevent one of the primary purposes of the conjugal act within the marriage relationship. More than half (54%) of the respondents disagreed with the aforementioned Church teaching and 13% were unsure. A majority (58%) of the respondents felt the moral teaching against in-vitro fertilization should be allowed for Catholic couples who experience infertility, while 24% disagreed and 18% were unsure.

End of life. Forty-Five percent (45%) of the respondents agreed that the death penalty is not an acceptable form of punishment, while 26% said it is acceptable sometimes, 18% said it should be an accepted form of punishment, and 11% were unsure. When it came to Euthanasia, an overwhelming majority, representing 79% of the respondents, were against any deliberate killing of an innocent human being, whether an embryo or fetus at any stage of development in the womb, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, as well as any deliberate act to hasten one's death. Ten percent (10%) disagreed and 11% were unsure).

NON-CATHOLIC SURVEY RESULTS

Non-Catholic representation. A total of 256 people completed the Non-Catholic Survey of which 63% were females and 37% males. With regards to marital status, 63% of the respondents were married, 30% single, 4% divorced and 3% living with a partner. With regards to race, 88% of the respondents were White / Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, 4% Black / African American, 2% Biracial, and 0% Asian / Pacific Islander.

Welcoming. The majority (75%) of the respondents felt their community / church / school / organization works well journeying together (synodality) and offers activities and ways to feel welcomed and involved in their community of faith. Sixty-Five percent (65%) felt the Catholic Church welcomes non-Catholics to attend Mass and to get involved in their community of faith (18% disagreed and 19% were unsure). Fifty-Nine percent (59%) of the non-Catholic respondents were unsure if the Catholic Church has specific ways to reach out to those who are not active or have become less active in their parishes (22% disagree and 19% agreed). Many of the Non-Catholic

respondents felt the Catholic Church leaves certain groups on the margins. Specifically, 63% felt the LGBTQ+ community is not well served, while 24% felt the Church could do a much better job with serving the homeless. Other groups that respondents felt have been left on the margins include those with mental disabilities, single mothers and fathers, homebound individuals, the unemployed, youth and young adults, undocumented immigrants, widows / widowers and seniors.

Listening. When it comes to the subject of “Listening”, 37% of the non-Catholic respondents felt the Catholic Church alerts them with opportunities to dialogue by respectful listening and sharing of ideas and values that have to do with race, religion, human rights, immigration, the economy, conflict / resolution, and the environment (25% disagreed and 38% were unsure with regards to the aforementioned). Thirty-five percent (35%) of the non-Catholic respondents felt the Catholic Church listens to women, youth and young adults regarding their ideas and concerns, while 29% disagreed and 36% were unsure. Additionally, 41% of the respondents felt cultural differences, foreign languages, and political ideologies limit the Catholic Church’s ability to listen, especially with those who see things differently than the Church (28% disagreed and 31% were unsure with regards to the aforementioned).

Immigration. The belief that one of the Church’s missions is to receive and welcome with love and respect human persons from outside the United States was shared by the grand majority of non-Catholic participants (73%) - with 8% disagreeing and 19% not sure. Of the reasons given for immigrants being allowed to come to the United States, 65% felt they should only be allowed to enter/remain if they comply with the laws of the United States; 68% if they are fleeing war / persecution / national disasters; 70% for work; 70% for study and 65% for reunification of family. Seventy-Two (72%) of the non-Catholic respondents felt unaccompanied minors, children who have grown up in the United States and persons arriving because of human trafficking should be allowed to remain in the United States and pursue a pathway to citizenship. Sixteen (10%) of the respondents disagreed and 17% were unsure.

Care of creation. When asked about the environment, 26% of the non-Catholic respondents felt the Catholic Church actively promoted the care of the environment, while 18% said the Catholic Church does not, 19% said sometimes and 38% were unsure.

Female ordination. Sixty-Four percent (64%) of the non-Catholic respondents were in favor of Catholic women being ordained permanent deacons, while 16% disagreed and 20% were unsure. Additionally, although not in a clerical perspective, 72% of the respondents believe the role of women in the life and mission of the Church is necessary and irreplaceable. Only 7% disagreed and 21% were unsure.

Marriage. A majority of non-Catholic respondents (63%) felt marriage, as instituted by God, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of one man and one woman joined in an intimate community of life and love (26% disagreed and 12% were unsure). Forty-Nine (49%) of the respondents felt same-sex unions contradict the nature of marriage while 40% disagreed and 11% were unsure.

Same-sex attractions. With regards to homosexuality, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (45%) felt that men and women with homosexual tendencies should be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity, and that every sign of unjust discrimination against them should be avoided (20% disagreed or were unsure). On the other hand, 36% of the respondents felt homosexual acts are acts of grave depravity, intrinsically disordered and are contrary to natural law, with 45% disagreeing and 8% being unsure.

Beginning of life teachings. Contraception and in-vitro fertilization were topics included in the family and marriage sections of the on-line surveys and listening sessions. Only 8% of the non-Catholic respondents felt that Catholic married couples should not use contraception in any form because it seeks to prevent one of the primary purposes of the conjugal act within the marriage relationship. An overwhelming majority (84%) of non-Catholic respondents disagreed with the aforementioned Catholic teaching and 8% were unsure. A majority (77%) of the non-Catholic respondents felt that in-vitro fertilization should be allowed for Catholic couples who experience infertility, while 4% disagreed and 19% were unsure.

End of life. Thirty-Five percent (35%) of the non-Catholic respondents agreed that the death penalty is not an acceptable form of punishment, while 21% said it is acceptable sometimes, 29% said it should be an accepted form of punishment, and 15% were unsure. When it came to Euthanasia, a majority, representing 43% of the non-Catholic respondents, were against any deliberate killing of an innocent human being, whether an embryo or fetus at any stage of development in the womb, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, as well as any deliberate act to hasten one's death. Ten percent (33%) disagreed and 24% were unsure).

PEOPLE IN CRISIS (HOMELESS SURVEY RESULTS)

Homeless representation. A total of 27 people completed the Homeless Survey of which 52% felt the Catholic Church welcomes the homeless to attend Mass just the way they are (30% said sometimes and 19% said the Church was not welcoming). Thirty-Seven percent (37%) percent of the homeless respondents felt comfortable asking the Catholic Church for help. Unfortunately, 44% did not feel comfortable and 19% were unsure.

Support of the homeless. Only 23% of the homeless respondents felt that the Catholic Church is actively involved in helping people that are experiencing homelessness. Thirty-Five percent indicated that Church helps them sometimes and 42% felt the Church never helps them. When the 27 homeless respondents were asked what services they would like the Catholic Church to offer assistance with – they responded with the following:
75% housing; 71% counseling; 71% food/clean water; 67% clothing; 54% access to medical care and 21% immigration services.

SCHOOL SURVEY RESULTS

High Schools results. Our two high schools (Knoxville Catholic High School in Knoxville and Notre Dame High School in Chattanooga) participated in the on-line survey. The participants included

students, faculty and school administrators. Knoxville Catholic High School (KCHS) had a variety of demographics regarding the respondents to the synod survey. The majority certainly intimated with their responses that they would like to see some changes within the Church, especially in the areas of: (1) acceptance of their congregation, (2) reaching out and attracting young people, (3) dealing with immigration issues, and (4) contraception use, especially within marriage. They also had some comments about bringing the Latin Mass back which were coupled with beliefs that Pope Francis is too liberal with his leadership and is pushing a socialist agenda.

A majority of respondents agree that: the Eucharist is the most significant part of the Mass (50%); an embryo is a person (80%); marriage is between a man and a woman (69%) and the death penalty is not an acceptable form of punishment (51%). The KCHS respondents had many concerns that were repeated with greater frequency than others including: the Church needs to be more welcoming to all. Several mentioned that the emphasis on rigidity and truth within the Church seemed to outweigh the importance of journeying together. Secondly, the Church needs to re-examine the role of women especially as it relates to the diaconate, and there was a sentiment that the Church should be less judgmental of LGBT folks as parishioners, even though many acknowledged the sinful nature of engaging in homosexual acts. The areas that both conservative and more liberal respondents seem to agree on is that the Church needs to be more accepting of all people without necessarily approving of their lifestyle - Church teaching being followed but with less judgmental or harsh treatment toward people seems to be a recurring theme in KCHS surveys.

Notre Dame High School (NDHS) in Chattanooga, Tennessee participated in the on-line surveys and had a total of six listening sessions. All the sessions were engaging, helpful and joyful. While in the small groups it was awesome to witness the desire to talk about the Eucharist. Even the results of the on-line survey showed that that the belief in the Real Presence is in the majority. Many of the participants in the listening sessions expressed a desire for more time with Jesus in the Eucharist, mainly through exposition and time spent in the chapel. They also expressed a desire to hear more powerful preaching on the topic of the Real Presence. Some of the non-Catholic participants found the Church's teaching on the Eucharist compelling and intriguing. They mentioned how much they love the peace they feel when they go to the chapel and sit in front of the tabernacle. Looking at the on-line survey results and what NDHS gathered from their listening group discussions, it's evident that some of our Catholic Church's teaching on morality is difficult for them to accept. When it comes to IVF and homosexual relations and marriage, without a doubt, there is a lack of education and understanding when it comes to the student body. It was felt that the modern culture is strong, and it's hard to fight against the ongoing "sexual revolution" that is constantly bombarding them through media and the prevailing ideas that "love is love" and "who am I to judge" what people do in private. There may be a hesitation from the teachers to talk about these topics because of fear, pushback, and a lack of education on the topics. Having a greater theological and philosophical understanding of these topics would help a lot. Additionally, some of the students identify as "homosexual" and many have a hard time discerning the difference between accepting people and accepting immoral actions as good. Finally, many of the participants (primarily teachers) believe that the Church is being mismanaged, especially on the local level.

Elementary and Middle Schools results. The Diocese of Knoxville has one K-5 school and seven K-8 schools. Only the faculty and administrators participated in the on-line survey, but students did

participate in the listening sessions. The majority of the K-8 participants believe the Church has handled the sexual abuse crisis appropriately, while grand majority said that the sexual abuse scandal in the Church has not caused them to stop practicing their faith. A high majority agree that the presence and the role of women in the life and mission of the Church remains necessary and irreplaceable; that marriage, as instituted by God, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of one man and one woman; and that same-sex unions contradict the nature of marriage. A majority agree that the Church makes a distinction between homosexual feelings and homosexual acts. Over half agree that Catholic married couples should not use contraception in any form to prevent pregnancy. The grand majority agree that human life must be respected and protected from the moment of conception and must be recognized as having the rights of a person. A high majority agree that all human life at any stage is to be protected and disagree that the death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment. The students like beginning and ending the day in prayer. They welcome the chance to discuss God and prayer during the day, whenever needed. They observed that the Church addresses world issues and teaches that the Church must be kind and non-judgmental. They appreciate that the Catholic Church helps those in need. The students feel comfortable asking 'why' and 'how' questions about their faith, especially during times of hardship.

Common areas of concern - schools

1. Need for more help and guidelines for how to evangelize outside of the Church family.
2. Need more direction on how to handle the tough topics, i.e., respecting homosexual people while not condoning their acts or their desire to marry. How to proclaim the truth without being disrespectful?
3. Need to find ways to bring back families who left due to all the COVID protocols which still are used without the apparent need.
4. Need for the review and revisal of the tribunal system and the requirements for an annulment due to excessive time it takes. Individuals married outside of the Church who did not go through rigorous marriage preparation under the Catholic Church should not be held to the same grounds as those who are practicing Catholics.
5. Need to proclaim the Truth and "not be afraid!" People are desperate for the Truth that sets them free!

CONCLUSION

The Diocese of Knoxville's Synod focused on communion, participation, and mission. Many of our synod leaders made every effort to encourage involvement on the part of each and all. We would echo our Holy Father, Pope Francis, "celebrating a Synod is always a good and important thing, but it proves truly beneficial if it becomes a living expression of {being Church}, of a way of acting marked by true participation. Participation is a requirement of the faith received in baptism. Consequently, all the baptized are called to take part in the Church's life and mission. Without real participation by the People of God, talking about communion risks remaining a devout wish."

With that being said, the level of participation in the diocesan synod process was lower than what we expected and hoped for despite the strong advertising, marketing, preaching and parish/school encouragement. The Diocese of Knoxville territory has a Catholic population of 68,000 (this does

not include the large number of undocumented Hispanics). Only 4,693 Catholics (approximately 13% of the diocese's Catholic population) completed the on-line survey. A significantly lower number participated in the listening sessions.

Although the participation rate information was lower than we hoped for, we did obtain valuable information that we can use as we continue our synodal journey. The most consist listening session and on-line survey comments were as follows:

We found many parishioners broken and scandalized in many ways by the way the Church handled the abuse from the clergy both sexually and through the abuse of power. We need a forceful statement from the Church that scandals within the Church will no longer be tolerated and will be dealt with swiftly. Clericalism in its negative connotations should be a thing of the past. We need to recognize the heroic contributions of the laity, both men and women, as well as our priests. We found that many did not understand and disagreed with the moral teachings of the Church, such as those relating to marriage, contraception, IVF and acceptance of people with different sexual orientation. There was a sentiment that the Church should be less judgmental and more pastoral to the LGBT community. Additionally, there was a significant number of respondents who felt the annulment process was too lengthy and difficult.

We found an equal division of opinion that the Church was involved in politically motivated issues too much or too little (not wanting the moral teachings discussed and applied to political issues / party platforms). Examples are support for Covid Vaccine policies, treatment and funding for migrants at the border (border policies), and Holy Communion for prominent political figures who support abortion or public sinners.

From our surveys and listening sessions, it was clear there was a poor understanding of the Church's moral teachings and disciplines. We found a general lack of knowledge and understanding concerning the teachings of the Church in many areas, especially those related to the Eucharist and Catholic Social Teachings. The more we reach out, the more we welcome new and returning Catholics, there is an ongoing and growing need for catechesis for adults as well as children on both the diocesan and local parish levels. In the opinion of some, general improvement of Catholic Education for children was the suggested answer to this lack of education. The survey and listening sessions tell us that adult faith formation is as much needed as catechesis of youth.

In conclusion, while the survey & listening sessions may have shown areas in which we do not understand, agree with, or support the teaching of the Church, like the journeying disciples on the road to Emmaus, we recognize Christ among us and have as our biggest takeaway was a renewed desire to work together to solve those problems that were presented and to continue the synodal process always maintaining a spirit of communion, participation and mission! May what the Holy Spirit intended in placing the Synod 2021-23 in Pope Francis' heart be done as it was in the womb and heart of our Blessed Mother Mary when the angel spoke to her.