



Diocese of Wilmington

Diocesan Synodal Consultation 2022



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Final Summary Report

August 15, 2022

PREAMBLE

*On the Solemnity of the Assumption of the
Blessed Virgin Mary into heavenly glory,
this 15th day of August in the 2022 Year of our Lord,
for the purpose of the Synod on Synodality
convoked by his Holiness, Pope Francis,
the Synod Team of the Diocese of Wilmington
comprised of Ms. Brenda Burns, Dr. Louis De Angelo,
Mrs. Arline Dosman, Vy. Rev. Glenn Evers,
Mr. Paul Henderson, Mr. Fritz Jones,
Mr. Robert Krebs, Ms. Colleen Lindsey,
Rev. Brian Lewis, and Sr. Ann David Strohminger,
by the grace of God and with a firm purpose to report clearly
and truthfully their findings,
joyfully submits herein the conclusions of the work
of this Synod in the Diocese of Wilmington
to his Excellency, the Most Reverend William E. Koenig,
the Tenth Bishop of Wilmington,
to the Christian Faithful, and to all interested parties.*

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The synodal path is not only one of listening but also one of discernment that invites us to “reread” the experiences brought forth in our listening to discover joys and challenges, insights and opportunities (Preparatory Document; Vademecum).

Introduction

On October 9, 2021, Pope Francis addressed the universal Church stating, “[W]e need the Spirit, the ever new breath of God, who sets us free from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund, loosens shackles and spreads joy. The Holy Spirit guides us where God wants us to be, not to where our own ideas and personal tastes would lead us.” Hence, seeking for the Church to listen to the Holy Spirit anew and furthermore, to respond to His voice, on that day the Holy Father opened the work of a new Synod, called the *Synod on Synodality*.

This Synod would differ from Church Synods of the past. Pope Francis emphasized the Catholic Church should always be *journeying together* by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This includes all members of the Church and even reaches to non-Catholics. He pointed out that the very word *synod* means “journeying together.” Hence, the *Synod on Synodality* that the Pope had initiated would be focused on process as much as on deriving content. This is because the process of the Church striving to live synodality by *journeying together* will produce the content for the Synod gathering of the Bishops in 2023. Past synods focused on a specific theme, e.g. *The Family, Young People, The New Evangelization, etc.* This Synod would focus on implementing *journeying together* with everyone. As such, Pope Francis invited all Bishops and every diocese throughout the world to participate in this special Synod.

And so on October 17, 2021, at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Wilmington, Delaware, invoking the guidance and aid of the Holy Spirit, Bishop William E. Koenig celebrated the Opening Mass for the *Synod on Synodality*, beginning the process of the Synod for the Diocese of Wilmington. In his letter of invitation to the Christian Faithful, he emphasized the historical roots of the Synod, “In the New Testament book of the *Acts of the Apostles*, we learn of times in which the early Church was ‘called as a community to discern the will of the risen Lord’ (*Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* 19). Examples of this are when ‘seven men of good reputations, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom’ (*Acts* 6:3) were chosen to provide food for those who were being neglected; or in *Acts* 10, we learn of ‘the discernment of the crucial question of the mission to the Gentiles’” (*SLMC* 19).

Recognizing not only its historical roots, but also its perennial importance, Bishop Koenig invited everyone in the Diocese of Wilmington to participate in the future diocesan synod consultations otherwise known as *Listening Sessions*. These *Listening Sessions* would provide an opportunity for all to hear the voice of God speaking to them in their own hearts, to share their experiences, and then to listen to the voices of one another. In effect, it would provide the Bishop and the Diocese of Wilmington – clergy, religious, laity, and ultimately everyone with open ears and hearts alike – to discover new pathways forward guided by the Holy Spirit. These *Listening Sessions* would assist all in realizing the goals of the Synod for better *communion*, increased *participation*, and clarity of *mission* as Christians in this present age.

Implementation of Listening Sessions

In November 2021, planning for the *Listening Sessions* commenced as the Bishop formed a Diocesan Synod Team which developed, organized, and executed a comprehensive strategic plan to reach as many people as possible who were willing to participate in the Diocese of Wilmington. The goal was to ensure each representative body in the Diocese of Wilmington was sampled and heard. The challenge was the short amount of time given to each diocese to develop their specific format for a *Listening Session*, as well as to make these sessions attractive, usable, and repeatable. Furthermore, the best way in which to collect and manage the data, i.e. the input and responses of

participants from the *Listening Sessions* needed to be determined. This aspect was critically important ensuring that the insights would be faithfully summarized and reported both to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) as well as to the Bishop, diocesan leadership, and the people of the Diocese itself.

As parishes represented the main body of constituents, it was discerned that the best approach would be to introduce the *Listening Session* forum at the deanery level, i.e. the collection of parishes geographically proximate to one another. Each parish was invited to send five representatives to a deanery level *Listening Session*, resulting in having their voices heard and also simultaneously learning how to conduct and lead a *Listening Session* thereafter at their own home parish, if so desired. To facilitate this process a *Facilitator's Handbook*, a PowerPoint presentation, as well as other leader and participant materials were created and made available for use in hosting a *Listening Session* by any Catholic organization within the Diocese.

While the *Listening Session* experience primarily started at the deanery level, focusing on parishioners, a comprehensive list of all Catholic organizations and groups in the Diocese as well as those on the peripheries was identified in *focus groups*. The *focus groups* represented the ideal set of unique existing groups with whom the Synod Team should interface. Striving to be true to the synodal process, this sample set encompassed the effort to reach out and hear the voice of a very wide range of people. The range of groups to be solicited would vary from Catholic Charities, to Catholic Schools, to those on the peripheries. The intention was to canvas and receive insights from as many unique entities and persons within the Diocese of Wilmington as possible given the practical constraints of a short deadline and limited resources.

Additionally, to provide greater accessibility to participate, a virtual *Listening Session* was created through which anyone at any time of day could watch an abbreviated form of the *Listening Session* online on the Diocesan YouTube Channel. After watching the video, the individual(s) would then be invited to complete an online survey capturing their insights from their time of prayer and reflection on the presented content of the Synod.

The Synod Team launched the *Listening Session* process commencing with the first group gathering on February 12, 2022. The aforementioned virtual *Listening Session* offering was first made available for use on April 19, 2022. The phase for conducting all *Listening Sessions* either in-person or virtually continued until June 4, 2022 – the better part of four months' time. The Diocesan Synod Closing Mass was celebrated by Bishop Koenig on June 22, 2022 at Holy Cross Church in Dover, Delaware. The final USCCB Synthesis Report was due on June 30, 2022, which represented a relatively short period of time from October 9th of the preceding year to plan, organize, and carryout a diocesan synod from the ground up in a meaningful way. However, the end result of the process proved to be quite fruitful and overall, was met with great enthusiasm.

Listening Session Format

The *Listening Sessions* included opportunities for participants to gather with others to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to them through personal prayer as well as to reflect, share, and listen to the Holy Spirit speaking through others in a group setting. *Listening Sessions* ordinarily started with the *Prayer for the Synod on Synodality*, followed by *Lectio Divina* on a passage of Scripture, most commonly the scene of Pentecost from the *Acts of the Apostles*. Once sharing and reflection for this portion was completed, the Facilitator would explain the importance and process for sharing on the *Two Primary Questions* of the Synod described below. Small Groups of five to eight persons would then reflect and share their insights while attentively

listening to one another. Each of the *Two Primary Questions* was reflected upon separately. Once both reflections were completed, a representative from each group shared with the assembly at-large the salient points from their discussion. The session concluded with common prayer.

The *Listening Session* experience was charged and designed to evoke a moment for reflection, and thus a novel response to the two fundamental questions of the Synod posed by Pope Francis. The Pope invited all who were willing to participate in the Synod to reflect on the following two questions: “The Church in announcing the Gospel *journeys together*. Therefore, **(1) How is this journeying together happening today in your local Church?** and **(2) What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?**” To aid participants in eliciting a response to these two questions, the Synod Team also introduced adjoining questions suggested by the *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality* to be reflected upon as well. Additionally through these questions, participants were invited to be attentive to *Strengths*, *Challenges*, and *Action Steps* that the Holy Spirit might also be revealing to them. This guidance was provided to help the participant answer the questions and to aid the Diocesan Synod Team in organizing and ultimately summarizing everyone’s responses.

It was determined that the *First Primary Question* would elicit two types of responses either: (1) *Strengths* exhibiting how the Church *journeys together* well already or (2) *Challenges* for an area where the Church may need improvement. The input shared by the group participants for this question was placed in one of these two categories. The group input was summarized and then recorded on a report form to be submitted to the Facilitator of the session. The group could list up to three *Strengths* and up to three *Challenges* on the report form. The *First Question* was presented as follows:

FIRST QUESTION: The Church in announcing the Gospel journeys together. How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church?

Our Strengths

- What are our experiences of journeying together in our local Church?
- What joys did those experiences bring?

Our Challenges

- What difficulties and obstacles have we encountered?
- What wounds did those experiences reveal?
- What voices are missing or not present among us?
- What insights have those experiences elicited?

Accordingly, like the *First Primary Question*, the *Second Primary Question* also offered adjoining questions to help participants articulate a response. This question would elicit one type of response as an *Action Step* in terms of what the Church is being called to do to *journey together* better at this time. The input shared from the group participants for this question would be recorded in the appropriate section on the same report form mentioned above. The group could list up to six *Action Steps* on the report form. The *Second Question* was presented as follows:

SECOND QUESTION: What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

Our Action Steps

- What paths forward are opening up for our local Church?
- Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound?
- In what way is the Spirit calling us to reach out and how?
- What are the areas for change for our Church and what steps can be taken?

As aforementioned, each small group completed a report form and then the group at-large would summarize all of the individual group reports onto a final Summary Report Form. Therefore, the final Summary Report Form for a *Listening Session* reported the three *Strengths*, the three *Challenges*, and the six *Actions Steps* that had the most consensus at that given session. The input on the final Summary Report Form for that *Listening Session* was ultimately entered into an online report form. The information was thus submitted and stored electronically in the Diocesan Synod Team database using the online application *Cognito Forms*.

Organization of Listening Session Results

What follows is the Diocesan Synod Team’s report on its findings, which represents the summarization of all input from the *Listening Sessions* conducted in the Diocese of Wilmington. This includes both insights reported from group sessions, as well as online submissions from participants using the virtual format. Content from all *Listening Sessions* was analyzed and placed into one of the following four categories to help organize the data in an intelligible and meaningful way: (1) *Faith*, (2) *Worship*, (3) *Witness*, and (4) *Minority Report*. Each of these headings contains a report on the major *Strengths*, *Challenges*, and *Actions Steps* for each respective category.

The category of *Faith* below represents all findings that in some manner pertain to the intellectual life, learning, and education. The category of *Worship* comprises all of the findings that in some manner pertain to the spiritual life, whether it be prayer, worship, the Sacraments, or liturgy. The category of *Witness* speaks to all findings that in some manner focus on the pastoral activity or the human dimension of the Church, including all forms of social outreach, diversity issues, and all secular content that arose. Finally, the *Minority Report* represents those insights which did not garner majority consensus across the board, but were nonetheless important to share as a unique voice to be recognized.

Faith Results

Through the diocesan synodal process, the call to communion in the Diocese of Wilmington is expressed in ***Faith***. Results from the synodal process emphasized that a value for the Faith and the Teachings of the Catholic Church is a strength in the Diocese. Most notably recognized in the Diocese were the dedication and quality of priests and lay leaders, the gift of ongoing catechesis through the schools and religious education programs, and, most importantly, the strong foundation built on Truth, Scripture, Doctrine, and Tradition. Attention to moral issues, particularly racial justice, emerged as a theme, as well as the need to raise awareness of others with needs in the worshipping community, such as the deaf and those who are hearing impaired.

Strong as it is, the development of Faith in the Diocese has challenges to be addressed. Primary among them are insufficient opportunities for Faith formation. A general lack of knowledge appears to exist among a largely uncatechized generation of Catholics, offering a number of opportunities for expanded faith formation. The need is evident among younger members of the Church as well as in the area of adult faith formation. It is not that programs do not exist; it is that the need is greater than what currently available programs can address. Additionally, attention to the role and presence of Catholics, including but not limited to persons who are African, African-American, Hispanic, Korean, and Native American, is another opportunity for the Church to grow in appreciation and understanding of its rich diversity in both knowledge and in worship. Such opportunities cannot be coordinated by clergy alone. It is incumbent on the Church to train well its lay leaders who will step into the roles needed by the local parish, deanery, or Diocese. These challenges and others rely on an ongoing assessment of the needs of the faithful to grow in greater appreciation of the connection between faith and life.

In the area of Faith, the Church may be called to several action steps. An ongoing need is to assess its parish, regional, and diocesan opportunities for faith formation, working collaboratively to expand or create programs of instruction, prayer, and evangelization. Targeted programs for youth and young adults may be accompanied by ongoing faith formation programs for Catholics of all ages and stages. Programs have the potential to be available in person and virtually at times so as to meet a variety of schedules. A review of seminary preparation for clergy and ministerial programs for lay ministers may be beneficial in assessing the type and quality of formation that occurs in preparing clergy, religious, and lay leaders for their responsibilities. Catholic education may require greater support for its formational and evangelizing mission. Increased visibility of the racial and cultural diversity by presence and participation in parish and diocesan roles may expand the faithful's understanding of the contributions of these groups to the mosaic portrait of the Church. Overall, the Church may grow when the faithful continue to seek new and different ways to move from maintenance to mission so that faith is learned, lived, and shared in the contemporary world.

Worship Results

Through the diocesan synodal process, the call to communion, participation, and mission in the Diocese of Wilmington is expressed in and through not only our faith but in a unique way through our ***Worship***, especially at Sunday Mass. Results from the synodal process emphasized that a particular gift for Catholics in the Diocese is the celebration of Sunday Mass and participation in the Sacraments, highlighting common strengths. Results of the *Listening Sessions* noted that engaged and participating Catholics feel a sense of relationship and belonging with the

parish communities through Sunday Mass. The Mass is seen as a life-giving community experience of faith. They spoke of the joy of praying and gathering together for vibrant, meaningful, and quality liturgical celebrations centered on the Holy Eucharist. This experience is also enhanced by good liturgical music that inspires and engages parishioners. The importance of the celebrant and homilist was also noted as a strength, though not all respondents noted the same level of experience.

Additionally, it is noted that through our liturgies, African and Native American culture and spirituality have been shared throughout the Diocese and parishes via music and dance. Hispanic participants spoke to the importance of worshipping, celebrating, and growing spiritually in their own language, culture, and traditions: "It's a blessing to have Spanish Masses." Participants also noted that while a few parishes offer signing to members of the deaf community, more access and leadership is needed in the Diocese.

In addition to the strengths in worship, participants also noted some challenges, which also can be identified as opportunities. Numerous observations in this regard reported a noticeable decline in participation. While Sunday Mass attendance was declining prior to COVID, there is now a possible longer term loss of people attending Sunday Mass especially among young people and some families. Moreover, this could indicate a growing lack of connectivity to the Catholic Faith and people's perceived value of the Mass and the Sacraments.

An additional challenge noted was that people on the margins of the faith community feel that while they are, at times, verbally welcomed and included at Mass, many times the reality is that this is more of a superficial or "surface" welcome and show of hospitality and that verbal messages do not translate into specific behaviors demonstrating that all are welcome. The words said need to be supported by our behaviors and attitudes, so that diverse people truly feel welcomed. This includes a willingness to be engaged with all peoples which demands understanding and responding to the needs of the diverse Catholic community that the Church is.

Respondents noted that at times the voices of younger people are missing, as well as those who feel marginalized from the official Church. Some feel that even when people want to engage with the Church it is easy to become lost because of a lack of outreach whereafter they ultimately leave the Church altogether. This identifies a need for a diversity of diocesan liturgical and spiritual celebrations that nourishes the culturally diverse Catholic community. The diversity of the Church challenges it to seek pastoral approaches to engage all people with a greater inclusion in parish life, both socially and sacramentally.

In the area of Worship, the Church may be called to several action steps directed at a desire for increased opportunities for prayer supporting better worship in the Church. There is a call to deepen spiritual growth through personal prayer based on Faith, Tradition, and Scripture, centered on Jesus and relying on the movements of the Holy Spirit. People are searching for enhanced programs and additional ways to grow in their spiritual life.

In addition to deepening the interior life through personal prayer, there is first a need to acknowledge the diverse liturgical pastoral needs and aspirations of our faith communities including young people and people from diverse cultural communities and others on the margin or periphery. This includes identifying pastoral practices where liturgy, sacramental celebrations, and liturgical devotions can be more family-oriented, culturally diverse, including diverse liturgical music, greater participation from parishioners, and encouragement for good homilies. Second, there is a need to provide formation, resources, and training to meet these diverse spiritual needs, including better collaboration of clergy, religious, and laity and acknowledging the presence and gifts of the Holy Spirit who still moves, calls, and surprises. Third, the Church should identify a

strategy that can model true accompaniment with people in the faith community that is rooted in prayer, compassion, and love. Finally, there is the recommendation to create an action plan for welcoming all who seek to participate in the pastoral, liturgical, and sacramental life of parishes and Catholic institutions in the Diocese adapting specifically to focus on everyone's needs.

Witness Results

Throughout the diocesan synodal process, the call to ***Witness***, was an essential component. The presence of dedicated and loving communities signified a strength for the Diocese. The parish communities, regardless of size, are fraternal, caring, motivated, involved, enthusiastic, and concerned for one another, tirelessly sharing their many gifts and talents. The dedication of the parish in their outreach to all people in need is expressed through charitable programs which reflect a strong community with a sense of fellowship, hospitality, and love for all people. The Church at both diocesan and parish levels sponsors a variety of programs and services to meet the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Black Catholic Ministry has enriched the Diocese with African American Spirituality. The support of pastoral and diocesan leadership has helped to include Native Americans to fulfill their mission. The Hispanic Community has helped bridge the communication gap between English and Spanish parishioners and those of other faiths. The presence of the Hispanic Community continues to increase and create a positive impact on the Church in the Diocese. Formation in the social mission of the Church, outreach and care for the community, collaboration between clergy and laity reflect people standing together in faith, belonging and contributing to a world larger than themselves.

While the strengths of Witness in the Diocese are well regarded and appreciated, there is significant concern for the notable absence of youth and young adults. There is lack of visibility and participation among youth, young adults, and families involved in parish life especially at Mass. Engaging the voices of adolescents and young adults by calling forth their talents for greater inclusion in parish life, both social and sacramental, and empowering them as valuable members may help them to stay connected beyond Confirmation. It may also help them to transition into being practicing Catholics into young adulthood and throughout their lives. The absent voices of the youth, the marginalized, and the former faithful all present a challenge, but represent an opportunity for points for growth and a deepening of the Church's spirituality.

Additionally, challenges were expressed regarding the growing pains of diversity. Uniting diverse groups of people amidst different languages, locations, ethnicity, and age and representing them properly calls forth Church leadership and governance models that value diversity and inclusivity in its call to witness and service. Growing pains of diversity in the Church refers not only to being welcoming and accepting one another, but also speaks to the challenges of truly integrating cultural identities, various languages, liturgical styles, and generational differences into one homogeneous assembly. There was a reported desire to work towards uniting all people in the church, but voiced frustration with the ability to do this well when attempted.

In the area of Witness the Church may be called to take the following action steps. Principal among them is the need to be welcoming and hospitable to everyone. There is a call to create more welcoming and hospitable Church communities inclusive of youth, the marginalized, former members, persons of diverse cultures and traditions, and those of special needs where each person is heard, seen, and valued as an essential member of the Faith. Communities are strengthened through positivity, outreach, and engagement. Advocacy as well as direct service is needed to change systemic issues of justice for all people. Intentional outreach and creative forms of

communication to youth, young adults and families are needed beyond what was helpful for previous generations. Innovative and expanded use of technology to serve the needs of the youth and those with disabilities such as the deaf and hard of hearing inclusive of cultural and language supports are needed. There was a call to invite our bishops to reflect and review that their directives may not overburden the faithful, in addition to a desire for them to overcome divisiveness at the level of the USCCB.

Minority Report Results

When listening to the voices of all persons it became evident that the Church must strive to be what it is called to be: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. With regard to feedback that was unique, but did not arrive at majority consensus, strengths of the Diocese were recognized in having some tremendous pastoral leaders along with multiple religious communities of men and women who enrich our local church and schools especially witnessed during the pandemic. However, as noted in our *Faith, Worship, and Witness* comments above, many African Americans and Native Americans maintain their faith yet struggle for recognition as viable Catholics. The Church is recognized as a universal voice of moral authority with sound social justice teachings, but it is also believed that the focus is more on a single issue while there is a need to focus on broad social justice teachings from birth to death. Another strength is bilingual communities where English and Spanish speakers are united and the variety of their ministries bring forth joy and rewarding spiritual experiences to all parishioners.

While focusing on meeting the needs of the majority, the Church is challenged to meet the needs of those on the margins of the faith community, because in many ways the Church is not the center of all parishioners' lives. The Church is also challenged to create and implement a means to establish trust to meet the needs of those impacted by the sex abuse scandal. Other challenges include addressing racism issues in and out of the Church along with those with sexual orientation as well as identity issues. It was stated that the Church must focus upon and implement initiatives for all Catholics to feel welcome, especially those who feel excluded. It was reported that women in the Church, including women religious are very capable, but are excluded from all decision making in the Church. Women could be very helpful in lay leadership such as in parishes without priests. Women are more recognized as leaders outside of the Church in the corporate world. Also a few proposed implementing a process for women deacons and empowering the laity to preach the Gospel.

The Church must also find a way to remove the perception of being judgmental and overly concerned with rules and regulations and being perceived as disconnected from the challenges facing many communities, e.g. gun violence. Additionally, those parishioners that have hearing impairments and/or limitations have not been supported in most parishes. Support would include signing and ensuring that the clergy and laity speak clearly, slowly, and audibly.

In the area of the Minority Report the Church may be called to take action steps to be a Diocese that is patient for the truth of the Gospel and Tradition to grow and produce fruit; not compromising or watering down ideals. There is a calling for the Church to teach about and address traditional exclusions. It was also pointed out that the Church needs to resolve the issue of Catholic politicians who contradict the Catholic Church's Teachings in their offices. Additionally, it was noted that a change of mind is necessary to look at each other as being created in the image and likeness of God and in doing so first seek commonality and then teach and form membership.

The Diocese must continue to acknowledge and reconcile the pain and hurts as well as the alienation and lack of trust of those affected by the pedophilia and sexual abuse scandal which still lingers and is present. The local Church should also implement a diocesan-wide forum addressing racial and social issues. Also there is a need to eliminate barriers allowing the Hispanic Community to be invited and accepted to the decision-making table. Other recommendations were to find a way to communicate with those on the periphery, engaging people beyond those Catholics who are already present in church. There was a call to seek out ways to create action plans to assist those who are hearing impaired. Additionally, a few participants suggested the Diocese should create action plans to help older parishes thrive by establishing a Professional Lay Leadership Team as administrators to resolve demands on pastors and priests. Finally, clergy shortage recommendations by a few included both allowing former priests who left to marry to be returned to active priestly ministry as well as the proposal of female ordination.

Ten Major Themes

In summary, the Synod Team presents the following *Ten Major Themes* of the Synod for the Diocese of Wilmington as broken down by *Strengths*, *Challenges*, and *Action Steps*. In parentheses behind each theme represents the data subset from whence the theme was derived using the above categories of *Faith*, *Worship*, *Witness*, and *Minority Report* as previously defined.

A. Strengths

- (1) Value for the Faith & Teachings of the Catholic Church** (*Faith*)
- (2) Appreciation for the Gift of the Mass & Sacraments** (*Worship*)
- (3) Presence of Dedicated & Loving Communities** (*Witness*)

B. Challenges

- (4) Insufficient Opportunities for Faith Formation** (*Faith*)
- (5) Significant Decline in Church Participation** (*Worship*)
- (6) Notable Absence of the Youth & Young Adults** (*Witness*)
- (7) Growing Pains of Diversity** (*Witness*)

C. Action Steps

- (8) Need for more Opportunities for Prayer** (*Worship*)
- (9) Desire to be Welcoming & Hospitable to Everyone** (*Witness*)
- (10) Church must strive to be what it is called to be: One, Holy, Catholic & Apostolic** (*Minority Report*)

Conclusion

In conclusion, given the time constraints and limitations on personnel to be able to plan and conduct the actual *Listening Sessions*, the Synod work in the Diocese of Wilmington was appraised overall as a great success. An online survey was conducted for those who had participated in a deanery level *Listening Session*. A total of 271 people participated in all of the deanery level *Listening Sessions* and of those 128 people completed the voluntary online survey. 89% of those respondents said the experience was “Excellent/Good” and 86% of the respondents stated they felt heard as it allowed them the opportunity to listen as well as share their own experience of the Church. This was similar to other feedback either anecdotal or reported wherein the strong majority of people enjoyed the experience, thought it was beneficial, and were desirous of more opportunities for the same. The strong consensus was that the Church is better off for the opportunity this had presented.

In total, there were 51 group *Listening Sessions* – 48 of these sessions were in-person and 3 of these sessions were done virtually. This amounted to over 1,400 people within the Diocese of Wilmington participating in a *Listening Session* and thus contributing to the work of the Synod. There were 41 submissions of people who used the online *Listening Session* platform and completed the accompanying online survey. A very wide and diverse range of people within the

Diocese of Wilmington were consulted. The over 1,400 people that participated represented consultations with:

- Diocesan Leadership
- All 7 Deaneries including all 56 parishes in the Diocese sending representatives
- 19 Individual Parishes conducted their own *Listening Session*
- Cultural Ministries including Black Catholics, Koreans, and Native Americans
- 17 of the 21 Hispanic Communities participated
- Deaf Community representation
- Catholic School Administrators comprising their Presidents & Principals
- Directors of Religious Education
- Catechists
- Elementary School Students
- High School Students
- College Students
- Young Adults
- Catholic Charities including both Staff and Clients
- Persons on the Peripheries including Atheists, Fallen Away Catholics, LGBTQ+, those Divorced
- Religious Women
- Permanent Deacons
- Diocesan & Religious Priests
- Individual Online Submissions

Admittedly, this is not wholly comprehensive as there are estimated to be over 250,000 Catholics in the Diocese of Wilmington and many more subcategories and classes of people that could have been consulted. However, the strong majority of preexisting organizations and structures were sampled or at least approached to participate. Moreover, the purpose of the Synod is to be an ongoing process that changes the style and approach of the Church such that there is always an open ear for those who may not have been heard yet and thus captured during the formal Diocesan Phase of the Synod. The *Synod on Synodality* is a beginning not an end; it is an ongoing effort to ensure all are able to *journey together* by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to God's Kingdom in heaven. To this end, the reader is commended to the following *Ten Best Practices* to advance this cause.

Ten Best Practices

All of the above *Ten Major Themes* depending on how one looks at them can actually produce *Actions Steps* whether they were already categorized as such or not. Hence, what the Synod Team hereafter presents is a list of *Ten Best Practices* as a practical outcome of the work of the Synod. These are recommendations for any Catholic parish, school, or organization to embrace in part or entirely to help respond to the voice of the Holy Spirit heard through this process in the Diocese of Wilmington at the present time. These may be found as follows:

- #1 – Value for the Faith & Teachings of the Catholic Church:** Prioritize the transmission of Catholicism at all levels by investing in new ways to reinforce the Faith as well as evangelize others about it.
- #2 – Appreciation for the Gift of the Mass & Sacraments:** Ensure that all elements of the liturgy are done well and that the Sacraments are readily available.
- #3 – Presence of Dedicated & Loving Communities:** Provide ample opportunities and forums for people to gather, participate in activities, and reach out to those in need.
- #4 – Insufficient Opportunities for Faith Formation:** Assess current faith formation programs in parishes and schools sharing successful programs and strategies throughout the Diocese.
- #5 – Significant Decline in Church Participation:** Identify and seek to address the reasons why people are no longer coming to church by proactively reconnecting with those who are known to be missing.
- #6 – Notable Absence of the Youth & Young Adults:** Explore ways to engage youth and young adults by calling forth their talents through greater inclusion in parish life and empowering them as valuable members of the Church.
- #7 – Growing Pains of Diversity:** Affirm and promote the beauty and goodness of diversity welcoming those of different cultures, backgrounds, and life experiences to come together as one Church.
- #8 – Need for more Opportunities for Prayer:** Provide greater access to prayer and spiritual formation through the liturgical life, devotions, and the rich spiritual traditions and disciplines of the Church.
- #9 – Desire to be Welcoming & Hospitable to Everyone:** Intentionally be polite and kind like Christ toward everyone encountered, renewing the basic principle that every human being is created equally in God’s image and likeness and is in need of salvation and God’s love.
- #10 – Church must strive to be what it is called to be: One, Holy, Catholic & Apostolic:** Prayerfully conduct a self-audit using the above nine themes and recommended best practices followed by addressing any deficiencies with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.