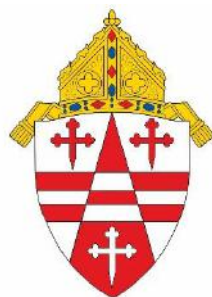


Synod Synthesis for the Archdiocese of Seattle



I. Introduction

In 2020, Archbishop Paul D. Etienne initiated a pastoral planning process in the Archdiocese of Seattle, beginning with 90 listening sessions. From these sessions emerged three pastoral priorities for the local Church: to encounter Jesus Christ and one another; to accompany each other as one human family on a journey of discipleship; and to live the unconditional love and joy of the Gospel. These efforts to engage the faithful in dialogue provided timely preparation for the diocesan phase of Pope Francis' global Synod on Synodality.

In the fall of 2021, pastors and other leaders identified coordinators to host synodal gatherings in parish communities across Western Washington. By December of 2021, about 500 coordinators had been named. Coordinator training was offered in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, and emphasized the simple, small group listening process suggested in the *Vademecum*, with time for prayer, for silence, and for listening to the Holy Spirit. Synod coordinators were free to design their own processes based on the needs of their communities. Training also included an overview of synodality, best practices to create prayerful environments for Spirit-led dialogue, templates for local planning, guidance on active listening, and instructions on writing and submitting results to the chancery. Before going forth to facilitate sessions in their communities, synod coordinators were also given the opportunity to participate in a synodal gathering. All sessions started from the fundamental question of the synod:

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together." How is this "journeying together" happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?

In all, synod coordinators hosted close to 1,000 gatherings, both online and in person, in which over 11,000 people participated. For those unable to attend, an online survey was provided, drawing over 250 responses. The 174 parishes, missions, and pastoral centers were the primary places where the synod unfolded, with over 90% of parishes participating, including some with very limited resources. Additionally, a broad invitation to participate was made to other institutions and groups, including grade schools, high schools, universities, prison ministers, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington, priests, deacons, and women religious. Some coordinators made special efforts to invite those on the peripheries, including victims of abuse, non-practicing Catholics, non-Catholics, the imprisoned, and homeless people. A measure of success was achieved where relationships had already been established, but much remains to be done for many groups to feel their voices truly matter to the Church. It is evident that, despite a relatively high level of participation, not all voices and viewpoints in this local Church are reflected in this synthesis.

After a general overview of the synodal experience, this synthesis will explore in greater depth the three principal themes that emerged in synodal gatherings: community, leadership, and the handing on of the faith.

The Synod: A Transformational Experience

The synodal gatherings were a new experience of Church. Participants appreciated the ability to share their stories — including painful experiences — without interruption, contradiction, or apologetics. One participant described the synod as “an official, Church-sanctioned conversation in which there are no taboo subjects, no off-limits subjects, no wrong answers. This is a healthy way to talk, rather than simply forbidding dialogue about some topics.”

Many participants expressed that the process was healing and hopeful. “The worldwide synodal process is a huge blast of oxygen in our Church.” “We thank dear Pope Francis for this gift of synodal listening, inviting us all to take part.”

Synod coordinators had a special opportunity to experience the grace of the process: “It was a holy opportunity as leaders to listen to people’s pain and stories. It felt very sacramental. Each session was an encounter with Jesus.” “[We were] called together to listen without judgement, without analysis, with love and acceptance. Session after session I saw hearts open and trust, deeply.” “The process was very liberating.” “Our stories helped us to see the inherent dignity and grace in every one of us. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we were moved from disagreement and distrust to candor and community.... It was in listening that I felt the Holy Spirit’s presence more powerfully than I ever have before.” One coordinator observed: “Thanks be to you, O Holy Spirit, for your gifts, your guidance, and your willingness to work with and through our humanness. And I’m sorry for underestimating you.”

Amid much hope surrounding the synod, there was also skepticism, and even cynicism, that the synod would lead to any real action. One participant said, “The synodal process is great, but it will all end up in the theology machine, the usual Catholic style.” Another participant relayed they were “leery that those who will receive our comments will not receive them and learn. ... This time, too much is at stake.” “Will the hierarchy listen to us? Will the notes from the listening sessions become diluted before they reach the Pope?” People want the synod to matter.

Rooted in Christ

The divisions within the broader community and Church were clearly reflected in the Synodal gatherings. Consensus was not reached, nor was that the aim of the process. It is clear, however, that across all divisions — cultural, geographical, ecclesial, political — the people of God share a common and profound desire for connection with Jesus Christ and with other people in a community of faith.

Contrasting and sometimes contradictory viewpoints emerged in these conversations. Many expressed a longing for change in the Church — change in who the Church welcomes; change in how the Church is led. Others feared that any break with tradition would be “a threat to the existence of the Church”: “Rather than change to fit the times, the Church needs to strengthen its message — not water it down — and people need to embrace all it means to be Catholic.” In many cases, these are not merely opinions or ideological differences, but deeply held convictions rooted in love of Christ. People want a Church that is Christ-like in its welcome and outreach. People also find Christ through traditional practices and beliefs, and want those traditions to remain.

In addition to some stark divides, there is much common ground. Synod participants treasure the sacraments, especially the sacrament of the Eucharist, and want a deeper prayer life. They want to know the Bible better. They want a living faith that is translated into action in the world. They want to share their

faith with others, especially those who have fallen away from the practice of their faith, and with the next generation. There is a true missionary impulse in the people of God, but many do not know how to share the faith they treasure. People want to be equipped and empowered to be the Church in the world, and they want Church leaders to show the way with energy and integrity. They are open to new models of leadership. They want the institutional Church to reflect more effectively what they know about Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

As a synod coordinator said: “The most common thread in my sessions was each person’s profound need to be recognized, embraced, understood, valued, and forgiven by their beloved Church. From deep within, they treasure their spiritual home and expect the best from it. They hold the Church to the highest standards — its own standards — and most are here because they want to participate in the ongoing building of the kingdom Jesus came to establish.”

In addition to these common themes, we heard consistent concerns from distinct groups within the people of God:

Young people are keenly aware of hypocrisy and want a Church of integrity, a Church of service, a Church that advocates for justice and combats climate change in concrete ways. They sometimes struggle to explain why they are Catholic to their friends, especially when they perceive the Church as sidelining women and rejecting the LGBTQ+ community.

Parents ask for help in handing on the faith to their children. They sometimes feel unprepared and helpless in responding to the moral and ethical issues their children face.

Women religious speak of their desire for a Church that accompanies, makes reparation for the past, walks with young people, and is open to new models of leadership.

Many **elderly people** expressed the pain of adult children not practicing their faith, and their concerns about the Church’s ability to connect with the next generation: Without them, there is no future.

Immigrant and refugee communities want the help and support of the Church in becoming part of their new community, and in handing on not only their faith but also their language and culture to the next generation.

Catholic people of color call upon the Church to address racism more forcefully and to acknowledge the wrongs of the past with sincerity and transparency.

Adult converts have a deep love for the Church. Those who have come from other Christian traditions encourage the Church to renew its efforts in community-building, youth outreach, and Bible study.

LGBTQ+ Catholics have experienced rejection. When they do feel acceptance from a particular priest or parish community, they know that might not be the case elsewhere. The parents, family members, and friends of LGBTQ+ people share this pain.

Divorced and remarried Catholics shared the pain of the annulment process, which they feel is needlessly complex, lengthy, intrusive, and even excruciating. Some divorced Catholics have been ostracized or shamed in their communities.

People who are **imprisoned** find joy in the Catholic faith, especially in the sacraments and the rosary. They feel a sense of belonging within the Catholic community in prison, but fear rejection by parish communities when they are released.

Catholics in rural areas share their yearning for consistent, accessible clergy and parish leaders, and for opportunities to build community and grow in their faith.

Catholics who value the pre-Vatican II liturgy want a stable Church that is unified in its understanding of tradition. Many question the purpose and value of consultation with the laity, and of this synodal process.

Non-practicing Catholics, or people who were away from the Church for many years, can often trace their departure to a negative encounter with a priest or minister, especially in asking for the sacraments. Others have drifted away because they feel unwanted and unneeded.

The next three sections of this report will highlight three central themes that emerged through all the synodal gatherings: **community, leadership, and handing on the faith to the next generation.**

II. Community: A Home, Not an Institution

The importance of community — and questions of who belongs to the community — came up in virtually every gathering. One simple comment captured much of what was expressed in synodal discussions of community: “We need to be a home, not an institution.”

The Impact of COVID

COVID came up frequently. A minority of voices questioned the suspension of public Masses in the spring of 2020, viewing this as “government influence,” suggesting the Church was “more concerned with body than soul.” The vast majority of participants, however, expressed gratitude for the many efforts the Church made to stay present, which was a source of encouragement for them in a very difficult time, and a testament to the Church’s adaptability. Many expressed concern for the homebound, the elderly, and those struggling with mental health challenges, all of whom experienced profound isolation during COVID.

The pandemic reawakened people’s awareness of the importance of the Eucharist, and the eucharistic community, in their lives. Many see the post-COVID future as a “a new start, [an opportunity] to make the parish the center of our community and become more vibrant.” People desire to bring more people back into the parish with greater personal connection and “more in-person activities as we come out of the COVID restrictions ... We need to know people's names so we can reach out when they're missing. Groups need to invite others to join.” People grieve that many have still not returned to Mass: “There are seasons in our lives and in our church, and we are in the Good Friday season.” COVID led many to rediscover that “we are not meant to live in isolation, but in community, and we have the opportunity to be community.”

The Value of Community

Catholics treasure their parish communities. “Church is home, family, community, friendship, peace. People want to go home, we are a Church and we are home to one another.” People spoke of the power of witness and connection: “A woman felt drawn to join the Catholic Church as an adult after witnessing acts of service and a strong sense of faithfulness from Catholics she knew.” Another participant shared how the Church, through ministries at her parish, “reached out to her and re-engaged her when her husband left. ‘The Church was there when I needed it.’” “We know that our parish community has our backs!”

Others shared painful experiences of feeling excluded, unneeded, or invisible. A woman who volunteered for several years stopped volunteering, and said that “no one seemed to notice.” “We feel alone despite being with other people in Church.” “Interactions are shallow, we need more opportunity for deep connections and conversations.” One participant said, “Parishioners and volunteers should be treated like gold, because they are!”

There is common awareness of the need to provide opportunities for parishioners to deepen their relationships with one another outside of the Mass. “People come for Mass but are looking for more. We

need to find out what.” Bible study, Alpha, and small faith sharing groups were named as ways to foster connection with others while helping individuals grow in faith.

People also spoke about the need for parish communities to be more outward-focused. Participants want “a Church that not only tends to whoever comes to the temple, but that looks for the one who has left or who has never been to a Catholic church.” “We are indifferent to the outsiders, yet we exist as believers to bring them in. People can be self-righteous and self-satisfied if ‘me and mine’ are saved from hell. What about the abuse victim, those consumed with substance abuse, those trapped by a bad marriage, poverty, or other circumstances? We need to meet them, accept them, and welcome them to join our walk with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.” People spoke of their desire to be part of this welcome: “As members of Christ’s body, we have a role to play; we have to receive God’s love and share it with others, especially those on the margins.” “Each person can smile more at Mass to show the joy we have ... Each person needs to know their faith more, and share their daily miracles with others around them We have to be willing to share our faith.”

Members of parishes facing closure shared their concerns. “Are there ways of looking at communities and seeing Church in a new way that could allow churches to stay open, knowing that there is vibrant community there, and that we are not dependent upon a priest to have access to what it means to be Church?”

Barriers to Belonging

The topics of inclusivity, welcoming, and hospitality were among the most discussed. People consistently pointed to Jesus’ example in the Gospels, while highlighting barriers to full belonging within the Church. “We’re reading the Gospels and seeing how Jesus walked with those on the margins and those with disabilities, and we don’t see the Church doing that. Jesus’ message is beautiful and counter-cultural, but we’re not seeing the institutional Church living into that.”

Racism

People of color spoke of routine encounters with racism, both inside and outside of the Church. A Native American woman shared that people often get defensive when racism is brought up, but that it needs to be discussed, because “it only takes one racist person or interaction to have a problem with racism in a community.”

Another participant observed, “It’s tough to deal with racism in the Church. It’s difficult to talk about racism because not everyone sees it, experiences it, or recognizes it. The synod, though, is the time to bring it up, difficult as it is.” “One woman shared that she has experienced much racism, especially during the sign of peace. White people would shake each other’s hands around her, but not hers, even when she had her hand out. ‘To be honest, I like that with the pandemic we do a touch-free sign of peace.’” Another Catholic questioned: “Where was the Church in summer 2020, when the whole world was talking about racial justice and Black Lives Matter? Jesus was always with the marginalized.”

Indigenous Catholics spoke of generational trauma caused by racism and boarding schools. As information comes to light about what happened in boarding schools, they gain greater understanding of what happened to their grandparents, “which makes this pain very fresh again.”

One parishioner observed that in multicultural parish settings, “it is visible that we tend to separate or cling to our own ethnicity, as well as socio-economic background, that the lesser or smaller groups are marginalized and left behind due to the lack of integration or association with those bigger groups. We cannot walk, journey, or grow together until we acknowledge, bridge, and face this reality by having an open mind and respect for individual rights.” Many diverse parishes experience a “lack of connection and

cohesiveness/unity. Groups and activities are limited too often to one cultural or linguistic group” because of the rigidity of older, established parishioners. “We are strands on the same rope, shredding apart instead of twisting together for unification.”

Inclusion

Catholics with disabilities struggle to participate fully in the life of the Church. Parents of special needs children wonder why most Catholic schools are not equipped to teach kids with special needs.

The dilemma of divorced and remarried Catholics came up frequently. Some people felt ostracized and rejected by people in their parish communities when their marriages ended. “I was told divorced people shouldn’t be eucharistic ministers, should not be allowed.” Many found the annulment process both unduly long and complex, and deeply painful. We need to “remove procedural barriers that keep people feeling like outsiders and discourage them from active participation in the Church.”

LGBTQ+ Catholics

Many expressed concerns about the Church’s marginalization of LGBTQ+ people; the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people was a frequent theme of the synodal conversations. “LGBTQ people are created in God’s image as surely as everyone is. It is past time to stop persecuting them and start trying to understand and love them.” Parents shared their pain: “My daughter is gay. I have no idea where that came from, but I realized: God loves everybody. I don’t see the Church being open to embrace gay people. That hurts.” Another mother said, “If God doesn’t make mistakes, how can someone say my child’s identity is wrong?”

The crisis over firing of gay teachers at a high school in the archdiocese in 2020 “was a painful moment, as hundreds of young people came and protested at the cathedral, moved by compassion and the love of Jesus. They were doing what we taught them, they were advocating for justice for the marginalized.”

Catholic school teachers shared that “they are frustrated by the Church’s definition of family: the school has many types of families and teachers would like to have alternative family structures recognized and respected so children feel accepted and not ashamed.”

A common thread in talking about inclusion was the sense that “the Church often prioritizes the doctrine and teaching over loving the person in front of us.” “The participants reported that the Church teaches the doctrine before the encounter with Jesus and questioned if it should be the other way around.”

III. Leadership

Leadership in the Church is a significant area of attention and concern. There has been an erosion of trust, which began with the clergy sexual abuse crisis. The faithful continue to be scandalized and discouraged by this legacy of abuse. People do not have confidence that there is more transparency in these areas today, and they do not feel adequate atonement has been made for these crimes. “I love the Church, but I am still grieving and heartbroken about the priest pedophile issue.... To me, the people in charge who moved the priests around make me angrier than the pedophiles themselves. As a Catholic school teacher, I know we have done things to prevent abuse from happening, but I’m not sure we have ever truly grasped it. It’s heartbreaking when I love the Church so much. I’m still processing it: I don’t know if I ever will truly process it. I’m not sure it’s something you can ever put behind you.” The abuse crisis has made it difficult for people to receive the Church’s teaching on moral issues: “The Church is quick to judge except when they protect their own.”

The erosion of trust brought about by the abuse crisis has been compounded by the historic complicity of the Church in the boarding school system for Indigenous children, where the extent of neglect, abuse, and cultural erasure may never be fully known. “My kids are Alaska Natives. I know the Pope apologized to the native peoples, but I have to wonder how I could put my kids in a place where there is that legacy of harm.”

Financial scandals, and the legacy of slavery and racism in the United States, have further shaken the trust of the faithful. The Church “needs to face up to its history of white supremacy and institutional racism. Our credibility to speak about God’s love for the world depends on it.”

The scandal caused to the faithful by these catastrophic failures is incalculable and continues to get in the way of mission, making it hard for the faithful to trust their leaders and to share their faith. These scandals also make it difficult for priests and bishops to lead. People want to feel proud to be Catholic, but in the shadow of the past, they find it difficult.

Leadership of the Church at the National Level

In general, people expressed unhappiness with the way the Church operates and speaks at the national level, particularly regarding political engagement. Many feel the American hierarchy is out of touch with the needs of the flock, and unable to respond to the challenges of our times. People are very concerned about the intrusion of politics into Church life and are concerned about bishops and priests “pushing” agendas on both ends of the political spectrum. They are concerned about the lack of consistency among the bishops and the disconnect between the bishops and the Holy Father. A priest expressed concern “about not just disagreement but contempt for Pope Francis by some clergy and the faithful in some parts of the country. There are several archdioceses not even willing to do the synod process.”

Many are scandalized by the denial of Communion, seeing this as a “weaponization” or “politicization” of the sacrament of the Eucharist. “Why don’t headlines read, ‘Jesus is Really Present in the Eucharist!’ instead of ‘Politician denied Communion’? In the Gospel we read that Jesus welcomed sinners and dined with them, but too many are denied access to the Eucharistic table, not by Jesus, but by us.” Whether with regard to the divorced and remarried, politicians, or members of the LGBTQ+ community, people feel that the Eucharist is being used to punish and exclude. “If the Eucharist is the source of life, then why cut it off?” Meanwhile, a smaller number of participants expressed frustration that the hierarchy seem fearful of speaking the truth and have made too many concessions to the prevailing culture.

People know the bishops oppose abortion, but feel that this focus has left other evils unaddressed. “It feels like the only thing they see as evil is abortion — they’ll strike a deal with any devil if they say they will end abortion.” People want the Church to engage with other social evils with the same passion, dedication, and intensity — particularly racism, poverty, and climate change. One young adult “shared how nervous she is for the future of the world with climate change, but no one in the Church seems to be taking her or it seriously.”

For most participants, the measure of leadership is the example and teaching of Christ. “No one wants to follow [the bishops] anymore ... no one likes where they are going. It doesn’t seem to follow the path of Jesus.” “For me, the closer I come to Jesus the further I feel from the institutional Church. I would like to have that gap lessened for me.”

The Impact of the Parish Priest

While there is considerable concern when it comes to the broader institutional Church, people speak highly of their pastors and parish priests. The incalculable impact a priest can have came through

clearly in the synodal conversations. People spoke with great love and affection of priests who supported and helped them at difficult moments in their lives. People expressed great “respect for the calling of priests as an incredible sign to the world of extraordinary faith and for our faith to stand as different in the world.”

There is a general sense that priests are too busy, overworked, or unavailable. “Many want to reach out to the priest but feel like he is so busy they don't want to overburden him knowing he is the only one in the parish ... so often they just deal with things on their own.”

People also spoke of the challenges that come with changes in parish leadership. People spoke of the pain of a new pastor coming in and altering various aspects of parish life without consultation, which can erode community and lead to a lack of trust. One person observed how difficult it is for the community when priests move frequently, noting that many of the strongest parish communities in the archdiocese have had long-term pastors.

Models of Leadership

The shortage of priests, and the need to consider other models of leadership, came up frequently. “We are worried about the priest shortage. There are fewer and fewer priests and we do not see any sign that will change. How will our parishes survive?” People expressed openness to other kinds of leadership, including deacon-led and lay-led communities.

Many suggested that the time has come to ordain married men. “St. Peter, the first Pope, was married.” People pointed out that married priests already exist in the Orthodox Church, among Eastern Catholics, and in the Roman Catholic Church as well. People see this as a way of not only increasing the number of priests, and hence the availability of the sacraments, but also of enriching the community: “People would like to hear someone other than the priest give a homily since he cannot relate to many situations involving parenting and marriage.” People also suggested that deacons might be ordained priests, or be allowed to anoint the sick.

The Role of Women in the Church

The role of women came up at almost all synodal gatherings. People shared the powerful impact of women religious in their lives. “When I was a child, there was a nun who made me feel so loved and cared for. That is why I decided to teach catechism, so I could be that person for others, like she was for me when I was growing up.” The loss of sisters is deeply felt by the faithful. “Where are the sisters?” one participant asked. People would like to see more sisters and more “female exemplars of faith to connect with.”

They would also like to see women take more leadership roles in the Church. “We want women in leadership roles because we can already see women with enormous capability. We want our girls and young women to see a place in the Church for themselves.” “We don't have to wait for female ordination to allow women visible/prominent roles as leaders, including homilists.”

The ordination of women as deacons or priests came up frequently. This topic emerged not only as a solution to the problem of the priest shortage, but as a matter of justice. “One mother, who was in great pain as she shared this, said that she was on the brink of leaving the Church, concerned about the effect of the Church's messages toward women on her daughters: ‘I feel like women are second-class citizens. We are discriminated against because we can't be deacons or priests. How is that equitable?’” Another participant suggested, “If there had been a woman/mom higher up, a sexually abusive priest would never have been moved from one parish to another.”

A young adult observed, “If Mary could bring Christ bodily into the world through saying ‘Yes’ to him and carrying him and giving birth to him, that is the most priestly thing one could do.”

Women who work in the Church expressed particular concerns. “Three young women who have spent their entire working lives working in the Church shared that they experience sexism, clericalism, and ageism daily.” They observe that clerical authority often seems to be exercised arbitrarily.

IV. Youth: Handing On the Faith to the Next Generation

One of the most prevalent themes that emerged in the synodal conversations was handing on the faith to the next generation. One participant said: “I love that my faith comes from 2,000 years of one generation handing the faith to the next generation. I am concerned that it won’t be handed to the next generation now.”

Parents express great anxiety for their children. “It breaks our hearts to see our children that we brought to Mass and sent to Catholic schools and colleges reject the Church.” “I feel like a failure because I was not able to hand down my faith to my children who are now adults.” People grieve that their family members seem to have lost this part of their heritage and the spiritual lifeline of the faith. People expressed concern about the survival of the Church itself, and about all that young people are losing without the sacraments. “A lot of young people are missing out on what the Church has to offer — that peace. I teach confirmation and in that group I encounter an increasing number of kids with a spiritual malaise — it’s challenging to help these young people find the peace, the community that comes with participation in the Mass.”

Parents with young children want to know how to hand on the faith in a way that will help their children place the practice of the faith at the center of their lives, and they want the help of the Church in doing this.

People also talked about the reasons for the disconnect with youth. Some highlighted the many competing voices in culture and society which vie for the attention of young people, including school activities. Immigrant and refugee communities noticed a breakdown of respect between elders and children. Some spoke of the pressures young people are under, pointing to a solipsism and deep isolation in younger generations. Many wondered whether Church teaching in some areas has alienated young people.

People suggested that service, outreach, and social justice could be a way of connecting with youth. One participant asked, “The passions of youth match the core of the faith and the life of Christ so beautifully right now; can we not move to elevate their voices more, since they are so in line with Christ’s teachings?”

Voices of Youth

In synodal conversations with young people, they expressed that they treasure their time with priests and deacons outside of sacramental celebrations. They value real relationships and want more of them. They want their priest to know their names. For the young, inclusion, community, and service are high values. They want to encounter Christ, to participate in parish life, to know their faith and to practice it more concretely through hands-on service. One coordinator summarized: “They want to find joy and energy at Church events, but find themselves with little room for faith expression. They shared desires for beauty, transcendence, and energy at Mass and parish events, an ‘alive’ faith, as well as reaching out to the young and an explicit invitation ... that they would be involved.” Many young people expressed a desire to be able to share their faith and Church teachings, but do not feel equipped to do so.

Young people “want an active, loving Church, which requires doing/living our faith in a personal way that goes beyond merely attending Church services.” They want to be part of the Church now — not just in the future — but often feel there is no room for them. “A young man said he enjoyed youth classes

but after graduation there were no places for him in the Church. He no longer mattered.” There is a sense of not belonging: “Kids and others who struggle to make sense of life ... don’t feel the embrace of God in Church for who they are, their questions, their feelings, their self-doubts, their differing opinions. They don’t feel Church journeying with them.” Sometimes young people reported feeling judged, “rejected or stifled in parishes run by the elderly.” A mother whose daughter no longer practices the faith said, “I asked my daughter what the ideal church would look like. ‘The Catholic Church isn’t a happy place,’ she told me. ‘There’s nothing for me there.’”

Young people also want the Church to speak out about issues that matter to them, especially justice and race. Many are troubled by the Church’s attitude toward LGBTQ+ people. “One teenager said they want a more welcoming Church and don’t like that people assume they are anti-LGBTQ because they are Catholic.” Many young people see a contradiction between the Gospels and the Church’s treatment of gay people. A fifth-grade boy said, “If we’re all children of God, how are we not equally accepted?” Another student said, “If God says he loves everyone and he doesn’t lie, doesn’t he also love trans people?”

A teacher summarized: “I think students are genuinely challenging the Church to see them in their struggle, and comfort, encourage, and affirm the goodness of each person. Not try to change them — but affirm the innate goodness of their humanity. Many of these students did not feel affirmed, but rejected or judged. This is a powerful challenge to the Church.”

Conclusion

In a polarized culture, the synodal process offers a way for the people of God to journey together in company with the Holy Spirit. Synodality is not easy. Sharing and listening to painful experiences is difficult, and the challenges can seem insurmountable. Pain and love existed side by side in these synod conversations. But there is great cause for hope in the willingness of so many to participate in the synodal process, in people’s deep love for the Church, and in the universal desire for a deeper relationship with Christ as individuals and for the Church to reflect Christ more compellingly in the world.

This process has helped bring to the surface many hopes and dreams for the future: “To not leave anyone behind. To reach out to those who fell away during the pandemic. To speak to people in the realities of their life and how Jesus can be found there, no matter where they are. For people to become more involved beyond just coming to Mass.” People long for “a Church that values all its members, from the young to the old, and seeks the active involvement of all in ministries and attempts to find bridges that unite diverse groups (such as young and old). A Church that focuses on young people and makes the faith relevant to their lives and to the contemporary world.”

As the whole Church looks forward to the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023, our local Church will continue to reflect on our experiences of the synod. The chancery will provide ways for parishes, chancery leadership and other groups to read and discuss this synthesis. More importantly, the synodal process itself needs to become a way of life in this local Church and needs to be woven into pastoral planning processes at the parish and archdiocesan levels.

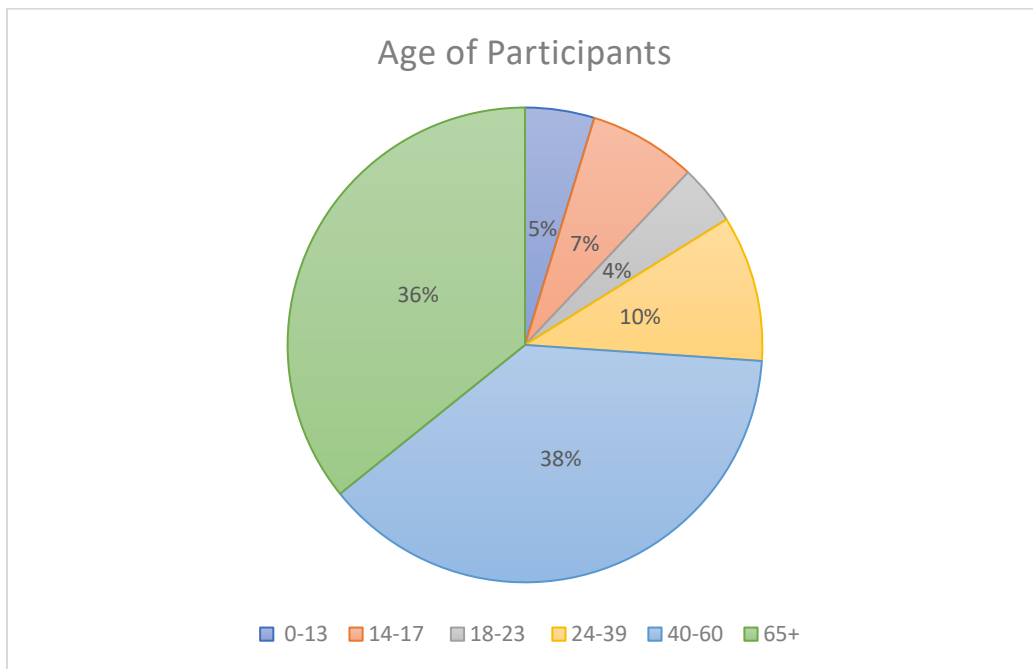
The synod provided an opportunity for the faithful to see themselves and one another as they truly are: members of the Church, the Body of Christ. As one coordinator put it: “During the synodal gatherings, I felt I encountered the Church itself, in a way I never had before. The experience brings to mind the words of St. Teresa of Avila, who died under the shadow of the Inquisition, aware that many were suspicious of the reform she dreamed of bringing about. Her last words were, ‘I am a daughter of the Church.’ We, too, are children of the Church.”

APPENDIX

Synod Synthesis for the Archdiocese of Seattle

Brief participation statistics*:

- 127 of 142 (90.1%) of parish communities provided listening session reports
- 986 Synodal gatherings
- 11,191 participants (63% female, 37% male)
- Race, Culture, Ethnicity:
 - 3% - African American, Black, African
 - 58% - Caucasian, White
 - 0.5% - Chinese
 - 5% - Filipino
 - 18% - Hispanic, Latino
 - 0.2% - Japanese
 - 0.3% - Korean
 - 0.2% - Native American, American Indian, First Nations, Alaska Native
 - 1.2% - Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian
 - 5% - Vietnamese
 - 3% - Multi-racial
 - 6% - Unknown



*Data represents only activity reported to the Archdiocese of Seattle. Information on age and race are not official and represent estimates by local synodal event facilitators.