



## *For a Synodal Church...Communion, Participation and Mission*

### **The Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico The Synodal Summary of the Main Question from the Papal *Vademecum***



**A synodal church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together” and asks: 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.” (PD,26)**

It is helpful to remember that “journeying together” occurs in two deeply interconnected ways. First, we journey together with one another as the People of God. Next, we journey together as the People of God with the entire human family. These two perspectives enrich one another and are helpful for our common discernment towards deeper communion and more fruitful mission.

*The Archdiocese of Santa Fe has received over 10,000 comments (from written correspondence, Listening Sessions and the ASF survey) that represent a broad range of topics – liturgy & sacraments; pastoral leadership; the role of laity (both men and women); Hispanic and Native ministry; and outreach to youth and young families as well as marginal groups (poor, immigrants, divorced, LGBTQ+, etc.). There have been 262 Listening Sessions involving 4,216 participants representing individual parishes, ministry groups, religious orders, and Archdiocesan consultive bodies. The rate of parish participation was 62%.*

After reading all the comments submitted, we have attempted to summarize comments and Listening Sessions of them in a manner that offers positive and constructive paths to “journey together in the future.”

The following ten themes were provided, in the training sessions for listening coordinators, as starting points and guidelines:

1. Companions on the journey
2. Listening
3. Speaking out
4. Celebration
5. Sharing responsibility for our common mission
6. Dialogue in Church and society
7. Ecumenism
8. Authority and participation
9. Discerning and deciding
10. Forming ourselves in Synodality

The conversation and dialogue was not to be limited to the above topics, but they served as possible discussion points.

A universal note in many of the Listening Sessions, was the sense of gratitude by the participants for the opportunity to speak out, express their thoughts and feelings and be listened to. The opening prayer and the sense of gratitude set a positive tone to the Listening Sessions. Other Christian denominations and faith groups who participated commented that they hoped their faith leaders would carry out a similar process.

Another comment that surfaced in the Sessions was that the synodal process would truly bring about changes. (In other words, participants wanted the Synodal process and ecclesial path of spiritual discernment to make a difference and not just be a paper document.)

**The ASF Synod Survey** remained posted until June 15, 2022. The Survey, created by the platform Survey Monkey, takes approximately 3-4 minutes to complete and was available in Spanish and English, with a sub-set of questions for those who categorize themselves as no longer practicing the Catholic Faith. The information and insights could be submitted anonymously, but the survey could only be taken once.

There were 511 surveys submitted, with the highest percentage submitted from the ages of 55-64 (21%) and 20% from those 18-24 years of age. We attribute the involvement of this last age group largely to the development of a QR code that made the survey familiar and accessible. 60% of the overall respondents are women, 95% identifying as baptized Catholics and 92% considering themselves active Church goers.

The Archdiocese formulated the following questions from the *Vademecum* for their Listening Sessions and the survey. In this “journeying together,” address the following questions:

1. Are there gifts (or what gifts do you find meaningful) that the Catholic Church brings or could bring to our journey together both for our faith communities as well as the world at large?
2. What obstacles in the Catholic community keep us from journeying together in our faith communities and human family?
3. Where does the Spirit invite us to grow (moving us forward) in our journeying together?

The following pages will attempt to summarize the top 10 themes identified and represented in the Listening Sessions and surveys. A synodal approach will seek to identify in what direction it is possible to walk together while discerning what seems to come from God. This summary will attempt to preserve the local flavor or meaningful formulations through direct quotes from the voices of the participants in the synodical process and material collected.

(Please note, the comments are not listed in any order of priority.)

**Are there gifts (or what gifts do you find meaningful) that the Catholic Church brings or could bring to our journey together both for our faith communities as well as the world at large?**

1. The Catholic Church has a vast historical sweep. It embodies the best and worst of Christian history. In New Mexico, it has a 500 year-old history of inculturation with Native, Spanish, Mexican and Anglo presence. The faith community has learned how to survive and even flourish in a variety of cultural and social contexts. Participants thought the Church needs to do a better job in our historical and cultural context.
2. The Catholic Church has a rich culture: Holy liturgical seasons, Art, Music, Native and Hispanic religious traditions, local Feast days, Los Hermanos, Las Posadas, Pilgrimages, Santos, Retablos, Church adobe architecture, and Monasteries. A Protestant pastor stated that the “Catholic faith has the bells and smells of a tangible faith.” This was seen as important to continue in our parishes.
3. A strong tradition of social justice – from Papal documents to Bishops’ pastoral letters. Catholics demonstrate this in their public lives – both words and actions. One comment was “Service is at the heart of Catholicism and your synodal process is a gift to the world.” A Buddhist leader was impressed with her “experience of the Catholic nuns in Palestine and in the slums of Peru.” There was a consensus that Catholic Charities and Catholic social action have a strong presence in New Mexico.
4. The Catholic Church has a strong theological tradition – both in formulation of Christian doctrine and in understanding faith in the context of human reason. Many of our ecumenical and interfaith partners commented that they commonly utilize the works of Catholic theologians and spiritual authors. One Jewish participant thanked the Catholic Church for its serious and collaborative work on Hebrew scripture (Old Testament). His comment was: “The Catholic Church has brought the Scripture (Hebrew) to life.” A Presbyterian pastor had a picture of Pope Francis on the wall of his study during a listening session. An Evangelical pastor had the works of Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, to better understand Church teachings on the Holy Spirit. Two female pastors commented that they “read spiritual and theological writings of Catholic nuns.”
5. The Catholic Church has a strong spiritual tradition. Spiritual traditions have inspired centuries of both Christians and “people of good faith.” Augustinians, Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Norbertines, Salesians and Jesuits to name just a few. Comments were that many Catholics today are unaware of the richness of these spiritual pathways and methods of prayer and contemplation. They asked that they be part of faith formation at the parish level. Besides just praying for vocations, the Church needs to educate in the “discernment of the Spirit” as the faithful ponder vocation decisions.

6. The Catholic Church has a strong sacramental and Eucharistic life. Parishioners, in large numbers, thought these were the life of the Church and could be better explained and celebrated with scriptural and historical foundations as well as culturally sensitive art and music. This was a strong area for Catholic identity and communion.
7. “Jesus is the reason we are Catholics. He gives His life and love to us and wants to be with us.” (A confirmation class participant). Requests were common for better instruction on “how to pray” better. Share methods of prayer and contemplation. Explain better the rosary and novenas. Have more opportunities for prayerful reading of the scripture to better understand Christ’s message and pedagogy with fellow parishioners. Have more times of silent and spoken prayer outside of the Mass. This was a request of many – especially for prayerful scriptural reading – *Lectio divina*. One young man shared “Religious education needs to start with developing a relationship with Jesus and then the Church teachings.”
8. The Catholic tradition has a strong history of leadership in the sciences – astronomy, physics, biology, archeology, and others. Some young adults requested better understanding on the part of the clergy and faith formation leaders in the areas of science. Evolution, reproductive anatomy, and genetics are topics one young Catholic thought needed more substantive information especially for young Catholics going on to college. “This is a place (college) where your faith is challenged.” The sentiment of several were that priests and catechists did not have the background to explain certain biblical stories in the context of our scientific world.
9. Essentials of the faith and informed conscience. The Catholic Church prays the Apostle’s and Nicene creed during every Eucharistic celebration. Many participants, especially among the younger generations, knew these to be essentials of their faith. Yet there seem to be so many “rules and regulations” that define a Catholic today which are not part of these essentials. Younger participants in the Listening Sessions raised both the question of an “informed” conscience and the freedom that comes with it. An example discussed in one listening session was “birth control” and how many priests preach that it is a “grave (mortal) sin” and yet it is not a creedal element of their faith. In good conscience, the participants practice birth control (not to avoid having children) but to better plan how to raise and care for their children especially now that both parents were working. They did not consider themselves to be in a state of “mortal sin” and felt they had formed their conscience in the context of their faith.
10. Awareness of Vatican II is minimal among “people in the pew” both young and old. When Vatican II is mentioned, most Catholics, as one stated, “don’t have a clue.” One well informed young voice stated that the Catholic Church went from a Church of “anathemas” to a Church that “opened the windows” to the broader world, wanting “to make the Gospel known and understood, as Jesus did, in the language and culture of His day.” The request was that faith formation, especially of catechists and young adults needs to include the documents of Vatican II so to better understand the church of today.

## **What obstacles in the Catholic community keep us from journeying together in our faith communities and human family?**

1. Faith formation is not adequate for youth nor for adults. Most participants felt that there was much more to be done, but this requires a well-educated group of parishioners and catechists. Participants thought with the challenges of today's contemporary culture and social environment, Catholic faith formation needs more than preparation for First Communion and Confirmation; ongoing religious education after Confirmation is needed to better prepare young Catholics for work and college.  
Many participants thought that parents need to be involved in the faith education of their children.  
Young couples requested opportunities for faith formation as they face social and ethical issues of workplace and political life. One parishioner stated, "The use of social media with interactive mini classes and podcasts can be made good use of." She would like to see "online programs for catechesis for all age groups."
2. Many people from marginal groups and the "Nones" do not feel welcome in the Catholic Church. They do not feel free to bring up controversial topics that require discussion and clarification. For many in this group, the experience of the Catholic community was critical and judgmental. This was especially true for those who consider themselves marginalized, as one Confirmation student expressed that they felt judged by "how they dressed, their sexuality, hair, jewelry, etc." One young man said, "Christ ran with the outcasts. Our Churches can be anything but Christ-like." "The Church needs to move from exclusion to inclusion and reach out to those who are seeking." "The Church should be a place of hospitality and openness to all just like Jesus was. All of us in the Church need to show more love and kindness."
3. Celibacy was an obstacle frequently mentioned. One participant asked, "Why can't priests be married? Catholic clergy seem rigid and apart from the people." They are like "old men living in an ivory tower trying to keep things the way they have always been." A well-respected Episcopal priest said, "The fact that I am married and have children and grandchildren creates a real bond with my parishioners and provides relevant content to my sermons." "In the context of the sexual abuse by some clergy, celibacy is not the witness it might have been in the past." A female choir director in one parish said, "My heart goes out to a priest who has had a bad day and goes home to an empty house at night and has no one to talk it out with." "If priests could marry, they would understand the family dynamics and be better pastors." "If priests can't marry, we will continue to have a priest shortage for the calling to priesthood does not necessarily require a call to celibacy." "Allowing priests to marry and have a wife --- it's normal in the human nature of life." "Does Jesus truly ask that all pastors and priests be celibate and male? The example of a married cleric is a strong witness for parishioners."
4. Lay Catholics have been conditioned to be passive recipients rather than active participants. Unfortunately, this is the culture of most lay Catholics. One goes to Mass on Sunday and drops some money in the collection box and goes home. A non-denominational pastor

commented that in his church, “Everyone has a role in the building of their faith community.” For many Catholics, what Father says and does is the Church. There is no reason administration, finances, faith formation, and a multiplicity of ministries cannot be done by the laity. “This active participation needs to begin with the youth in the parish. They can be involved with music, liturgies, lecturing, visiting the sick and helping neighbors in need.” “Not just a select or core group should run everything, more laity need to be involved in ministries, parish council, visiting the sick and imprisoned and provide more social and worship activities for our community.” “Clergy need to respect and collaborate with lay parishioners.” “Parishioners need to step forward.”

5. Women’s role in the Church. One Catholic confirmation teacher mentioned, “I feel called to be ordained a Deacon.” In listening to our ecumenical pastors, this topic is a major stumbling block. “Why aren’t women ordained? Over half of the Pastors in our community are women – prayerful Christlike women!” Two Protestant pastors stated, “We see women working on the periphery of the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church has alienated one half of the world. The gifts and calls of women need to be included and not faced with the challenge of exclusion.” A frequently repeated comment from Catholic participants (both men and women) was “Women are left out of full participation in the Church. Are we not all created equal?” One woman responded to a priest’s explanation that “Jesus’ apostles were all men.” She responded, “Yes, and they were also all Jews.”
6. Social topics are complex, but many younger Catholics see the Church present them as “black and white.” Many Church members said they were afraid to open their mouths because when they raised questions, the response was “the Church teaches” which means there is no room for discussion. “Life is complex and filled with grey areas.” One young Catholic said, “Perception of the Catholic Church is more authoritarian than willing to explain and discuss.”
7. The Church needs to be above “partisan politics and work to find common ground.” One Catholic doctor stated that “in the last election, it seems that all Christians were for Trump and if you were a voting Democrat, you could be denied Eucharist. Priests should keep their political agendas to themselves and not promote them from the pulpit. Jesus’ agenda is what we want to hear not theirs.” Another comment from a participant was that the Church needs to take a stand and be stronger in its condemnation of liberal Catholics. Our faith commitment often compels us to take a position and stand on critical social issues, but it must be based on Christ’s word and example – the full Gospel message and the sacredness of all creation. This is what the Church must profess with courage.
8. Obstacles to Interfaith dialogue. A Muslim woman stated “that the Catholic Community has been very supportive and good to her and the family since we have moved to New Mexico. I have fond memories of the nuns who taught me in first grade in Bethlehem.” A Buddhist leader found “some teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are at odds with human reason, and I challenge the Catholic Community to move from exclusion to inclusion and reach out to secular groups that are seeking. Embrace folks that are different with tolerance and acceptance. Remove those obstacles. Your faith has much to offer.” From a Jewish leader “Take the word ‘Jews’ out of your Holy Week services. Those “Jews” were religious leaders

aligned with Roman authorities. The Jewish people, in large part, honored the work and words of Jesus.” He said that he still experiences anti-Jewish remarks from certain Christians. He continued to state, “Religion does not necessarily make you a better person. What is important is man’s heart.” “I as a Jew was raised to love and respect all. You Christians are human beings just like me....created by a loving God.” “Many Jews are still suffering from 2,000 years of PTSD.”

9. Obstacles to Ecumenical (other Christians) dialogue. A Methodist minister said, “The Catholic Church has put itself in a silo with a ‘top-down structure’ with a dogmatic certainty that does not connect God with where people are today making dialogue difficult.” An Ecumenical group of Pastors, all agreed that “the Catholic Church is impenetrable. We cannot access parish priests and we get no response when we call to invite them to community worship services or address social needs in the community.” They went on to say that “Many in the Catholic Church have not moved beyond the Reformation and do not know how to talk to other Christians. Both clergy and Catholic parishioners need to be better educated about other Christians and the ecumenical progress that has been made since Vatican II.” Protestant pastors stated, “There is so much we could do together to serve our faithless world and the poor.” A Presbyterian pastor said she imagines the day when she can “hear all the Church bells ring in our community and all Christians and people of good will take a moment and pray for the poor and suffering in our community and throughout the world. Then, the world might come to believe.”
10. “The Church hierarchy, bishops and priests, can become enclosed in a clerical culture that is seemingly safe and secure but, in many instances, isolating them from their parishioners and the larger world.” There were also many comments regarding Catholic priests who are living examples of Christ in the world. They care for the sick and dying and listen to the needs, both physical and spiritual, of their parishioners. Even our Ecumenical partners have nothing but the highest praise for the bishop and clergy who partner with them in both worship events and response to social needs in the community. Priests who participated in the Listening Sessions were very few but they responded with honesty and humility. They, in general, felt blessed to be priests and have learned to accept their celibacy as a gift of both witness and service to the community. With the limited number of priests today, they have no choice but to call on the laity to assist with both the spiritual and physical needs of an active parish. One parishioner commented “Priests need to feel comfortable and confident to call upon us to take more of an active role in the Church.” One priest commented on how important it was to find fellow priests to share their life of faith as well as a need for a more social community.” His idea was for two or three priests to live in common and share the pastoral responsibilities for their respective parishes.

## **Where does the Spirit invite us to grow (moving us forward) in our journeying together? (based on Synodal responses)**

### 1. Education and Formation

The laity needs: more encouragement and opportunities to serve a variety of administrative and ministerial roles in their parishes. Pastors need to feel comfortable opening doors and sharing duties and ministries with their parishioners. The Catholic Church can learn from the Protestant communities how to effectively implement this. The laity also need more educational opportunities with short courses, both online and live, to become familiar with scripture, church history, church doctrine and ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

Youth are a critical area for effective and creative education from primary grades through entry into the workplace and university. Opportunities for service both in the parish as well as social outreach should be an essential part of their faith formation and parents need to be front and center in their children's faith formation. Support courses can be provided for parents so they are better prepared to help with their children's faith formation.

Clergy are well prepared in scripture, church history and doctrine, but they could use more opportunity and training in homiletics.

They also need more background on ecumenical and interfaith topics: Church history on divisions; different scriptural interpretations; sacramental differences; different religious cultures; and familiarity with progress made in bilateral and multilateral Church agreements.

Training in parish administration and team management – how to delegate and supervise effectively.

More science and social studies courses to better understand and preach intelligently to today's public. These can be short courses but they need to address the interface between the world of science and faith: evolution, human anatomy and physiology, astronomy, psychology and sociology.

Programs such as RCIA, Religious Education, ACTS, Edge, Encuentro, Emmaus Journey, Jornada de Fe, Ecumenical and Interfaith workshops, Summer School of Christian Formation need to be well supported and expanded throughout the Archdiocese.

### 2. Role of Women

“Women are the mothers of every individual who makes up the Church. They deserve a role of primacy in our Churches or, at least, on footing with their male counterparts.”

“Minimally, the role of diaconate needs to be seriously considered for women since they are and always have been the main service (diakonia) providers in our Churches since the time of Jesus.”

“Over half of the Catholic academic theologians in the United States are now women and many of them serve as spiritual directors in retreat houses and seminaries. It is only a question of time.”

### 3. The Life of the Spirit

Prayer and devotion to the Holy Spirit must be a centerpiece in the life of the “journey together.”

The Catholic community needs to take advantage of the rich spiritual history from the early Church fathers and mothers through all the great spiritual writers and devotions of the Church.

Methods of prayer along with “discernment of the Spirit” must be taught to both clergy and laity as well. “Mini retreats and days of recollection should be offered to parishes or groups of parishes throughout the year.”

“Feast days, pilgrimages, liturgies, sacred music, and art need to be promoted and encouraged among parishioners. Creativity is a gift of the Spirit.”

“Feast days, parish festivals, Las Posadas, Lent and Advent should be kept alive and supported.”

“Informal prayer groups and bible study should be promoted and supported when possible.”

“Church events should occasionally include meals (potluck). This always serves to bring people together.”

“Missions and talks on spiritual topics should be offered throughout the calendar year, especially during Advent and Lent.”

### 4. Ecumenical and Interfaith Dialogue and Events

Protestants, Orthodox, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindi and many other faith communities want “to partner with Catholic churches to participate in common prayer services and in addressing community social needs.”

“Vatican II documents on Ecumenism and Non-Christians need to be promulgated among clergy and laity.”

“Both Bilateral and Multilateral church documents have made real inroads toward Church unity. An exceptional document of what Christians all believe is the Lima 1971 document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (better known as Lima BEM).”

“This mutual understanding only serves to better understand and appreciate one’s faith community.”

## 5. Forming Ourselves in Synodality

This experience of becoming companions, walking together is the methodology that Christ used during His ministry. After 2000 years, we can confirm the effectiveness of not only the what but the how he has taught us.

May we continue to be good listeners with open hearts and minds and without prejudice.

May we not be afraid to speak out with courage and freedom with truth and charity.

May we celebrate each other's uniqueness in this body we call Church and celebrate the Word and the Eucharist with better understanding and more complete participation with those we might have left behind.

May we all, clergy and laity, share responsibility for the administration, ministerial and spiritual needs of our fellow parishioners and community members.

May we persevere in dialogue both within our church and society and be the patient hope for mutual understanding and healing divisions.

May we continue to realize that we are united by baptism and that our sisters and brothers in other Christian churches have a special place in our common worship and service together.

May each one of us, especially the laity, not forget that we are co-responsible for our faith communities – for both our communal and spiritual growth of each member of this community especially those who have been marginalized and excluded in the past.

May the Holy Spirit and the process of communal and personal discernment become a critical part of our lives of faith and service. May we support the faithful decisions of each other as we discern our vocations to better serve Christ's Gospel in our world.

In conclusion, in the words of Pope Francis (EG 23), *“The Church's closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey: communion and mission are profoundly interconnected.” In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance, or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.”*

*“To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his life which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people.” (EG 268)*

**Respectfully submitted by:**  
**Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Co-leader**  
**Michelle Montez, Executive Director, Pastoral Ministries**