



Report of the Synod on Synodality

**Saint Michael Parish
North Andover, MA**

Over the past 6 months, St. Michael Parish has been engaged in dialogue about Pope Francis' call to become more of a "listening Church...journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel".

The Process:

A team of staff and volunteers was established to facilitate the process of Synodality at the parish. Always invoking the Holy Spirit's guidance at each meeting, and modifying the suggested questions prepared by the Archdiocese of Boston, they developed 4 questions for the parish to discuss. Explanations of the Synod and invitations to participate in the process were well communicated through the bulletin, website, emails, Facebook and personal invitation. The team collaborated in presenting 7 listening sessions, first with staff and members of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance Council, followed by gatherings after Mass for parishioners in general. At each gathering, the participants united in the Prayer for Synodality, they were introduced to the process and participated in small group discussion of the 4 questions posed, which, given time restrictions, may not have all been discussed. The attendance at each listening session was between 10-25 participants, including the facilitators. The team felt that the pandemic hindered greater participation in the process.

The Discussion:

Question 1: Thinking about our parish, archdiocese and the Church, who has a voice, and who should have a voice?

Responses:

Most participants expressed, with frustration, that the bishops have the voice in the universal Church and that the bishops and pastors have the voice in the Archdiocese. A very few felt that this hierarchical voice was positive. Another very few expressed that the hierarchy was out of touch with the reality of people's lives.

The majority of participants stated that *all*, by their baptism, should have a voice. Many offered groups of people whose voices are ignored in the Church. Among them are: lay people, women, those who are divorced, those with non-traditional sexual orientation, elderly, NONES (the religiously unaffiliated), prisoners, youth and young adults.

Regarding having a voice in our own parish, participants were mixed in their responses. Half expressed that they had a voice, that the pastor and staff listened well and even sought their counsel. They expressed that their voice was heard because of the relationship they had with the pastoral team. They felt respected.

Others felt that they had no voice. Among the comments were: no one would listen, they didn't know how to have a voice or that they were hesitant, even afraid to speak up.

Again, as with the universal Church and Archdiocese, the majority expressed that in the parish *all* should have a voice and that there should be intentional formats for communication. Many cited the need for the Parish Pastoral Council to be more visible and representative of the parishioners. Several expressed the need to go out to the non-active parishioners to listen to them and to share their own witness of how God works in their lives

Question 2. Are you able to dialogue openly and freely with anyone in the Church on important matters? What has helped this process? What prevents this process?

Responses:

There was very little discussion about the universal Church. However, those few who did mention it had diverse comments. A few expressed that there is little to no dialogue between the "out-of-touch" hierarchy and the people they serve and that there is great division in the Church at present. Others expressed hope in this synod which starts the process of being more of a "listening Church".

Most of the discussion was focused on our own parish. Like the first question, people were divided in their assessments. Many expressed discomfort in dialoguing, citing such roadblocks as: no opportunities offered for discussion, no education on Church and/or social issues, no suggestion boxes, lack of communication from clergy, staff, and/or Parish Pastoral Council, not feeling comfortable speaking freely to parish clergy, fear of conflict, of being judged because of differing opinions or of expressing thoughts that are contrary to Church teachings, size of the parish, lack of transparency, and not being sure of the process.

Still others expressed great comfort and ease in dialoguing due to welcoming and caring clergy, staff and parishioners. Many cited the following as aiding the process of free and open dialogue: small faith-sharing groups, openness to one another, trusting relationships with individuals or small groups, approachable priests, good small-group

facilitators, pre-Covid social activities that gathered people and are starting up again, growing in compassion by being open and listening to others with differing opinions or those who are struggling, and open communication via bulletin, emails, Facebook, and virtual webinars.

Question 3: Do you feel you have the opportunity and feel equipped to fulfill God's mission of making disciples for Jesus through our parish or the greater Catholic Church?

Responses:

The majority of participants felt that they had opportunities and were equipped for mission. They expressed opportunities such as ministering in faith formation, serving the poor in many ways, locally and internationally, volunteering in liturgy, hospitality, outreach to the sick and homebound, ministering to the youth and performing little acts of kindness.

Parishioners felt equipped to fulfill God's mission of making disciples from many resources such as: growing in their relationship with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, their own upbringing in the faith by their parents, their participation at Mass, in faith-sharing, Bible study and prayer groups, parish missions, Catholic TV and other virtual resources and opportunities for spiritual nourishment and simply by being in community with others. Some encouraged people to gather for brainstorming on how to better make disciples for Jesus and to invite 1 person back to Mass within the year.

A smaller number of people did not feel that they were equipped to bring about the mission, citing the need for more adult faith formation or that they feel limited by opportunities to serve.

Question 4. Do you feel the decision-making process within your local parish community could be improved? Is prayerful discernment a part of the process?

Responses:

Since this was the 4th question, time was waning for full discussion. Some participants were very aware of the decision-making process, having participated on staff, Finance Council or Parish Pastoral Council. The majority, however, had no knowledge at all of the process. Some were confident in the parish's decision-making process and recognized the fruit of the decisions. Others felt that the process needed more collaboration with the parishioners. It was evident that more education on the decision-making process is needed for the parish at large.

In Summary:

The process of the Synod on Synodality brought parishioners from St. Michael Parish, North Andover, MA, together in dialogue, which is always life-giving because of the presence of Jesus Christ: "Wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there I will be in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20). All in attendance felt that it was important for the

Church to hear their voices and the voices of all the baptized. The majority in attendance encourage the leaders of the Church, universal and local, to become better at listening to the people with welcoming, non-judgmental and open spirits, to encourage dialogue, to learn from one another, and to make decisions more collaboratively. For the Church to grow in its mission to make disciples, parishioners recognize the need to take advantage of the many opportunities to be formed more in faith and to work collaboratively in bringing about the mission of Jesus Christ.