

**Archdiocese of Las Vegas
Archdiocesan Synthesis Document
for the Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops
8 April 2024**

INTRODUCTION

Following the guidance offered by the Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, the Archdiocese of Las Vegas hosted three additional listening sessions to supplement those already hosted in the earlier phase of the synodal process, one in each of the three deaneries of our Archdiocese. The faithful of the Archdiocese were not confined to their own deanery; all were permitted to attend the listening session of their choice. Close to 200 of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Las Vegas participated in these additional listening sessions.

To initiate the process, Archbishop Thomas offered an invitational video that was shown in all 39 of our parishes and missions on the Third Sunday of Lent, together with parish bulletin invitations. The three listening sessions were held throughout the Fourth Week of Lent on three different days of the week (Monday, Thursday, and Saturday) and at three different times (evening, morning, and afternoon) in order to accommodate the schedules of the faithful and encourage wide participation. We also provided for remote listening sessions from our rural parishes so that the faithful in the peripheries of our Archdiocese could meet as parish groups and link to the deanery listening sessions. As a result, four of our rural parishes participated and were proportionately well represented.

In a desire to engage the People of God in a synodal style, the three listening sessions offered opportunities for a Conversation in the Spirit: prayerful reflection on each of the guiding questions, open listening and sharing within small groups or tables, and reporting of those discussions to the larger group. All notes were taken and collated by the Archdiocesan Synod Team. This present synthesis is the fruit of the same five-member synod team that assisted in collecting responses from the first listening sessions held before the first Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality. In the pages that follow, we respectfully report on responses to each of the two guiding questions, highlighting both successes and distresses as noted by the faithful; their responses were quite candid and diverse. We strove to focus, as much as possible, on the voices of the People of God, and used quotations in this synthesis wherever possible. Our hope is that this synthesis provided by the Archdiocese of Las Vegas will be a tessera to the overall mosaic of responses from the faithful of the United States and serve both as a contribution to our Episcopal Region's Synthesis process, and that of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

QUESTION ONE

Where have I seen or experienced successes – and distresses – within the Church’s structure(s), organization, leadership, or life that encourage or hinder the mission?

In response to Question One, several key themes arose. Although we are many, we are one Archdiocese, and the responses reflected that ideal, in both the successes and distresses.

a. Successes

Respondents praised the welcoming spirit evident within the Church, reflected especially in the way different ministries relate to and support one another, the presence of ministers of hospitality at Masses, the respectful and welcoming attitude of priests and staff, the growth of ministries that try to meet the various needs of God’s people, and the wide variety of parish-based community-building activities that foster belonging in the family of God. Most participants noted a positive change in the Church since Vatican II with Mass in the vernacular, increased attention to bible study, more inclusion of women and laity, enhanced ecumenical relations, and greater outreach to the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Efforts by Pope Francis and the Bishops to promote the Synod on Synodality and the Eucharistic Revival were also appreciated, especially the attention given to listening at all levels and reaffirmation of the Eucharist as the heart of the Church. Participants found some success in the growing use of social media to promote Catholicism and connect the faithful (i.e. online Masses, livestreaming, radio, etc.). The increase in ministries, programs, lay movements, and overall Catholic population is seen as a clear sign of the Holy Spirit working within the Archdiocese of Las Vegas. Finally, respondents continue to have a deep love, respect, and appreciation for their priests and bishops.

b. Distresses

Many of the distresses that were voiced echo those of our previous synodal listening sessions. There is distress with lack of consultation with laity and inclusion of laity in decision-making, especially evident in parishes without functioning pastoral or finance councils. Concern was expressed with lack of pastoral planning at the Archdiocesan and parish levels. Many felt there is no clear vision of where we are going as a Church and how we’re going to get there. We continue to foster a “maintenance” mindset rather than “mission” mindset with no foresight of how to promote and live our Catholic faith in the world or form parishioners in the evangelizing mission of the Church. A consistent distress was the need for adequate faith formation at all levels, especially considering social media and groups (outside and inside the Church) that distort Church teaching and confuse the faithful. While a small but vocal group expressed the desire to return to the Mass in Latin, promotion of traditional Church teaching, and maintaining restrictions around divorce, LGBTQ individuals, and who can receive Eucharist, more respondents embraced a welcoming and inclusive attitude that placed love, justice, and charity over rules and regulations. Clericalism continues to be distressing since it is perceived as working in opposition

to collegiality, co-missioning, and co-responsibility of the laity. Decisions are made “for” the people with little transparency rather than “with” the people.

Equally distressing for participants was the growing division within the Church itself, especially clergy and groups who promote their own ideologies and agendas. Much of this confusion, participants report, is due to the ambiguity on teachings and direction from the Pope, bishops, etc. that lead to confusion, misunderstanding, and division. Ongoing concern was voiced again on the role of women in the life of the Church, with many favoring women deacons and the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making roles at all levels of Church hierarchy. Considering the priest shortage and resulting lack of access to the Eucharist and other sacraments (especially in rural communities), some respondents expressed dismay at the Church’s unwillingness to ordain married men and women. One participant exclaimed, *“How can the priests be successful in their mission when we have so few?”*

Pain was expressed with the ongoing departure of youth and young adults from the Catholic Church and the lack of adequate strategies to address this crisis. Many respondents also expressed concern over the perception that the Catholic Church is a “one issue” Church. While appreciation was voiced about the Church’s strong stance against abortion, many participants believe the Church needs to speak out just as forcefully on other social justice issues (i.e., death penalty, poverty, immigration, racism, etc.) since all are human life issues as well. Strong legislative advocacy is needed that mobilizes the Catholic voice of the entire People of God, not just the voice of the Bishops. With the growth of Hispanic and other ethnic populations, respondents voiced the importance of better recognizing the cultural diversity of the Church by incorporating cultural expression in parish life and liturgy and reflecting cultural diversity in staffing. While respondents appreciate the Safe Environment policies implemented in the face of the priest sex abuse crisis, many believe the processes and policies to be burdensome. One group said, *“By the time people go through the hoops, their desire to participate dwindles.”* Hope was expressed that these processes are not eliminated, but somehow “streamlined” to better encourage recruitment and retention in ministries.

QUESTION TWO

How can the structures and organizations of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?

As a follow up to the previous question, Question Two allowed the respondents to share their feelings on how to continue the successes, or alternatively, remedy the distresses.

Respondents felt parish structures need to provide opportunities that foster life-long faith formation and spiritual growth, such as regular Bible studies, RCIA programs, and faith-sharing

groups to help deepen understanding of the Gospel. In addition, educational institutions within the Church (such as schools, seminaries, and universities) need to provide consistent and congruent learning as well as practical skills-building to effectively proclaim the Gospel. All engaged in ministry should minister by example with process as the focus rather than programs. One participant suggested, *"We need to become more united in the Church. The dignity of the human person often gets tossed out from our own rigidity."*

Additionally, respondents felt Sacramental opportunities such as Mass and Confession should be primary, allowing the baptized to personally encounter Christ and receive His grace. Leaders in parishes should invite and model active participation in liturgical celebrations that foster a sense of community and shared faith. Homilies need to be more relevant to those in the community and scripture focused instead of being focused on the personality of the priest or deacon preaching.

Respondents wanted all ordained ministers to be available to the people in addition to the weekend celebrations, by actively participating in the life of the parish/Archdiocese. Concern was expressed by some regarding the issue of clericalism. *"There is a need to be inclusive, listening with the heart, dialoguing with respect on the part of clergy and laity, and movement from egocentric to compassionate and empathetic living. There is a difference between legitimate authority and showing superior power."*

Furthermore, respondents wanted parishes to create space for fellowship, where believers can support one another, share faith, and live out Christ's love and mercy without judgement. Respondents emphasized the love of God and quality faith formation. Some felt there should be less outside influence such as politics, individual agendas, and non-vetted online references. There was a desire to have social events structured in such a way as to welcome everyone, no matter which Mass or group they attend, and thus strengthen relationships and build a sense of belonging.

Respondents encouraged the Archdiocese, religious orders and charitable organizations to engage in the works of mercy while also addressing social issues and advocating for justice, thus following Pope Francis' directive to create 'field hospitals' for those in the peripheries. Many expressed concerns for the divorced, single mothers/fathers, those with addictions, and those in the LGBTQ+ communities.

Attractive and inviting media platforms such as websites, social media, and publications were desired. Respondents wanted evangelization programs to equip leaders with the knowledge and training necessary to help the baptized share their faith and invite others into a community of love and mercy.

According to respondents, synodal structures and similar listening sessions need to be held regularly to encourage dialogue, consultation, collegiality, and collective decision-making. True collaboration between clergy, religious, and laity ensures a holistic response to the universal call to holiness we all share. Most participants agreed that to empower the People of God to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ, we urgently need a paradigm shift that focuses all our actions on the style of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Our Synod Team is grateful for the opportunity to gather again with the faithful of our new Archdiocese to focus on the successes and distresses of the Church's structures and organization, as well as opportunities for those same structures and organizations to support the People of God in the proclamation of the Gospel and the practice of our Catholic faith as a community of love.

We again found that the demographics of our participants indicated little to no participation from our youth and young adults, the homeless, the poor, the sick, undocumented, immigrants, and those lapsed in the faith. A majority of participants were 65 years and older (66%), female (65%), and Caucasian (62%).

It was gratifying to hear the great love for the Church across our Archdiocese as well as the love and respect for our priests, Bishop, and Archbishop. There is also much respect and appreciation for the Holy Father's call to Synodality and the U.S. Bishops' call to the Eucharistic Revival. Many expressed appreciation for existing parish ministries. In addition, opportunities for ongoing adult faith formation on an Archdiocesan level were mentioned and appreciated.

The total participant numbers were around 200 people across all three listening sessions and 21 of our parishes and missions were represented. Our team was grateful to all the participants for their time and effort to assist in our mission and call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ. It was apparent across all the listening sessions that people are passionate about their faith and their responsibility to share the faith – even when there is disagreement about actual Church teaching and best practices. It is our hope and expectation that we can continue to offer opportunities to gather and be formed in the faith, to be in community, and to hear the voices of the People of God in the Archdiocese of Las Vegas.