



**Roman Catholic
Diocese of Rochester
New York**

Synod Interim Stage Synthesis Report





OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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April 3, 2024

Wednesday within the Easter Octave

Dear Mr. Coll:

As requested, we are pleased to present the Diocese of Rochester's *Interim Stage Synthesis Report*, representing the comments received during the Interim Stage of the Synod on Synodality in anticipation of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, convoked by Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, under the theme: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission."

This *Interim Stage Synthesis Report* was prepared by the Office of Pastoral Services under the direction of Mr. Michael J. Sauter and Mrs. Elizabeth M. Johnston, who worked collaboratively with the 30 Synod Facilitators who ensured a wide and diverse consultation process.

Thanking you for your assistance in this Synod process and invoking the intercession of our Diocesan patron, Saint John Fisher, I remain, with an assurance of my prayers during this holy season of Easter,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Salvatore R. Matano
The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano
Bishop of Rochester

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-with one attachment-

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
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From the instructions given by the Secretariat document “*Toward October 2024*” for this Interim Stage of the Synod and guided by The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano, Bishop of Rochester, the Diocesan reality was assessed, and this led to an adaptation of the Synodal process. The current reality finds us, since the participation in the previous Synodal Phase, still amidst bankruptcy. Therefore, a more introspective and fruit bearing approach was adopted where findings and outcomes could possibly show results in the life of the parish/faith community since the Synod on Synodality began.

This adaptation encouraged a reflection on local realities as well as an encouragement to “*identify the paths we can follow and the tools we might adopt*” (*Toward October 2024*, pg. 2 #1) which could make these conversations fruitful for the parish/faith communities, peripheries of society, all the baptized, and the Diocese in order to “*move towards greater unity as one Body of Christ in proclaiming the Risen Lord and His Gospel for our Diocese today.*” (DOR adapted question #1). Parishes and participating groups were encouraged to use and practice the Synodal-styled Spiritual Conversations for their own enrichment and were able to share their comments via an online response form. The adapted questions were as follows:

1. Personal and parish/community engagement: How can we encourage and enhance stronger relationships between the Church’s structure(s)/organization/leadership/life and each baptized person that moves us towards greater unity as one Body of Christ in proclaiming the Risen Lord and His Gospel for our Diocese today?
2. Engaging with the Diocesan Church: How can the structures and organization of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of truth, love, and mercy in Christ?

The questions focused first on how the groups viewed their own experiences and ways of living the mission of the Church and, second, with suggestions on how the communities and the Diocese can collaborate in that same mission, entrusted to them by Jesus Christ. The groups were also asked, while answering the questions, to be mindful of how people in the peripheries of society engage in parish life (Sacraments, Mass participation, family formation, social ministry/responsibility). If so, how? If not, what can they as a community do differently?

The parishes were invited to participate, but at the same time the previous phase’s Diocesan Facilitation Subcommittee was reconvened and tasked with engaging their respective constituencies for two or more sessions. The Subcommittee included clergy, religious and lay leaders representing

a diverse population throughout the Diocese of Rochester's 12-counties. Some new members were added for a total of 30 to make sure as many constituencies as possible were engaged. Some of the areas include rural, urban, and suburban parish communities/staffs/councils, Catholic schools, cultural communities (i.e., Vietnamese, Filipino, Black, and Latino/Migrant communities), those incarcerated in prisons, young adult groups, volunteers from *Walking with Moms in Need*, college students, homeschooling families, Latin Mass participants, active and contemplative communities of Women Religious, catechetical leaders, prayer groups, young families, parents with young children, graduate theology students, Catholic High School students, and more.

In total about 42 groups representing 52 constituencies/ministries totaling over 450 people engaged in Spiritual Conversations throughout the Diocese of Rochester. The resources created to help guide the process will remain available with a continued encouragement to practice a Synodal-style of listening and sharing for the purpose of unifying the Body of Christ, proclaiming the Gospel of the Risen Christ, and living as missionary disciples.

The feedback from this "Interim" stage showed the continuing importance of the parish as the locale and source of much of the vitality in the Church during a time of challenge through the trials of Covid and bankruptcy, as well as the likely source of continued renewal. One group highlighted the parish as being the center for continued listening in the vein of the Synod. Among the youth and the college aged there was a sense that the traditional parish could be the source of both a better "digital footprint," with regards to ways of engaging teens and young adults in learning about their Catholic faith, but also as the source of positive "old school" dinners and "community building." Sunday evenings were posited in a few responses as possible times when families of teens and young adults might be freer to participate in Mass. College students spoke of the complicated daily schedules and calendars of today's young people but witnessed, at the same time, how the traditional "liturgy and devotions" of the Church meet the spiritual needs of so many of their peers today.

Sunday celebration of the Eucharist in the parish (faith communities, college, or prison) was identified as the central structuring reality of faith across the board. Here the catechetical leaders saw great hope where the parish can be the locale for community-building and a sense of "belonging to the Body of Christ." With the variety of responses, it was mentioned that, with the continued polarization within society and even within the Church (local, national, and international), both the unifying spirit of "tradition" as well as the need for "relevance" could be its

antidotes while also being the ideal place to “hold space” for differing thoughts and opinions. Another group spoke about how the Catholic parish, within the larger community, must be a place to distinguish between “nice” and “good”, and “the Holy.” Different constituencies placed the Mass, and our connection to it, as key to moving forward with local social justice initiatives that act as true leaven and do not fall prey to the polarization mentioned above. Groups suggested that “youth activities” and “fellowship” offered in connection with the celebration of the Mass would enhance participation in both.

Suggestions by a group of men associated with the annual Men’s Conference surrounding catechesis and its role in building up relationships and unity included, the central issue of authority and specifically the difference between “secular state authority” and the “authority of God.” Complimenting this were highlights of a need for the focus on the “human dimension.” For the Women Religious who contributed, this “human dimension” was expressed by one group as a need to share their gifts of themselves through their call of service to God and others as they are led by the Holy Spirit, while the other cited the need to build “healthy relationships” through a renewal and enrichment of the liturgical life of our local Church by the ongoing formation of our clergy. They see this as a method of evangelization through liturgy and through that, their commitment to prayer for its success.

Regarding catechesis, it was also mentioned that good catechesis on the Sacrament of Reconciliation was needed for continued growth as baptized children of God. Along these lines, a group of deacons put forth the need for catechesis to include a “thoughtful progression in a person’s faith journey” and one of the Migrant communities highlighted the role of “personal testimony” in sharing the Faith. In addition, some youth expressed the hope that the sought-for unity might be found in common struggles, and concerns about today’s world, as well as unity coming from the “common hunger for community in a lonely world.” The Vietnamese community shared that there is great need for their families to find relevance in the parish ministries in which they engage and where they can find their place with their different cultural faith traditions, language, and realities.

Across many of the responses, and especially among the young, there is a yearning for a “welcoming” atmosphere of being known by name and being welcomed, each of us, in our “falleness” and “brokenness.” A group of incarcerated men phrased this as a “personal” process, and as “listening to an individual’s story without prejudice, judgement or confrontation.” Some

young men at a Catholic high school referenced the desire for better ways of relating to youth, as the Church can feel “old” for them.

Responses were varied to the Synod’s encouragement for groups and constituencies to listen for the Holy Spirit’s guidance on ways the Diocesan Church can help all the baptized respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of truth, love, and mercy in Christ. Many seemed to focus on issues of “subsidiarity” (those things the Diocese can do better, as a matter of scale), and others as a place where the initiatives can be started through its leadership. Still others were focused mainly on the healthy relationships between the Diocese and the parishes.

Those issues that pertain mostly to subsidiarity included a focus on technology, and communications, such as social media, TV and even sponsoring a Catholic presence through “a kiosk” in a mall, “reaching out to lapsed Catholics” and teaching the “truth and beauty of the Catholic tradition.” Men’s groups, Women’s groups, mission trips and “offerings for teens” also surfaced as areas where the Diocese might be best suited to take the lead. Help was also asked of the Diocese for guiding evangelization efforts, including detailed research and communication on “why people left” and how they might be brought back, especially with the “unaffiliated” or “nones.” With fewer numbers of young people in the pews, some parishes ask for help at the Diocesan level for highlighting and bringing together young families in the Diocese, or guidance in “taking their faith into the workplace.” From cultural communities, Diocesan accompaniment was welcomed, appreciated, and encouraged in highlighting/participating in their cultural celebrations, building bridges that move toward positive relationships, assisting in forming the laity to serve using their God-given gifts, helping them to connect with other parishes, and advocating for Mass times and space that work for the needs of their communities. Forming and strengthening the knowledge of the Catholic faith for our Catholic school teachers and formation programs was also highlighted so parents can be assured their children are being instructed and supported with a strong faith foundation. A mention was made of “helping young mobile people with transition to a new Diocese,” and communicating to them what that Diocese offers.

Where the Diocese could help people by taking the lead in certain areas, the centrality of Life Issues remains important, as well as preaching centrally on “Truth, Love and Mercy” (the incarcerated in prisons). This theme on teaching and preaching Truth was also echoed in responses that asked for the Church to speak with fidelity and clarity on Magisterial teaching and liturgical norms. From our graduate School of Theology, there was hope that the raising up of “pastoral

structures” with a posture of hospitality can be foregrounded as we come out of bankruptcy and its “troubles and scandals.” A few suggested the use of regular, Diocesan, ‘listening sessions’ as one way of continuing to move forward in unity. Some participants expressed skepticism and pessimism about “the motives, structure and overall benefit of the entire synod process” itself. They called attention to a loss of clarity about Church teachings as one prominent downside of the process.

One of the final questions listed on the online form for the groups that engaged in the conversations asked, “*What was the overall experience of practicing this synodal-style of spiritual conversation/reflection?*” About 80% of the responses were very positive and shared that they look forward to engaging in this style of spiritual conversations in the future. These positive comments mentioned the conversations were “serious and thoughtful”, “uplifting and honest”, “constructive rather than venting”, “focused on potential solutions and possible clearer paths forward”, “allowed for greater participation rather than monopolizing of conversations and the participants felt listened to, free to share their thoughts, and open to the presence of the Holy Spirit.” The incarcerated said “the process was affirming of their Catholic identity, and it helped them know they haven’t been forgotten.” One group said that “despite their pessimistic response, the conversations were pleasant and light.” The high school teens said, “the participation in these discussions made them happy and they felt it was the first time their opinions were asked and heard.” Other responses identified the difficulties they experienced as they engaged in this process of synodal conversations. Some comments shared that “it was an awkward process that will take getting used to”, “the starting and stopping as well as the time keeping was challenging to provide fruitful conversations”, “the questions were difficult to understand”, and “a better developed protocol and training would help.”

In summary, the overall experience of engaging in this process of conversations that shared thoughts and suggestions for ways both the communities and the Diocesan Church can collaborate to bear fruit and live the mission of the Church entrusted to us by Jesus Christ was positive. We hope and pray this experience provides better ways to bring about the unity so needed in our society, communities, and the Church, as well as our Diocese of Rochester. May the Holy Spirit continue to move us all together as one people united in the mission of the Lord.