

## **SYNOD 2022 – 2023 Diocese of Shreveport, Louisiana**

### **PROLOGUE:**

The following is the completed document prepared as a synthesis of the many listening sessions held around the Diocese of Shreveport in the Spring of 2022, also including input emailed directly to the diocesan synod committee. There was no intent for this to be a word-for-word verbatim from everything we heard. Rather, we hope we have captured the passion, spirit and the overarching themes contributed by all those interested in the future of our diocese. An exact copy of this document was electronically sent to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops group on Synodality, who will further enmesh it with the documents they receive from other diocese's around the country. That completed report will be used by the world wide church when drafting an agenda for the Synod on Synodality to be held in the fall of 2023.

While the listening session phase is complete, the work for all of us has just begun. First and foremost, we are called to continue to listen to each other, the church, and especially those who normally do not have a voice to share with us. Remember, the initial goal of this was to help us learn to listen. Additionally, we believe you will find ideas in the following report that can be acted upon immediately at both the parish and the diocesan levels. Some of these action items will require money. They will all demand our time and talents.

Bishop Malone is now making plans to visit each and every parish for further listening, communication, and sharing. Of course, he is only one person, so it would be easy to assume this process will take at least a year. However, the fruit of his visits will help form the work and identity of the diocese for years to come.

We ask you to please read, study, and pray with the following. This too could take a year. We suggest keeping a journal for notes, meditation, and follow-up. Form small discussion groups. Share ideas with your pastor and parish pastoral council. And through it all, continue to ask yourself: "What do I hear in each statement?" "How does it make me feel?" "Where are those feelings coming from?" "God, how do you want me to respond?"

## **THE DOCUMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our synodal experience began in October 2021 with communications from our Bishop to the entire diocese through a letter read at every Mass, as well as using several videos hosted by the bishop and a few lay persons, posted on our diocesan website and social media. Beginning in the Spring of 2022, listening sessions were offered at many of our diocesan parishes. We also received personal input by email from Catholics from around the diocese.

Determining a percentage of participation from the approximate 40,000 Catholics in our diocese is impossible. However, we were pleased and even surprised by the number of those interested enough to attend the listening sessions or to submit their comments through email. Once the listening sessions began around the diocese, we were uplifted and inspired by the content.

Through the listening sessions and what we heard in the emails; we were touched by the spirituality of our diocese. Or, put another way, the lived experiences of North Louisiana Catholics came alive in the heartfelt and passionate sharing of stories and events of personal and communal encounters with God in the lives of those who shared.

Although not surprising, an overwhelming number of comments came with the feeling that “my group” is not listened to. Whether elderly, youth, male, female, preference of liturgy type, or any other group one could imagine, they all needed to express how they feel their own group is “on the margins” and not recognized or listened to. We conclude that in at least some way, they are all correct. We sometimes have an easier time talking than listening, underlining our need to look at synodality in the first place. We now find ourselves with the long-term desire to practice fully listening to each other. Through prayerful discernment we have attempted to synthesize all of the contributions we heard into this working document.

### **POLARIZATION**

Similar to the early Church’s division of understanding about the nature of Christ (divinity vs humanity), a topic still in evolutionary understanding today, we are faced with similar divisions with theology vs spirituality, liberal vs conservative, styles of liturgy, gender identity, Catholic social teaching, divorce and remarriage, and many more. We continued to hear the hope for a utilization of new and universal language which better defines and describes these positions leading to a “center” of understanding that eliminates confusion. Several told us they have been attacked by other Catholics because of their beliefs, so they remain quiet and unengaged. We can do better.

## **PRIESTLY AND RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS**

There is now, and have been over the decades, a common passionate desire for more priestly and religious vocations.

Additional discussion and comments include:

Among those were some who were pleading for female ordinations. One person shared that it's time we accepted all of those whom God calls. They have been praying their entire lifetime for more vocations and they feel the answer to those prayers has been "no." Imagining God answering the prayer, they hear God say: "No, I'm not going to give you more vocations to celibate males. If you want more priests, you are going to have to ordain everyone I call to the priesthood. This includes married males, as well as women (celibate and married). Right now, you are accepting fewer than 50% of those whom I call."

One person suggested a total renewal of seminary training for priests, including a rewrite of curriculum to include greater emphasis on social justice, sharing of resources with the needy and further understanding of the inclusiveness of the phrase "People of God." A bright and robust future for our diocese will include a large and diverse Catholic population from every walk of life acting in both leadership and member roles, knowing and living our faith in everyday life.

Teach priests how to pastor. Then we can hire, train, and pay lay administrators.

## **MARRIAGE & FAMILY**

Many expressed that marriage and family are at the heart of a vibrant parish and church. Most parishes suggested providing events with food where we can invite family, workmates, and neighbors, offering a very brief message about who Jesus is personally to us. There was a desire to see encouragement for families to pray together.

Additional discussion and comments include:

Rules on marriage/weddings (inside church, divorced/communion) should be updated with help from the laity.

Birth control should be approved by the church

We need to have a central diocesan natural family planning course instead of just telling engaged couples (and anyone else) to find an online course on their own.

Many church fees for marriage are too expensive and deterring for lower income Catholics to marry in the Church. We should not be charging for the sacraments.

Annulment process is still too lengthy and invasive

Inclusion of divorced and remarried in family

Inclusion of singles in family

Inclusion of widowed in family

## LITURGY & WORSHIP

Easily, we can attest that the most often expressed theme we heard was the importance and necessity of the celebration of the Eucharist. As always, this is what brings us together in the most holy of ways. There was some consensus that we do our best to never allow our churches to be shut down again. At the same time, some shared the grace that virtual Mass was to them and how they still experienced the broader community even attending virtually. We heard requests for education on the Mass, including a desire for quiet before Mass and other liturgical options. Mass is the common life of the parish. There were calls for a more simple Mass with less intrusive music, as well as requests for complex Masses using many of the options of additional music, prayers, sacramentals and gestures.

Additional Discussions and Comments include:

Female ordination

Women Homilists

Annulment process seems punitive, not restorative

Divorced and remarried without an annulment should be able to receive communion

Homilies on current events/issues/common life

Mass more personalized (anniversaries & birthdays)

More healing masses

Cultural adaptability of the liturgy

Latin mass

Please request quiet before Mass so that those in prayer and reflection have the time of quiet with the divine.

So many prayer and Liturgy opportunities are designed for retirees. People who work are not able to participate in the Masses or other ministries.

Make Mass more accessible and understandable to non-Catholics, maybe a program or some other guide.

Adoration, new opportunities of liturgical celebrations, different prayer opportunities, easier for non-Catholics to participate, offer nursery.

What is our mission beyond the brief sentences in our mission statements?

Good use of contemporary music

It is insulting and harmful for a priest to tell us what the appropriate and non-appropriate music for liturgy is. God touches our artistic senses in diverse ways. No one knows what is appropriate or not appropriate for any one person other than that person themselves

Many felt their parish goes to great lengths to be liturgically sound.

Maybe using the talents and ideas of various age groups to participate in the programs or liturgies would bring more people to Mass.

Just need the laity to (in many cases, to continue) encourage greater participation amongst each other.

Seasonal prayer and liturgical celebrations outside of Advent/Lent.

Focus on reverence and respect for the Eucharist.

Youth Masses, modern music, more music that the congregation can sing to.

Some Masses seem like a concert more than a liturgy.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

We heard input on the everyday administration of our parishes and the diocese. Some view the administration responsibilities of the diocese as few and incidental. On the other hand, others feel it is the engine that makes everything happen. It is important that our diocese create a Department of Strategic Planning, whose members would at least include representatives from every individual and group mentioned in this document. There are many Catholic professional associations who could help us set the standards for all of our activities and endeavors.

Additional discussion and comments include:

Transparency of scandals/financials

Bishop visibility and availability

Better Communication from diocese on issues

Frustration over diocese and parishes not supporting Catholic Charities financially

Include women more in administration + decision making

Also include youth, families, divorced, ethnic groups, all marginalized people

At the diocesan level, create departments for: Catholic Spirituality (including but not limited to liturgy), LGBTQ, Adult Singles, The Elderly, Catholic Outreach, and Prison ministry that includes legal, employment and education assistance.

Allow pastors to be pastors and hire lay people to be responsible for the administration

Lay Leaders including Canon Lawyers, Hospital Chaplains who can also anoint the sick, Prison Chaplains, Spiritual Directors, Youth Ministers, Catechist - Preachers, and Parish Administrators.

Our use of all mediums to communicate is lame. We have diverse desires in how we want to be communicated to. Find ways to communicate to everyone

## **SERVICE & OUTREACH**

We heard the phrase Catholic Social Teaching more than once. It is an area that puts legs to our doctrine and encourages us to minister to others. Catholic Charities, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Christian Service, Community Renewal, Mary's House, and many others are foundational to our opportunities to be Christ to others.

Additional discussion and comments include:

Catholic college ministry

Catholic action in north Louisiana (prayer services for murders)

Campus ministry needs more support

More participation from adult children

"Seasons of life" groups

More accepting of minorities

Bridge builders

How do we clarify the work and mission of Vatican II into the current practices and ministries?

## EDUCATION

We heard a continuous calling (begging) for a diocesan and parish investment in Catholic education at every age level and including all subject matter. This included a cry for trained and paid lay teachers of all ages who would be inspired to commit to teaching, not only what we believe but how we live it in the real world.

Additional discussion and comments include:

Some would like more teaching about abortion, asking should it be allowed for people who aren't Catholic, should it be or not be the dominant issue, and can we have a deeper understanding of why people get abortions.

Others desire more discussion on topics like addiction, mental health, pornography, poverty, immigration, current and former prison inmates, wealth disparities, the documents of Vatican II, etc.

Clarification on catholic teaching (to both Catholics and non-Catholics)

Revive and expand the Greco Institute as part of our adult education and development

Catechesis on dogma and doctrine of the church, and how to live these spiritually in the post-modern world

One suggested a plea for encyclicals on *Gaudium et spes* and *Lumen Gentium*

Our Church and its members often get maligned by liberal Christians and secular liberals because of its (depending on the specific issue) moderately-to-very conservative views on gender and sexuality. And, predictably, the rest of Catholic social doctrine gets routinely ignored or worse. However, it is important that Catholics remember that our Church also teaches the following (and I would really like to see at least one other Christian denomination get on board with the first on the list):

1. The principle of the Universal Destination of Goods - that every human being has the right to a share of the goods of creation sufficient to realize his or her fullest potential as a human being simply by right of being born.
2. The right to join and be represented by a trade union or a professional association.
3. The right to full employment.
4. The right to a just and living wage.
5. The right to fair, safe, and reasonable working conditions.
6. The right to security of employment.

7. The condemnation of the death penalty.
8. The condemnation of racism.
9. The affirmation that every single human being is created in the image and likeness of God.
10. The affirmation of the necessity of care for, and protection of, the environment.
11. The affirmation of just treatment of animals.
13. The just distribution and redistribution of wealth.
14. The defense of the rights and dignity of immigrants and migrants.
15. The defense of the rights and dignity of the poor.
16. The principle of the "Preferential Option for the Poor".
17. The principle of the sovereignty of conscience.
18. The principle that labor must always take precedence over capital.
19. The right of workers to strike.
20. Affirming that workers with disabilities have the same rights as other workers.
21. The right to discharge freely one's religious duties/freedom of religion.
22. Affirming the dignity and rights of human persons regardless of personal convictions.
23. Affirming the priority of ethics over profit in all economic decision making.
24. Affirming the priority of ethics in the development of technology.
25. Affirming the necessity of nuclear disarmament.

## YOUTH

In every institution, youth is the future. Pope Francis has expressed to our youth, they are not only our future, but our present. Yet, the facts have escaped none of us. More and more of our youth become disengaged and detached from the church, its sacraments, liturgies, and its grace-filled life. We heard this lament from many and understand everyone's concern. We are defining youth as those from our youngest ages to those in their fortysomething ages. The vitality of the church needs them all. Consequently, our ministry as a diocese must include new and creative ways to invite and include them, as people of God, into full fellowship with the church. One group stated our youth needs more opportunities to have a voice in the church.

Additional discussion and comments include:

I'm heartbroken because my grown children and their children do not engage in the life of the church

We need well paid and trained youth directors, surrounded by a team of trained men and women whose ministry is to help the youth see their place in the church and feel welcome in the church.