



## **Diocese of Palm Beach Synthesis Summary**

In summary, our experience of the local synodal process in the Diocese of Palm Beach can be considered a success in that we have journeyed together and listened to one another in our local Church. Emerging from the global Covid-19 pandemic, we have clearly witnessed and experienced the need for community, to be able to speak to one another and to be heard. This synodal process provided the opportunity to do just that.

We heard from nearly five hundred people who participated in about 30 Listening Sessions all around the diocese and from another 125 individuals who responded via the online questionnaire and through the mail. In addition to the laity, clergy including our Shepherd, Bishop Gerald Barbarito, and the Religious Sisters in our diocese, all participated in the Listening Sessions. For everyone's participation, for your time and contributions, we are grateful. It is our prayer that everyone who participated feels appreciated and that no one feels overlooked.

In cases where parishes, ministries or other groups held Listening Sessions, it is our fervent prayer that the leadership of those groups "heard" what the participants had to say. This synodal process provides a wellness check for each parish, ministry, or group. Strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities can be gleaned from the comments to help frame the future if the effort is made.

For the Diocese of Palm Beach overall, several themes and opportunities emerged from this journeying together. First and foremost, the strength of faith and the appreciation of the Mass and the Eucharistic Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ are beautiful realities in our diocese. So many peoples' faith is built on the foundation of the Mass, the sacraments and prayer. The universality of the Church and its traditions all contribute to that sense of participation and belonging.

A strong sense of belonging to the local faith community is key to strengthening a person's commitment to the parish. This sense of belonging to the local Church hinges on recognition and respect. Simple experiences such as being greeted by name by the clergy, receiving a personal invitation to participate in a ministry or fulfill a need, or feeling welcomed by fellow parishioners, all these bind us to our local faith community. By experiencing a sense of belonging, we come to know that we "are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27, NRSVCE). Belonging is integrally connected to generous participation in the ministries and activities of the parish.

While the Church is appreciated for providing the sacraments, visiting the sick, and providing spiritual guidance, unfortunately, a certain perception exists that



the Church does not proactively reach out in response to individual needs. Of course, this may simply be related to a lack of communication. However, parishioners do express the desire to be able to connect more with their pastors and other clergy at their parish.

When asked about fears, doubts, and confusion and how they might affect participation in the faith, a wide range of responses were elicited from “I have no doubts or fears” to misconceptions and misunderstanding of what the Church actually teaches. Some participants questioned why confession must be made to a priest or the necessity of the annulment process. In general, worries and concerns centered around key cultural hot-button issues including:

- Holy Orders for women
- Married priests
- Church teachings on sexuality and same sex attraction
- Divorce and re-marriage
- Clergy abuse and other scandals

Other key areas of concern include:

- Modernism
- Restriction of the Latin Mass
- Confusing or unclear teaching/guidance from the hierarchy
- Exodus of youth from the church
- Lack of adequate formation of youth
- Shrinking church attendance
- Public scandal given by self-acclaimed Catholic, pro-choice politicians
- Priest shortage
- Perceived politically motivated homilies
- Perceived aloofness of U.S. hierarchy

In addition, several opportunity areas for further discussion and formation emerged from the responses and group discussions. First, the need exists for better formation in the principals and foundations of evangelization. Too many are fearful or feel inadequate to this task and may benefit from coaching on how to share the faith. Simply setting a good example is not enough. As we have learned since Vatican II, “...the Good News proclaimed by the witness of life, sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life” (Paul VI, Evangelization in the Modern World, No. 22).

Another desirable area of formation is connected to the hot-button cultural issues of our time including moral as well as social justice issues. Further adult



formation and support are needed to help frame our thinking through these issues from a Catholic viewpoint that is, with the mind of God, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8). Many of the key cultural issues are complex, and we need the opportunity to consider and discuss various viewpoints and develop our understanding through a Catholic lens to develop appropriate responses, solutions, and action plans.

All in all, when we encounter Christ in a meaningful way and then are welcomed in the faith community with respect and concern, we build relationships of trust. As a response, our curiosity and desire to learn are fostered, leading to a growing desire for a deeper relationship with and a deeper conversion to Jesus Christ. Ultimately, this conversion process leads us to become missionary disciples, committed to Christ and His Church and, in turn, accompany others through their own process of conversion. May our local synodal process serve as a catalyst for this process of conversion.