

Diocese of Charlotte – Final Parish/Group Report

Section One - Contact Info and Synodal Conversations Data

1. Full name of the Parish/Group Contact Person:
2. Email of Parish/Group Contact Person:
3. Phone number of the Parish/Group Contact Person:

4. Name of the Parish/Group you represent (if you represent a parish and a mission church, please include both):
St. Eugene Parish

5. City of the Parish/Group you represent (if the group you represent is present in multiple cities, please write "Diocesan Group"):
Asheville, NC

6. Number of in-person Synodal Conversations:
12 events; 26 group discussions

7. Number of online Synodal Conversations:
None

8. Total number of Synodal Conversations held (in-person and online):
26

9. Total number of participants in the Synodal Conversations (in-person and online):
249 in person plus 59 in the Survey = 308 Participants

10. Languages used in the Synodal Conversations (select all that apply):
 - English
 - Spanish
 - Other (please specify)

11. How many meetings (in-person and online) addressed the first synod question about the signs of the Lord's presence in our lives?

We used the following questions in each of our Gatherings:

#1 - What has been your greatest joy in being part of the Church?

#2 – What has been your greatest struggle in being part of the Church?

#3 – Here at St. Eugene, how are you being nourished in your faith?

#4 – What is lacking for you, or what do you wish we had?

#5 – What struck you most in today’s discussion?

12. How many meetings (in-person and online) addressed the second synod question about the questions and challenges we face in our lives of faith?

See #11 above

13. How many meetings (in-person and online) addressed the third synod question about the steps forward the Holy Spirit is suggesting to us and our community?

See #11 above

14. Did the Parish/Group you represent distribute a survey among its members to collect responses to the synod questions?

Yes

No

15. How many people responded to the survey?

59

16. What synod questions did the survey address?

Our Survey Questions included the ones from Group Gatherings & the following additional ones:

- 1. If you have left the Church, or left St. Eugene, could you share with us why you did so?**
- 2. If you have left the Church or no longer attend services, what would it take for you to return?**
- 3. One specific hope I have for the Church moving forward is...**
- 4. This is the beginning of a process of parish discussion and discernment. What would make it easier for you to participate?**
- 5. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?**

Section Two – Fruits of the Synodal Conversations

17. The first synod question asked, "What are the most significant signs of the Lord's presence in your life?" In 500 words or less, please describe the common answers and themes that emerged during the conversation AND the participants' most inspiring or moving responses or questions.

In our parish, we asked:

What has been your greatest joy in being part of the Church?

Here at St. Eugene, how are you being nourished in your faith life?

People expressed they felt God's presence in their lives most strongly at the Eucharist itself, in the forgiveness and renewal of Reconciliation, in private prayer in the quiet church, during Benediction and Adoration, when serving in parish ministries, and working with other parishioners in these ministries.

Working together on peace and justice issues in the broader community was mentioned by a number of participants. People expressed that the Synod small group sharing had given them strength and courage to stay with the church because they realized they were not alone in their joys or in their frustrations. Pro-Life, Climate Change and other social justice issues were all mentioned. Though differing opinions and perspectives arose, participants felt the focus on listening to understand and willingness to learn from each other were helpful ground rules. There was a strong desire for this sharing to be continued and for formal structures to be set up in the parish to ensure this.

In addition to these comments people noted that other small groups in the parish - base communities, book sharing groups, Bible study groups, etc. have been significant sources of support, companionship and spiritual sustenance during COVID.

People expressed excitement and a real sense of the Spirit moving in the Church again. One of the joys expressed was being part of the universal church because it can make powerful statements for good - on climate, racism, war, poverty, and for marginalized groups like the LGBTQ community. The richness of Catholic history and tradition was also mentioned as a source for spiritual growth, and there was gratitude voiced for our pastor and two deacons.

This was captured best in the following statements:

- ❖ The Eucharistic Celebration is the anchor of my life.
- ❖ I can feel myself a part of the Body of Christ most when sharing the Sacraments in community
- ❖ In reconciliation God always calls me back; I am forgiven and welcomed home.

- ❖ During COVID I realized how much I need my faith community.
- ❖ My faith is strengthened by meeting deeply spiritual parishioners
- ❖ Involvement gives me humility & brings me closer to who Jesus wants me to be.
- ❖ I was in the military & moved a lot. The Church was my point of consistency.
- ❖ It feels safe and nice at church. It's a place of calm. It helps me forget issues in my personal life. (from one of our youth)
- ❖ The church helps me not judge others & try to understand what they are going through. (from one of our youth)
- ❖ I feel at home here. I have a family. I feel a unity of the Anglo and Hispanic Communities

#18. The second synod question asked, "What are the biggest challenges or questions you face in responding to the Lord's call?" In 500 words or less, please describe the common answers and themes that emerged during the conversation AND the participants' most inspiring or moving responses or questions.

We asked:

What has been your greatest struggle being part of the Church?

What is lacking for you, or what do you wish we had?

Repeatedly, people said the church is out of touch with the realities of our everyday life. Men and women with significant responsibilities are treated as children by the Church. Women encounter a church giving them second-class citizenship, treating them with misogyny and fear. Minorities, (racial, national or others), see the church prioritizing the unborn but remaining silent when their lives need defending. The LGBTQ community is ostracized by a church clinging to a natural law that doesn't recognize modern science. Parishioners who are their parents, family and friends, expressed anguish at the church's lack of understanding and pastoral care.

Other painful issues include the geographically and historically wide-spread sexual abuse scandal, tragic abuse that occurred in schools for Native Americans, and the long history of racism within the Church. Many said the Church has lost all credibility as a moral authority; others see no need to confess their sins to a priest. Many found the Church unable to deal with sexuality in a healthy manner, citing an all-male, celibate hierarchy afraid to give women equal footing in the Church, who instill guilt around sexual behavior, and who fail to see the action of the Holy Spirit in the laity's rejection of abstinence as the only acceptable birth control. Others believe the Church no longer has standing to require obedience regarding sexual issues.

A quote:

"When the sex abuse scandals happened, the Church hierarchy was more concerned about sparing their reputation and pocketbooks than about protecting its children. Caring more about the institution than the People of God is just one way Clericalism has corrupted Church leadership."

Others strongly disagreed with clergy using the Eucharist as a political statement, and preaching that abortion is the only criterion for judging a candidate while ignoring policies regarding racism, immigration, climate change, child care, economic injustice, healthcare, and more. Most did not want pastors pushing political views, implying they are moral imperatives. Many felt embarrassed and angry by these actions from church leaders. Others stated they want prelates to focus on caring for the poor and marginalized rather than the wealthy and powerful.

Finally, concern was expressed about uninspiring, liturgical celebrations. The Eucharistic is the primary source of spirituality for most Catholics, yet it is often reduced to a dull, robotic exercise. We need homilies that apply to today's world, music and liturgy that inspire and nourish us while drawing us closer to God. We need to be a place where all are welcomed and accepted as the imperfect but amazing people we are, regardless of race, nationality or sexual identification. We need to be challenged by priests who reflect a loving God, and who grasp the complexities we face trying to live out our baptismal call.

#19. The third synod question asked, "What steps is the Holy Spirit suggesting to you and your community to respond more fully to the Christian vocation?" In 500 words or less, please describe the common answers and themes that emerged during the conversation AND the participants' most inspiring or moving responses or questions.

At the parish level we identified impediments to our worship and communal faith lives. That includes the loss of connectedness due to COVID and requests for restoring community building events ASAP.

Investment in a full-time, paid Music Minister/Liturgist was brought up across all groups. Both Hispanic and Anglo communities asked for training for all liturgical ministers. To expand these ministries more wide-spread involvement by parishioners is needed to rebuild our parish's strength and vibrancy.

Another strongly voiced concern was the need for a Family Life Minister who will expand programming especially for youth. The Hispanic community mentioned families

moving to protestant denominations because of their youth programs. The youth groups asked for retreat times, shared community service opportunities, a youth choir and more. They also voiced a need for discussion beyond "that's the way it is" and a need for someone to go to with mental health concerns.

Others mentioned problems with our physical plant. Routine maintenance and major fixes are slow to come. This is another area needing investment in full-time staff. It was noted unattended maintenance escalates the cost of repairs.

At the diocesan level parishioners reported a lack of connection to the Diocese and to our bishop. Some stated their only experience with the bishop is mailings requesting money. Others observed the Diocese was "starving our parish of financial resources for sufficient parish staff."

Hurt remains over the Bishop's perceived lack of understanding for the trauma caused in sexual abuse incidents here around 2010. Slowness to respond regarding Diocese-wide abuse was also mentioned.

Significant concern was voiced for the pre-Vatican II direction in the Diocese and the huge investment in a new seminary to train priests in pre-Vatican II mindsets that perpetuate clericalism and are strongly rule based rather than pastoral. This negatively impacts their financial support. We ask for a more Synodal relationship between the parish and Diocese with opportunities for dialogue and input into decisions that affect us.

Participants expressed embarrassment and disgust with U.S. bishops who are in open conflict with Pope Francis, with their politicizing the Eucharist, and with emphasis on a single pro-life issue while not speaking out against the violence of racism, the death penalty, economic injustice, gun violence, and violence against the LGBTQ community, Asian Americans and others. We want a Church that stands, as Jesus did, with the poor and marginalized rather than the wealthy and powerful.

Participants are grateful to Pope Francis for calling this Synod and experienced it as a breath of fresh air - the Spirit moving. They hope this focus on the Laity's role will be an antidote to pervasive clericalism. Concern for the hostile resistance to Pope Francis was voiced even when people didn't necessarily agree with all Francis has said or done.

The majority of participants agreed celibacy should be optional for priests, and women need to have full membership in the church - welcomed into the diaconate, the priesthood, and other decision-making positions. This would relieve the shortage of priests and reduce the exodus of people no longer wanting to be part of an institution denying women full membership.

Section Three – Responding to the Synod’s Fruits

#20. In 500 words or less, please reflect on how to respond to what emerged during the synodal conversations. As you think about your answer, I encourage you to discuss what you learned from the synodal process with your parish/group's leadership and those who helped you facilitate the conversations. To ponder the issue, you might consider the following questions:

How should the parish/group respond to what emerged in the synodal conversations? Are there particular steps the Holy Spirit is asking the community to take? How does the parish/group best respond to the questions and challenges that affect people the most?

Is there a way to continue the conversation?

How do we foster and give a space to grow in the relationships born thanks to the synodal conversations?

The responses we gathered present challenges for both the Parish and the Diocese. At the Parish level major themes we need to address include the following:

- The reduced sense of community and connectedness caused by COVID restrictions and the desire to return to many of our traditions as quickly as is safely possible
- The great desire to invest in our Liturgical celebrations with full-time music/liturgy ministers as well as ways to invigorate all liturgical ministries through education of volunteers, increasing the number of those volunteering for ministry teams, and other thoughtful liturgical enrichments
- A universal call emerged for educational programming. This issue was across all groups, both Anglo and Hispanic communities, both youth and adults, and for assuring whatever is offered is available to our less mobile and homebound parishioners. The need for a Family Life Minister was stressed.
- The immediate need for a much more extensive youth programming. This was brought up by our youth in their Synod gatherings as well as by their parents; it was especially stressed by our Hispanic parents.
- Concerns were also raised repeatedly regarding insufficient maintenance staff for our physical plant, creating long standing safety issues, eye sores and property deterioration that is becoming more and more expensive to repair.
- Requests for more opportunities for shared prayer came up across all groups. This includes Scripture sharing, Base Communities, Taize gatherings, Centering Prayer, group rosaries, book study, Benediction and Adoration, etc.

Results of our Gatherings are being taken first to our pastor and the Parish Council. The results will also be shared with the parish at large with strategies for how issues will be

addressed. A process for ongoing Synod-style conversations was a very strong request across all groups. This is seen as a way to strengthen our faith sharing and for discerning future steps for community development. Exactly how this will be accomplished has not yet been determined.

We look forward to seeing how the Diocese addresses the challenges raised by these Synodal responses. Many new opportunities for renewal have been raised and our fervent wish and prayer is that we can build our Church together as we move forward.