

**Responses to Synod Questions for XVI Ordinary General Assembly
of the Synod of Bishops
St. Katharine Drexel Parish
Submitted to Bishop Sullivan January 12, 2022**

Pre-Questions

1. How has the church (universal, diocesan, or parish) either been important or an obstacle to the growth of your faith?

The Church is vital to my faith. My parish is my extended family. The universal church has been important to my growth. It is a staple part of my life, a need in living my life, spiritual compass. It has grounded and calmed my life. It is my source, my inspiration my guide on how to live a Christian way of life making Christ as the center of my existence. It is fun because it connects to my Father's stories. It feels like I am coming back home. The Church is my anchor in life – where I receive the Sacraments, esp. Eucharist and Reconciliation. The Church is welcoming and provides me the opportunity to share my faith and nurture friendships with other faith-filled people. Vatican II made the church come alive, but many people do not know the documents and teachings of Vatican II. Twelve years of Catholic Education formed my core religious beliefs.

The Church hierarchy has been an obstacle to my faith growth. The news media reports on the Pope, some Bishops who speak against the Pope or get involved in politics, and Vatican Staff who do not practice and teach what Jesus taught are all confusing and cause obstacles to growth in faith. The scandals around priests who sexually abused children and the cover-ups and mishandling of these cases has cost the Church millions of dollars and their role as a moral authority in society. Other Obstacles: annulment process, recently divorced felt like an outcast; large congregations are overwhelming; some people feel the church is becoming more liberal, while others feel it is too conservative; sometimes dogmatic approach can be an impediment to needed change; Not enough preached about abortion; the stance on abortion and gay rights makes me question should I remain in the Catholic church; the lack of women in the hierarchy and opportunities to be deacons and/or priests is frustrating.

2. What do you believe the Holy Spirit is asking us, the church, to do today?

The Holy Spirit is asking us to bring more young adults in the church; to be more welcoming regardless of our past history; to develop our faith story; to bear witness of God's goodness so we can tell the world how glorious, magnificent, merciful our God is; to teach the truth of the Gospel with love; to reach out to the unchurched or marginal Catholics; to love and care for one another; to do more fun and inviting spiritual things together; to host Praise & Worship and community events; to join

with other churches when appropriate; to re-evaluate how all people, especially the most vulnerable, are treated; to move on and complete the work of Vatican II; stay true to Apostolic doctrine; love one another as God loves us; love our neighbors in actions and words; live the teachings of Christ; fight abortion, glorification of homosexuality and other perversions; be inclusive of others' ethnicity, sexual identity, politics or religious beliefs; allow priests to marry; allow women to be ordained; continue to feed the hungry and educate young and old; be more hopeful; be bold and proclaim the Gospel; witness to the world, evangelize; revert to Latin Mass; allow divorcees to fully participate in Mass (receive Communion)

Companions on the Journey

3. Who is missing from our parish community? Why?

Young families are focused on their careers and lead busy lives with children involved in sports, college-age youth and young adults have not received a strong foundation, Latino families go to a neighboring church, many former parishioners have joined Protestant churches in our area because of their lively services, fellowship and outreach to the community. People left because of the child abuse scandal and the hierarchy not being responsive.

Other responses: People of color; Divorcees; People who did not return from the pandemic; 20-40 year olds; My family is not welcome, my grand children were not baptized because their mother was not married in the church, my sister's children were refused catechetical instructions because of inability to pay, the father left the church.

Shared Responsibility for our Common Mission

4. How does your parish help members to live out their service to society? To be missionary disciples?

Prior to COVID (March 2020), a monthly donation to the Community Food Bank was held, and Stephen Ministers visited people in their homes. St. Vincent de Paul Society helps people who both belong and do not belong to the parish, Knights of Columbus and the Youth Groups coordinate donations and distribution of needed materials (food and clothing); House of Charity; special collections for poor here and around the world; nursing ministry; Renew ARISE program helps us be missionary disciples; religious education programs encourage helping.

Dialogue in Church and Society

5. How could your parish provide opportunities for diverse peoples to come together for dialogue about the Church and the Church's relationship to society?

Several respondents mentioned participating in the Arise program; be willing to attend meetings outside the church building (revise neighborhood small communities); develop outreach programs where parishioners can do service with non-parishioners in the community; pot luck dinner; weekly hospitality after Mass; organize educational seminars about church social teaching; form advocacy groups; invite speakers from other parishes/religions; have open discussions on a regular basis at various times; teach English.

Speaking Out

6. Do you feel you are able to speak up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in your parish community? Why or Why not?

22 yes, 8 no

Yes: I participate in Bible Study, and I am active in Knights of Columbus and Pro-Life Activities; when I have something important to say or something I think everyone should know; I have told and written about my dissatisfaction with the hierarchy and clergy around sexual abuse.

No, who would I go to? Our new pastor says hello but seems reserved and doesn't engage in conversation much with parishioners; I don't understand how the parish operates – what does the parish council do? How are decisions made? I suggest having a Suggestion Box available.

Celebration

7. What keeps most people, the majority of Catholics, from participating at mass on a weekly basis?

The most common answer is COVID, one person reported not feeling safe because ushers and greeters do not wear masks and do not socially distance.

Other answers include: busy lives; priorities have shifted; work schedules conflict; outside activities & life distractions make it hard to go to church; people don't recognize or believe that Jesus is in the Eucharist and they don't understand what is happening at mass; people do not have a personal relationship with Christ; Lack of strong faith, come out of obligation not to celebrate Eucharist, adults not educated to appreciate Eucharist as center, many operate at elementary understanding; divorced people cannot receive Communion; Catholic in name only; no need for mass; there is no family room or pre-school pull-out from mass. Mass is boring - you know what is going to happen next; and the scandals of the church (priests abusing children and being moved to other parishes) keep us away; church wants money, parents' influence – they do not attend, so why should I? The church is hypocritical about current

issues such as "Black Lives Matter"; they didn't take a stand on it, yet they advocate caring for each other. Sermons and scripture readings should relate to current events.

8. What particular issues in the church and society do we need to pay more attention to?

We should have more activities to gather together as a parish community not just during mass. We should have a picnic in our parking space, music playing and dancing to promote togetherness and develop closer relationship to one another, fellowship after all masses in Drexel Hall rooms to help people socialize and get to know each other. We could have focus groups in the parish to share cultures/heritage, like we had pot luck dinners in pre-COVID Julys.

Abortion (mentioned most often), same sex marriages (mentioned numerous times), sex trafficking, homelessness and poor people, immigration (we prayed for immigrants during the Year of the Immigrant, but there was no follow-up, LGBTQ community, child abuse, sexual abuse, drug/alcohol addiction, suicide, mental health, health care, job equality, violence in society, all who are marginalized, racism, bigotry, loneliness among elderly in our parish (do we have a ministry who visits them?), women's rights, expand role of women in hierarchy and ordain them as deacons and priests; women should lead Communion Services, have faith sharing instead of homily; promote using conscience – not outdated rules (esp. around birth control and remarriage); allow married men as priests, and allow priests to marry; younger generations' faith, and more activities for young people so they keep coming to church; spiritual experiences,

Spend less time on climate control and more time teaching about sin, confession, being in a state of grace to receive Communion.

Ecumenism

9. How does your parish relate to the other Christian churches or communities? Should more be done?

We are not connecting to other churches. The only time I step on the other church is when I attended a memorial service which I found it awkward because their service is totally different to what am used to in a catholic church. Pre-COVID we participated in Lenten Soup Lunches with other churches, but we did not really interact with other people or learn about their beliefs.

Multiple responses indicated more work needs to be done from our parish. One person stated: Other churches embrace diversity; It is more like what Jesus taught. Other suggestions: have a combined choir event; try to bring them to the true faith,

teach them the rosary; more should be done within our own walls to keep people from leaving before mass ends.

Authority and Participation

10. Do the lay faithful in your parish understand that they are co-responsible for the well being of the parish? 80% responded YES, 20% responded NO
Yes: by donating weekly and to charity. Some of us understand we are co-responsible, but we often feel our ideas won't get approved or if we have a suggestion we're afraid we will have to implement it, and we don't know how to do that. It would be great to work with a church appointed event coordinator and motivator – someone who gets to know people and their talents/gifts.

No, I think, it should be emphasized to us that we are the church and that we are responsible for the growth of our church.

11. How are the lay faithful invited to share their talents with parish and surrounding communities?

Mostly we are invited to share our talents in the parish, we could do more outreach to the community (although COVID makes this challenging, esp. visiting the sick in hospitals and nursing homes). Bulletin, priest announcements, and ministry members inform parishioners of ministry needs: choir, lectors, eucharistic ministers, Knights of Columbus, Stephen Ministry, St. Vincent de Paul Society, CCD & RCIA teachers, church cleaners & decorators, Adult Faith Sharing & Prayer Group meet weekly, Youth Ministry, recently the Renew Arise program. People are asked to join a ministry or they volunteer, then they are trained as lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, Stephen Ministers; it is very hard to get volunteers for things other than Mass.

Discerning and Deciding

12. How are decisions in your parish made? How could this process be improved?

The most common response was "I don't know". The second most common response was, "By pastor and Parish council". Other responses include: priest, business administrator and office staff make decisions. Conversations could occur with parishioners about updates or programs being considered (e.g. what is happening with building a church? Why is the parish office only open 3 1/2 days a week?)

Some people do not know how decisions are made or what the parish council does. Terms on the council seem unlimited, since we have not had elections for

new members in several years. Recently a survey was sent to change the mass times on Saturday & Sunday evenings, but there was a very low response rate.

This process could be improved by posting more information more often on our website. Perhaps there is a technology expert in the parish who could volunteer and help with posting reports and/or minutes from meetings to the website

Have a suggestion box in the foyer where people can drop in suggestions.

13. What tools or processes does your parish employ to promote transparency and accountability?

The most common response was "I don't know". Weekly contributions are published in bulletin; Financial report had been mailed to parishioners, but not since COVID; there is a parish website and app that could publish more information.

Forming Ourselves in Synodality

14. Does your parish form people to "walk together", to listen to one another, to participate in the mission of the Church, and to engage in ongoing dialogue?

16 people responded YES, and 8 responded NO. Sometimes, but not enough. Only 8-10 people participate in weekly Faith Sharing and/or Prayer Groups. About 50 people (out of 1800 registered families) participated in the 6-week Arise program held in October 2021. Neighborhood communities were attempted a few years prior to COVID, but they were not successful (people were either too busy or did not want to gather at other people's houses).

Understanding The Eucharist

15. Do you believe that the Eucharist is the true body and blood of Jesus Christ? Why or Why not?

Almost everyone responded YES and explained that they believe because it has been taught to them and because they have a personal experience of the presence of God, their faith, and scripture. A few do not believe that Jesus is actually present in the eucharist. They think it is just a symbol.

16. Why do you come or not come to mass?

People come to mass to be part of a spiritual community, to receive Holy Communion, desire to worship God, to socialize with believers, to encounter Jesus, to be inspired by the Word of God and homily, to receive comfort; to find inner peace and reflect on blessings; to have quiet time to listen to God; to feel

divine embrace; helps me in my personal life; out of fear/faith, try to interact with God.

People do not come due to COVID and others not following recommendations; work schedule, mass schedule; cannot receive Holy Communion; children are loud and do not sit still; feel disconnected from what the Church stands for; there is no public transportation & church is too far to walk.

Other Input

17. What is the best part of belonging to your parish community?

Several people responded the best part is seeing people of different ages and backgrounds come together on an even playing field; it is my extended family; I love the diversity and sense of community; welcome and openness of the parish; friendliness of pastor; lots of hugging (pre-COVID) and helping each other; the parish community is very supportive; it builds my faith; receiving the sacraments; joy-filled worship; the sermons; shared faith; Bishop and pastor are not involved in politics.

18. What would you like to see change in your parish community?

Mission statement should be projected on the screen each week, encourage more parishioners to be involved in parish activities, music lyrics should be projected or published in the bulletin so to encourage parishioners to sing; have more hands on activities; have Hymnals for everyone (we could purchase them and bring them every week to prevent spread of germs). Open liturgy committee to the parishioners with mixed members; have seats with kneelers or pews in a real church; have some weekday masses in the evening for working people; offer Confessions after weekday masses; have more activities to bring families together (form Activity Committee); have mission trips and local mission projects; make spiritual direction available and free; have retreats or adult education days during the year; publish a directory of names/phone numbers/emails/occupations of parishioners; have volunteers to drive older people to doctor's appointments and church; bring back altar servers; more nuns; women priests, married priests; religious leaders reach out to community; more people at confession; people not leave Mass early; more spiritual enthusiasm and appreciation of gifts we have; more interest in adult learning – spiritual programs; more people in church groups; diversity; new members in womens' club; acceptance of loud children even a children's Mass; more opportunities to socialize, without charge so everyone can participate; pot luck dinners; better sound system, esp. when recording masses; Bingo – brings in money; Mass schedule, Sunday at 6:00 pm.

19. If you could offer the Holy Father, Pope Francis, one bit of advice, what would it be?

The most common response was: Keep on doing what you are doing. Also: Be more merciful in pastoral and liturgical response to the divorced and remarried, those who identify as LGBTQ, those with mental health, drug/alcohol problems and with disabilities; allow priests to be married, consider women to be ordained as deacons and as priests; explain reasons why decisions are made; take good care of your health; remove priests who are gamblers/lazy/abusive – don't just move them around; Continue to be visible; Continue to be more unified and diversified; Stick to the true values of the church, stay away from liberal way of thinking, emphasize the rosary and devotion to Mary; just help people to believe – find themselves; show us practical ways to live the gospel – remind us to respect diversity; create an understanding of the Holy Spirit; Clean up the scandals – take responsibility; continue the work begun with Vatican II; revert to the Tridentine Mass; feed the poor, church create work projects for them; stick to the Bible - keep out of politics; create online parochial schools; promote Bingo in every parish to help with costs.

20. Is there anything else you would like to offer?

Thank you for including the laity in this Synod! Thank you for taking the time to read this!

Suggestions: Educate us more on the teachings of the Church. Priests should explain the opportunities to come closer to God – I only recently learned the value of Divine Mercy Sunday and adoration; Most people do not understand stewardship; Promote vocations, devotions, prayers and education of children.

RESPONSES FROM YOUTH:

Three things about your friends that you would like to share with pope Francis:

My friends are weird, funny, awesome, cool, nice, procrastinators, shy, quiet, kind, creative and comforting. We all have different strengths, different opinions and we ask a lot of questions, we don't judge each other, we often break rules, we are tired everyday.

What are some challenges that young people face today?

Concern of disease especially COVID, can't go to sleep early because of homework and computer games. High expectations from parents and teachers,

broken heart, depression, suicidal thoughts, toxic environment in homes and with friends, finding out your true identity, scared to mess up, time management between practicing faith, going to school and work. Worried about the future, sometimes being raped, be forgiven, and adults do not listen to us, do not give us credit though we have more information, understanding and knowledge.

What young people really think about the church?

Young people see church from a different point of view because of media. A lot of things are coming out that were kept secret and may lead us to not believing anymore. The Church is nerve wracking because it is rigid and structured, and it hinders us from connecting to one another. It is boring. It pushes away young people. You're in the religion if you follow the rules. It is a place to be with GOD. A safe place. It is a close community.

What young people really want of church?

To be more understanding. You shouldn't feel like an outcast when you don't follow the norm, should be able to come in style, what is comfortable in our skin., a place to establish close friends, to learn more about God, to give us advice on some problems, a separate service for teenagers and children, there should be events for young people.

Who is missing from the church?

The LGBTQ because they don't feel accepted, not a big Hispanic group, young people ages 17-20 because they are busy finding themselves, establishing their independence. They feel church is boring, can't relate to church. I may be physically present but my mind is busy with other ideas or thoughts, family members who are not catholic.

Do you feel heard in your parish community?

Yes., I wouldn't be in church if not because of Mrs. Millet. She listens to what I have to say. Most of the teenagers' answers are no, because they are quiet, not popular, shy, they don't know what they want and God does not answer my prayer even though, I pray every day.

If you are responsible for creating a youth ministry what would it be?

Have a platforms for kids to communicate, solve world hunger, stop global warming and pollution, creating charity all over the world, spread the word of God, create art stuff so people could express themselves by letting everything out in paper, have celebrities give advice cause people look up to them, youth ministry similar to Saint Katharine youth ministry, clean up trash from the forest, helps kid in shelter and give them family, help with mental illness

How does your parish help members to live out their service to society? To be a missionary disciple?

Different prayer groups, empower parents to be missionary in passing on the faith to their children. There should be an announcement of what activities church is having and its progression. Members should be more involved on its parish activities.

How could your parish provide opportunities to diverse people to come together for dialogue about the church and the church relationship to society?

There should be a fellowship in every mass and every diversity group should sponsor a fellowship for everyone, by doing this hopefully we learn to understand its culture.

If you would offer the Holy Father one bit of advice, what will it be?

To be welcoming to everyone, to travel more and learn more languages, to keep doing of what he is doing, listen to our problem, give people hope, don't overwork yourself, support LGBTQ community, talk to the kids about their mental health issues, to sponsor education, seminars to our faith. Keep doing what you are doing, you are doing of excellent job

The youth is concern about what happens when the older generations is gone.