

## **Notional Response to the *Fundamental Question***

Responses regarding the Fundamental Question were wide ranging. There was substantial carryover/restatement of many comments shared in the initial theme discussions on Communion, Participation and Mission. The call to the Synod is, in itself, encouraging for our Journey. The hope is that the message from the laity will be forwarded as completely and accurately as possible by our Bishops.

At the level of the Church universal, concern was expressed about who is welcome on the Journey. Some groups/individuals feel estranged due to their circumstances and church position on key issues. We need to be a Church where all are welcome, and diversity is accepted. In order to journey TOGETHER, the Church should examine positions on: women priests and deacons; married priests; the annulment process, divorce and re-marriage; and LGBTQ members. The Church must to rebuild trust and continue to address the long-term impacts of the pedophile scandal.

The Church needs to strike a balance between tradition and the reality of current times to stay relevant. We should be less a church of “no” and more a church of “know”. Jesus’ simple message can be lost if the hierarchy creates hoops that people no longer want to jump through; some will follow Christ’s teachings elsewhere.

At the Diocesan level, many expressed how difficult our journey is, given the shortage of vocations in America and our diocese. The Journey requires a planning, resources, direction, leadership, and celebration. Many worry that we are meandering not journeying. Pastoral turnover impacts the momentum of the Journey. While we appreciate and support our international priests, the journey is sometimes hampered by language barriers and the challenges of parish level ministry in a culture/society different from their home. The diocese should expand/reinforce the acclimation process for our international priests and the parishes they serve.

There are encouraging examples of smaller groups/ministries within the parish journeying joyfully together for years – scripture and book studies, men’s and women’s groups, Cursillo communities and many more. However, there were repeated concerns over our lack of journeying together as larger parish community. Parish wide opportunities and participation have dwindled and have been further compromised by COVID. Our sense of community has suffered as a result. We need to bring back events for the whole parish. Virtual events are no substitute for the intimacy of in-person interaction.

In a similar vein, we need to strengthen our welcoming efforts for new or potential parishioners with get-togethers especially for young families. Active parishioners are much older than our local demographics. The youth of the parish are not a significant presence in community or liturgy. Particular concern was expressed that we are losing some of our youth on the journey to other churches that offer a variety of youth-oriented activities and worship experiences. We need more youth involved in our liturgies and more social and service opportunities for them.