



# Archdiocese *of* Philadelphia

## Overview

The Diocesan Phase of the Synod on Synodality in the local Church of Philadelphia was a significant opportunity for encounter. It was stated frequently at the outset of archdiocesan and local sessions that perhaps the greatest fruit of the synod may be in the relationships that were strengthened and blessed during the synodal conversations themselves. However, it is also the sincere hope of the Archbishop that these efforts mark the beginning of a new chapter of life in the Church of Philadelphia, one that is defined by a renewed and continuous openness to the Spirit of God “working in us, through us, and sometimes despite us.”

Over the course of eight months, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia’s synodal process, deeply rooted in prayer, included a widely distributed survey regarding the faithful’s journey with the Church, facilitator training for nearly 300 individuals, and more than 250 local and diocesan-hosted synodal listening sessions, conducted both virtually and in-person.

The questions posed during the listening sessions were as follows:

- **Topic 1: Joys and Concerns about the Church from the people of God**
  - What fills you with joy about the Church?
  - What concerns do you have about the Church?
- **Topic 2: Listening Aspect of the Church**
  - In what ways or moments has the Church encouraged you to speak up? How does the Church listen to you or hear what you are saying?
  - How can the Church create greater opportunities for people to be heard?
- **Topic 3: Accompaniment/Journey**
  - How can the Church help you and others to grow in your relationship with Jesus and your relationship with the Church?
  - What can the Church do to support people on their faith journeys?

## Key Themes

As a result of the survey and listening sessions across the Archdiocese, a number of key themes emerged from the collective response of the faithful:

- **The opportunity for synodal dialogue was deeply appreciated, unprecedented, and something the Church should strive to continue in the future.**

Many participants noted that this was the first time they had ever shared their faith so openly, and the first time they had been so intentionally invited to share their voice. Most agreed that the Church rarely listens and even discourages the faithful from speaking up at times, though several noted that this may be because people either aren’t comfortable, or haven’t taken advantage of the opportunities the Church provides. Regardless of the historical precedent, there seemed to be great gratitude for the synod and the opportunity to listen and share without agenda or focus on outcomes or solutions, as well as great hope that this kind of synodal dialogue and listening will continue in the future.

- **There is tension and dichotomy in people’s perceptions of the clarity and charity with which the Church speaks and teaches:**
- There was a great call for more unity and uniformity on Church teachings, especially regarding the sanctity of life and sexuality, but also great yearning for the Church to be more welcoming, non-judgmental and inclusive, particularly towards women, divorced individuals, and the LGBTQ community.

- There was praise for Pope Francis’s pastoral, non-judgmental approach, but also concern that the Church is becoming more secularized.
  - There was desire to minimize clericalism and the priest-centric focus of parish life, but also the longing for priests to be more accessible and present in the lives of the people.
- **The Faithful find great joy in the universality of the Church, in participating in the sacramental life of the Church, and in being part of the community of believers.**

People described the Church as “home” and a place of refuge anywhere in the world. They shared deep gratitude for the Eucharist and the gift of the Lord’s Real Presence. They found solace, joy, and accompaniment as part of the community of faith and being in real relationship with others.

- **There is great hunger for healing and for knowledge.**

Participants acknowledged hurts of the past from scandal, abuse, rejection and lack of welcome. They expressed a deep desire for healing and rebuilding trust, and a yearning for Church leaders to engage in dialogue on difficult and controversial issues. At the same time, people expressed a hunger to be better formed in “the why’s” of the faith, to develop a fuller understanding of the richness of the faith through greater formation, catechesis and accessible application – a “plea for direction and even correction from the Church” as one respondent described it.

- **Reaching youth and young adults is both a great need and a great source of hope for the future.**

While many spoke with nostalgia about the Church and a yearning to bring back “what has been lost,” there was near universal agreement that youth and young adults are a source of great hope for the next generation of the Church. Reaching them, involving them, being present to them and ministering to them must be a critical focus for the Church going forward.

## Next Steps & Conclusion

Archbishop Perez has articulated three primary priorities for the future:

- **First, we must move as a local Church from crisis to hope.** This will be accomplished with a particular focus on restructuring and rebuilding outreach efforts to youth and young adults.
- **Second, we must rebuild the resources of the Church.** By tapping into existing talent, engaging the philanthropic community, and evaluating and refocusing ministries and structures, the Archdiocese is committed to positioning the Church of Philadelphia for the future.
- **Third, we must create a culture of missionary discipleship.** With the synod as a launching point, and with support and resources from the Archdiocese, both priests and laity alike are invited to renew their vocations and commit to ongoing formation to strengthen evangelization efforts across the Archdiocese, rooted in dialogue and encounter. Additionally, each parish will be discerning the feedback from this synod and the survey and developing three local priorities for building a culture of missionary discipleship.

Beyond these significant next steps, there is a desire to continue the conversation and break open some of the more complex topics raised by the synod feedback. The Archdiocese is exploring ways to create additional opportunities for meaningful and ongoing dialogue and gives thanks for the way the Holy Spirit continues to bless the Church of Philadelphia with faithful disciples who seek to walk the synodal path in building communion, participation, and mission.

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