



## DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS SUBMISSION

1. (Arch)Diocese: Diocese of Allentown, Allentown, PA
2. Kim Fiorentino, Secretary of Administration; Jessica Edris, Director of Mission Advancement
3. [kfiorentino@allentowndiocese.org](mailto:kfiorentino@allentowndiocese.org); [jedris@allentowndiocese.org](mailto:jedris@allentowndiocese.org)
4. Top Themes/Topics that arose in Diocesan Synod outreach

### **Mission of the Church**

Among the faithful, the mission of the Church goes beyond ensuring access to the Sacraments and cries out during these times for more efforts to lead souls to heaven, to provide understanding of and desire for the sacraments, to develop active vocations for all individuals whether married, single or in the clergy, and to provide opportunities to build community and to serve others in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Also noted was a commitment to teaching and modeling for faithful Catholics how to live a life witnessing their Faith to serve both as a spiritual refuge and as a guide in navigating modern life in which so many challenges and struggles exist.

### **Catholic Faith and Parish Communities**

Many of the faithful of the Diocese are life-long Catholics and deeply committed to their Faith. There were many expressions of support for their parishes and the great comfort, foundation and joy derived from being part of their communities.

Some also shared their feelings of having a relationship with the Lord but feeling disconnected from their Catholic Faith and parishes for a variety of reasons including lack of confidence in “organized religion;” the perceived ability to have a direct relationship with the Lord without being part of a parish community or receiving the Sacraments; disillusionment with Church leadership as well as the residual effects of the abuse crisis which continues to impact some individuals’ view of their Catholic Faith.

The COVID pandemic over the past two years has also severed the connection with the Catholic Faith. Many expressed a feeling of abandonment from the lack of access to the sacraments during very difficult times and others shared an exacerbation of growing feelings of separation or lack of need for the Church as part of their lives.

### **Education, Evangelization, and Formation**

From cradle Catholics to those new to the Catholic faith, a strong need to teach and catechize the truth and beauty of the faith was expressed as an urgent need. People stated the importance to provide more opportunities to learn about their Catholic Faith from the pulpit. They also conveyed the desire to have access to more organized outreaches, events and materials as well as see more current methods of communication (digital outreach, social media) utilized to reach beyond the pew.

A strong desire was noted to (re)commit to central tenets, reverence, and traditions of the faith (i.e. Latin Mass), while sharing practical applications to modern day life for all ages. Many articulated their desire to be nourished and grown spiritually and to avoid political discourse in evangelization and formation outreach.

### **Youth and Young Adults**

A predominant theme across all ages of respondents was the need to prioritize education, evangelization, and formation of youth and young adults. While the older respondents cited this need to secure the future of the faith, the youth and young adult respondents noted the need as a desire to be seen and heard as an important part of the present and future of the Church. As generations of spiritual seekers, the youth and young adults are curious and interested in examining their faith, but only some are receiving what they need to understand the faith and feel engaged with parish and Church life.

### **Vocations and the Priesthood**

There is growing concern about the quantity and quality of priests serving the parishes in the Diocese. Many expressed the great work and outreach an involved and caring priest can accomplish in a community. Others expressed how parish communities and individuals suffer when priests do not know their parishioners; do not make time for outreach; or are too occupied with administrative tasks.

### **Laity and the Church**

Many expressed a desire to have more lay involvement in the leadership and administration of the Church. The pastor/priest's priority should be for the pastoral care and spiritual leadership of their flock and the majority of respondents felt that the laity had the expertise and willingness to assist and lead the Church in important ways. In particular, many noted the desire to see more women with influence involved with the management of the Church.

### **Culture and Communication**

Reflecting on how contemporary life is so different from the time when the Church and traditions established, many expressed a desire to see it become more relevant to the

Catholic of today. As a universal faith, the faithful expressed desire to see more diversity of voices, more transparency from Church administration, intentional and personal outreach, inspiring and informative homiletics, and more relevant communication that engages and evangelizes.

Some expressed the need to prioritize intentional and regular outreach to those on the margins: the disaffiliated, the disillusioned, the divorced, the disabled, LGBT community, and those in physical, emotional, or spiritual need. Some noted the disconnect they feel between the Jesus of the Bible and the priorities of the local and global Church of today. This was a particular priority of the youth and young adults who noted that they connect with the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

5. Collaboration with any non-diocesan organization

We reached out to local non-profits and governmental agencies to try to hear from people who need assistance in the following:

- a. Individuals with addiction issues
- b. Individuals suffering with serious mental health issues
- c. Individuals with disabilities and their caregivers
- d. Pregnant women in need of support with temporary housing, prenatal care, counseling as well as teens with counseling and social/vocational training
- e. People seeking food support at soup kitchens and food pantries as well as rental support for housing
- f. Incarcerated individuals (although this was very difficult during COVID with the numerous restrictions in place).

6. Approximate number of people who participated in in-person listening sessions

We utilized a network of 174 parish ambassadors to hold public listening sessions at 65 parishes with an average of 30-50 people attending at each parish.

Estimate 2,300-3,800 individuals participated in listening sessions.

In addition, Commission for Men, Commission for Women, Catholic Charities, and each of our seven Catholic high schools held listening sessions.

We conducted a listening session for the LGTB Community and their friends and families which our Bishop attended.

We also hosted a listening session for our seminarians.

7. Approximate number of people who participated in virtual listening sessions

The Diocese of Allentown just completed our recognition of *The Year of the Real Presence* to invite people back to an authentic understanding of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. As part of this outreach, listening sessions were in person to better facilitate dialogue. However, a few sessions were conducted by Zoom and we estimate about 100 people participated virtually.

8. Approximate number of reports received from parishes and other groups

We received 77 reports from 84 parishes and about 10 additional reports from other groups including sessions held with our Catholic educators, young adults, LGBT listening session, Hispanic community, and Directors of Religious Education.

9. Did you supplement listening sessions with online survey?

Yes – we were among the first in our Metropolitan area that posted an on-line survey. A link to the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AllentownSynod>

We also distributed an on-line survey in Spanish. A link to this survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AllentownSynodSP>

Paper copies of these surveys were also made available at parishes and other diocesan-wide listening sessions.

2,425 individuals responded to the on-line survey or completed a hard copy of the survey in English or Spanish.

10. Did you focus upon any particular questions and/or draft focus questions?

Did your diocese select particular questions from the Vademecum?

We kept our questions centered around the four key areas presented by the Vademecum: participation in life of the church, dialogue in church and society, Catholic identity and relationship with God, and how we journey together as a faith-filled community.

11. Did your diocese craft unique focus questions based upon Synod resources?

No.

12. Does your diocese plan to make the diocesan synthesis public?

The Diocese will provide a summary of our report to parishioners and share in diocesan publications.

13. Does your diocese have plans to use the synthesis for other purposes?

Yes. Our Bishop, His Excellency Alfred Schlert, intends to carefully review and reflect on our own internal report and synod summaries to respond to the needs of parishioners and those who feel disconnected or away from the Church or our Catholic Faith.

14. Please tell us anything of note about the Synod process in your diocese.

What brought consolation:

- The many joys that Church and parish life bring, how it was missed during the years of pandemic
- Desire for more connection, more formation at all ages

Were there any surprises?

- Difficulty in outreach to the margins including those disaffiliated from their Catholic faith

15. Any additional comments you would like to share with the USCCB Synod Team

While many noted they were cynical about the potential outcomes of the Synod, most appreciated the process and agreed that the local and global Church should be in conversation with their faithful on a more regular basis. There is an active desire to re-engage with the church through events and developing fellowship and community.