



ARCHDIOCESE OF ANCHORAGE-JUNEAU OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

SYNOD 2024 Archdiocesan Report

I. Introduction

The Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau held seven different listening sessions during this Interim Stage Towards October 2024. The groups we invited to participate were: 1) the priests of the Archdiocese during our annual convocation; 2) religious women; 3) a group that identifies as marginalized within the church; 4) Catholic Native Ministry; 5) chancery staff; 6) Archdiocesan wide parish staff, including all deacons and school staff and faculty; and 7) an archdiocesan wide ZOOM session. In total, nearly 200 people participated in listening sessions where we utilized the format of the Conversations in the Spirit.

We used the questions provided from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Synod Team:

- *“How can the structures and organization of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?”*
- *“Where have you seen or experienced successes and distresses within the Church’s structure(s)/organization/leadership/life that encourages or hinders the mission?”*

Specific comments and quotes from participants are included in each section.

II. Areas of Consensus

From all seven groups, there was the recognition that first as church, we all belong to the Body of Christ. We are a worldwide church rooted in the sacraments. We find unity in our diversity of cultures, thoughts and practices. We strive to welcome all.

- *“We are the Body of Christ and the church needs to walk in the footsteps of Christ and we need to be united as the Body of Christ.”*
- *“The liturgy is what unites us.”*
- *“Christ must be the beacon of light that leads us back to that common goal.”*
- *“The church is my resting place and where my hunger is fed.”*

The areas of consensus were: 1) the role of laity; 2) the role of shepherds; 3) a listening church; 4) structures necessary to build the Body of Christ; and 5) the mission, formation and pastoral care of the people.

The Role of the Laity

As stated in the Synthesis Report's Letter to the People of God, "the church also needs to listen to the laity, women and men, all called by holiness by their virtue of their baptismal vocation... She needs to welcome the voice of those who want to be involved in lay ministries and to participate in discernment and decision-making structures."

- *"The gifts of the laity need to be nurtured because they all are uniquely gifted which leads to Christ."*
- *"Young people need to be formed as witnesses of Christ." Gathering them together nourishes community and faith development.*
- *There is a "dearth" of men's involvement in lay leadership and catechesis.*
- *The church needs to pay attention to individual charisms and develop a greater understanding of the roles of the laity.*
- *We need to recognize our vast differences and diversity that make up the Body of Christ. "There is unity in diversity."*
- *There is an attrition and "greying" of the faithful.*
- *The role of women and the gifts of women need to be recognized, utilized and supported.*

Often the laity needs support in discerning their gifts given to them at baptism. The role of women religious are often overlooked. There needs to be "an acceptance and honor" to their roles and many gifts that they bring to the faithful. The structure of the church often hinders their ability to fully offer needed pastoral care to the dying.

The Role of the Shepherds

In acknowledgement with the Synthesis Report of a Synodal Church in Mission, the ministry of the ordained is influential on those with whom they shepherd.

- *All ordained must be formed to listen.*
- *Pastors need to be trained for leadership.*
- *Church ministers need to be enculturated in the cultures in which they serve.*
- *The ministry of presence is a success especially when the Priests and Bishops go out to the people.*
- *Priests and Bishops need time to renew their spirit.*
- *Evaluations and self-evaluations of ministers would be a help to their ministry.*
- *"Priests need humility and an even keel expressed from the pulpit."*
- *"A lack of compassion, empathy and relationship from priest and church leaders has a magnified negative effect."*

- *Our Bishops need to be shepherds and not create disunity which leads to confusion and doubt with the faithful because the hierarchy, as keepers of the faith, are expected to provide unity and order.*
- *“Priests are being asked to run a business. Are they being trained to run this business? If not, we set them up for failure. Maybe it’s a better job for laity.”*

There is gratitude for the role of the ordained in the care of both the church and its people. The people acknowledge the demands of ordained ministry and the challenges their shepherds face. They look to their pastors to lead in the image of Christ to ensure a vibrant community where the people and the pastor share in the work of Christ and His church.

A Listening Church

As stated in The Letter to the people, “The church absolutely needs to listen to everyone, starting with the poorest... the church of our time has the duty to listen in a spirit of conversion...”

- *“Synodality builds bridges and builds community and finds common ground.”*
- *“Once we learn about each other we start respecting each other.”*
- *“Ministry is more effective when people are understood.”*
- *“Synodality isn’t a democracy but it can encourage people to listen to each other.”*
- *“Pastoral care is meeting people where they are.”*
- *People want community where they are accepted and belong.*
- *“Casting judgement will do more harm.”*
- *“Humility is the ability to hear both sides of the story and know why things are happening.”*
- *“There is a benefit to new ideas and enthusiasm.”*
- *“It is good for us to express what we care for and what we worry about in the church.”*
- *All cultures are holy and sacred and “we have the same sense of togetherness as people of the same faith.”*
- *“The beautiful part of our community of faith is the priest and sisters allowed us to celebrate our cultural practices, dances, music and activities. We learned to truly embrace our culture [within our faith tradition].”*

Listening authentically means engaging and accompanying people. “The poor and those not listened to are the marginalized.” When we listen with love and mercy, versus listening without hearing, we do the work of Christ.

Structures necessary to build the Body of Christ

Consensus was found in addressing the structure of the church, identifying its many facets. It was stated that *“Church structure is like a scaffold on which we build.”*

- *“The church needs to look in the mirror and really look as an organization and structure if it is walking in the footsteps of Christ.”*
- *Often existing structures for formation are effective and should be utilized more broadly. Lay leaders should be included in the diaconate training program and some support ordaining women as deacons through this program.*
- *The church should help people understand and appreciate the role of the magisterium.*
- *“Hermeneutic of continuity requires the church to protect scripture, tradition and magisterium.”*
- *“Rural parishes have different and unique challenges than others.” Some commented that current married deacons ordained as priests would benefit rural areas.*
- *“I like to believe I’m part of a giant institution that doesn’t need my input with its history, tradition and scripture.”*
- *“Pope Francis gives hope the church will change, but hope that it’s not for popularity sake but for goodness sake.”*
- *“The Catholic church is global, universal, and inclusive. It is critical to ensure we stay whole as one global family.”*

It was clearly stated that within the structure of the church there are institutional failings:

- *The church needs to show greater transparency on issues especially regarding sexual abuse.*
- *The church needs to be more proactive than reactive.*
- *How can we address the wounds we have?*
- *“Sex abuse scandal has thrown up walls to building relationships, plus hurts the reputation of the church.”*
- *“The Church is more active in defending the faith than spreading the faith.”*
- *“[As a celibate gay man], the church still thinks there is something wrong with me. It is a strong barrier.”*

As stated by one participant, “The church has beautiful teachings, traditions and sacraments. Rich history in the way we approach our relationship with God... How do we express that instead of saying if you are Catholic, you must following this rule and this rule. [We should make our approach] the central focus of what it means to be Catholic.”

The Mission, Formation and Care of the People

The Synthesis Report of a Synodal church in Mission states: “Rather than saying that the Church has a mission, we affirm that Church ‘is’ mission. ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you’ (John 20:21).

- *Church teaching on morality needs to focus on all forms of serious sin equally, not just an emphasis on sexual sin opposed to sins against charity.*
- *Faith formation needs to be consistent and improved for all ages and stages.*
- *Families need emphasis, support and nurturing as they carry the faith.*
- *“If we don’t get together we live in isolation.”*
- *If we want to engage our people in ministry, we need to have active [parish] councils.*
- *We need to help/catechize that we are called to outreach and engage people outside of the four walls of the church. Our successes are our social services, people long for ministries of outreach.*
- *We need clarity of mission: “Why did Jesus come? [For the] salvation of souls, all else is commentary.”*
- *“Support all stages of life.”*

As someone stated, this section could be easily summed up remembering “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”
John 3:17

III. Conclusion

The following could be considered proposals and considerations for the Fall of 2024 gathering of the Synod of Bishops:

- The Role of the Laity needs to be formalized, clarified and expanded.
- Pastoral Councils need to be mandatory at both the diocesan and parish levels.
- Transparency needs to be defined. The people of God expect transparency at all levels.

We pray that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the process during the final phases of this Synod on Synodality. We continue to pray for the synod delegates and bishops throughout the world as the thoughts, ideas and concerns of the people are brought together, and especially of this local Archdiocese, to the Holy Father in October of 2024.