

Diocese of Marquette
Synod on Synodality Synthesis
May 2022

The methodology for the Diocesan Synod consultation began with reaching out to various popular movements and groups in the Diocese of Marquette with the ten thematic questions and asking them to facilitate local listening sessions. Groups without a clear leader or common to every parish (i.e. Knights of Columbus, altar society, Order of Christian Initiation for Adults, etc.) were to be coordinated through the local pastor.

The Fundamental Question: **A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.”** *How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?*

The “journeying together” in this diocese is currently taking place via small groups such as bible study, ongoing education, Cursillo grouping, priest fraternities, charismatic prayer groups, Neocatechumenal Way, parish functions and outreach, Order of Christian Initiation for Adults, men and women’s groups, etc. The Spirit is inviting us to go grow via hospitality, social justice outreach, witnessing and sharing, further study, corporate communion for groups, invitation to others, instilling a sense of belonging, standing steadfast in the faith, and making the parish a center for holiness and authentic friendship.

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY - *In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road. In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”? Who are those who seem further apart? How are we called to grow as companions? What groups or individuals are left on the margins?*

We are “journeying together” with our priests, deacons, religious, and parishioners. We seek the company of the fallen away, unchurched, and collaboration with Christians of other denominations. The pandemic, church scandals, broken families, apathy, cynicism, conspiracy theories, poor catechesis, political ideology, and drug use have hindered the spread of the Gospel. A reprioritization on seeking the sacred is needed, along with our joyful encouragement towards others to join us. We are strengthened on the journey by holding fast to Catholic principles and morals, and the frequent reception of the sacraments, especially penance and the Eucharist. On the margins are Native Americans, the divorced, young people, the fallen away, immigrants, lower socio-economic classes, and those with political ideologies.

2. LISTENING - *Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people? What facilitates or inhibits our listening? How well do we listen to those on the peripheries? How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated? What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own? What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?*

We are listening to the Spirit at work through the ordinary means of the Pope, bishops, priests, Sacred Scripture, homilies, Church documents, and online resources. The Spirit also speaks to us, but is often ignored in those seeking help, those proposing new ideas or ways, minority groups, or in a close friend. The laity are listened to via direct communication with their pastors, parish councils, youth groups, faith formation programs, and campus ministry. The listening is aided by an openness to hear people first, discern their immediate wounds, and then enlighten them with the truths of the faith. Listening to the Spirit is inhibited by poor attitudes, apathy, pride, political divisions, anger, forgetting our identity as God's beloved son/daughter, redefining marriage and gender, and exalting individual opinion and experience over revealed truths. Other limitations to listening include a consumerist attitude towards religion and viewing the Church as a place to go rather than a place to belong. We can listen to the fallen away and unchurched when we interact with them at funerals and weddings and to the young people through campus ministry and youth groups. We reach those on the margins through prison ministry, St. Vincent de Paul, Feeding America food distribution, and homeless shelters supported by the churches.

3. SPEAKING OUT - *All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity. What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?*

Authentic speech is hindered by reading everything through political ideology and current fractures in American society. It is also inhibited when we use rage, force, and fear to bend others to the will of the mob. Others believe they will experience rejection and retaliation if they speak up or that nothing will change. Again, people can speak directly to their priests, write their bishop, express the needs of the community at parish councils, etc. Often the matters people want changed within the Church (abortion, birth control, same-sex marriage, gender identity, etc.) are unchangeable revealed truths. Most media outlets in the U.S. are operated by people with a liberal agenda who are not favorable to the Church's opposition to the sexual revolution. Due to the "soundbite" nature of reporting, when the diocese is asked for an interview, very little of substance is conveyed in the final media coverage. The media tends to promote a certain

narrative and the Church is its biggest roadblock. A 24/7 news cycle means fear and anger are pedaled above truth and good works. The media narrative prevents many believers from seeing the true beauty and freedom offered in the Gospel. The priests have an obligation to engage each generation with a new and relevant approach to bring them closer to Christ through dynamic preaching, personal interactions, and a community that gives them a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves, namely the greater Body of Christ. This joyful evangelization must be delegated to the parishioners also as their primary mission.

4. CELEBRATION - *“Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy? What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?*

The celebration of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist tie us together in this one Body of Christ. Mass aligns us with God’s will, feeds and nourishes us, and commissions us to go forth in His name. These liturgies help us find peace, hope, healing, encouragement, and direction for our lives. It helps us to prioritize what is of highest value or worth in life, and thus we are reminded to worship God alone. The graces we receive influence how we treat others, make moral decisions, live our Christianity publicly and prophetically, and share ourselves in radical generosity. Participation at Mass is promoted through various ministries – sacristan, decorator, music, greeter, server, lector, extraordinary minister of holy communion, and usher. People are recruited personally by other lay ministers or the pastor, through announcements, and interest surveys. They are trained in workshops, with written instructions, and with workbooks. Ministry is encouraged among the youth at special liturgies and received well by the parishioners.

5. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION - *Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What hinders the baptized from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting? How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.)? How does the Church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way? How is discernment about missionary choices made and by whom?*

Every baptized person is called to participate in the life of the church because they are anointed priest, prophet, and king. Some do not participate because of church scandal, embarrassment to be in the public spotlight, they were not invited, too busy for extra commitments, or lack a clear sense of the mission. Areas of mission that could be better served are the youth, those coming

back to the faith, unchurched, fallen away Catholics, homebound, and those suffering with mental health. We do celebrate Masses in support of medical, police, and fire fighters. There are intercessions for the military and those who hold public office at Mass. Missionary choices are often made on behalf of the community by pastors, evangelization or pastoral councils, and inspired individuals or groups.

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY - *Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding. To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue? What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc.? How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed? What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to? What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty?*

Dialogue happens in the community through prayer and fellowship opportunities. Diversity is present within church socials, among our international priests, Catholic Campus Ministry, charismatic prayer groups, Catholic schools, on social media, in community outreach initiatives, and parish councils. Collaboration happens among the priests on diocesan boundaries via sharing coverage at nursing homes, promoting Catholic schools, fundraisers, healing Masses, and penance services. The religious communities are assisted through parish-run fundraisers, teaching in Catholic schools, faith formation programs, campus ministry, and visiting the homebound and nursing homes. Lay associations and organizations in the diocese include Secular Carmelites, charismatic prayer groups, Knights of Columbus, Cursillo, Totus Tuus, Yahweh's Yoopers, Baraga Youth Fraternity, pregnancy services, Catholic Social Services, etc. Conflicts are handled in a healthy fashion when people express their concerns in personal dialogue or via letter to their pastor or bishop. It is unhealthy when they express rage on social media or in the news without proper investigation. Divergences of vision and division can never be solved by moving from one outrage to the next without seeking to know the full teaching or story. We need to pay more attention to why people drift away from their faith, dynamic preaching and teaching, young families, parochialism within church, the pandemic's effects, loss of the sense of the sacred, prioritizing God first, moving away from a feelings based faith, irregular marriages, relativism, mental health, Native Americans, suicide prevention, and those experiencing same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria. Dialogue with other denominations happens in St. Vincent de Paul, Feeding America food distribution, homeless shelters supported by churches, ecumenical clergy associations, and ecumenical bible studies and services. The Church dialogues with society through its social justice teachings and outreach, preaching on moral principles not politics, encouraging prayer for those who suffer, collections for disaster reliefs, and through the lay faithful who exist in the world in an incarnate way.

7. ECUMENISM - *The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations? What do we share and how do we journey together? What fruits have we drawn from walking together? What are the difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?*

Ecumenism is accomplished through local clergy associations and shared worship services at Thanksgiving, Advent, Holy Week, and the week of Christian Unity. They also share in social justice projects such as Feeding America food distribution, food banks, and homeless shelters. We also have diverse denominations in our families and among our friends. Dialogue and pursuing common goals in the name of Christ brings harmony to our local communities and peace rather than division and suspicion. Ecumenism is harmed by speaking ill of another faith community from the pulpit, on social media, or in the news. Unfortunately, many non-Catholic traditions have strayed from sound biblical teachings in recent years in an act of appeasement and conformity to the world. This has not done their flocks any favors and makes Catholicism stand out as counter to the world and “behind the times” compared to other Christians. Going forward more dialogue is needed, priests should participate in local ecumenical clergy associations, look for opportunities to do social justice outreaches with other church communities, and share personal witness. We can also make our churches and/or parish halls available for certain community needs such as sacred music concerts, fundraisers, or health initiatives.

8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION - *A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice? How are evaluations conducted and by whom? How are lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people promoted? Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the local Church (Pastoral Councils in parishes and dioceses, Presbyteral Council, etc.)? How can we foster a more synodal approach in our participation and leadership?*

The goals in the Church are most often set through the hierarchy of the bishop or priest in cooperation with the advice of various councils – priests’ council, college of consultors, vicars, evangelization, pastoral, and finance/administration councils. For many parishes, we are stuck in maintenance mode and never expand through mission; we are more reactive than proactive. Teamwork is promoted through committees and faithful volunteers who take ownership in the parish. Evaluation of goals and results are done in the parish by the pastor and within councils. Lay ministries are not clearly defined at times and supervision/support is difficult for busy priests with multiple parishes and duties. Lay ministries include faith formation, adult education, music ministry, prayer groups, church groups, youth movements, and Catholic schools. Synodality

happens on the grassroots level naturally as people collaborate and operate various ministries. Synodality is currently operative in diocesan councils, parish councils, and school councils. Synodality can be aided by more personal invitation for lay participation, better support from the pastor, clear communication and defining of the mission, and showing appreciation for those who serve.

9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING - *In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. What methods and processes do we use in decision-making? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures? Do our decision making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God? What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice? What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?*

Decision-making is typically done top-down: Holy See, local diocese, local parish. Again, the input and ideas of the lay faithful and clergy is most often sought in the form of councils. Surveys of parishioners tend to give a wide variety of answers when orchestrated, so priests tend to tap key parishioners to seek feedback. People on pastoral, finance, and evangelization councils have a chance to be part of shaping the mission of their local parish. Priests also make themselves available for people to ask questions or offer feedback. Listening sessions have also been utilized for certain topics. Transparency and accountability happen by recording meeting minutes from councils, publishing monthly budgets in bulletins, and publishing parish annual reports. Pastors are accountable to the finance council for spending and hiring related issues. Parishes have routine diocesan audits, and annual reports on everything from sacraments to finances. If a priest is accused of improprieties there are victim assistance coordinators, an Independent Review Board, and a bishop's reporting hotline available. We can grow in our communal discernment through prayer, study, Mass, meals, convocations, regional gatherings, and small groups.

10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY - *Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning. How does our church community form people to be more capable of "walking together," listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue? What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?*

To make people more capable to walk together we offer spiritual direction, discernment of spirits, helpful resources and classes, opportunities to practice virtue through service, preaching on equality and our common identity as God's beloved son or daughter. Obstacles to walking together include parochial mindsets, biases, scandals among church leaders, personal sin and pride, and a flawed idea that we can or should change revealed moral truths.

Conclusion: This synod process has helped us realize the wide array of consultation already happening, such as priests' council, college of consultors, vicars, evangelization council, pastoral council, and finance/administration council. Consultation also happens on the grassroots level when parishioners dialogue with their priest, within families of blended faith backgrounds, and in communities that perform social justice outreach. The synod process also identified ways we could equip the lay faithful to take on ministries better through invitation, training/support, communication, and clear goals. The synod process has made us aware of groups on the margins that could be served better such as the youth, those coming back to the faith, unchurched, fallen away Catholics, homebound, and those suffering with mental health. Lastly, there stills exists a great chasm between what some expect to be changed within the Church and her teachings versus what has been revealed to us by God, namely the beauty of authentic marriage between a man and woman, the theology of our body, the gift of life, and our duty to uphold the faith in season and out.