

Summary of Themes from Synod Listening Sessions

In preparation for the 2023 World Synod of Bishops called by Pope Francis, Bishop Soto has asked the parish pastoral councils throughout the Diocese of Sacramento to conduct listening sessions. We were pleased to offer five sessions in our parish, one of them with our youth. We have submitted to the Diocese, the notes from all the sessions, and, as stated, with no names.

At this time as your council, we would like to share with you some of the themes we heard. As publicly agreed, we will not share specific comments or any names. This summary will highlight some suggestions regarding the international reality of our Church. However, much of what we heard focused on our parish reality. We consider it positive for us as your council to have heard your comments specifically those about our parish community.

The initial question invited us to share what was most life giving and inspirational as we reflected on our experience of faith and Church.

Many individuals shared about the importance and significance of the Eucharist, the liturgies, homilies, and quality music at our parish masses. There were observations regarding the need, in the wake of COVID and online worship to be aggressive in inviting parishioners back to in person attendance. There were also some comments wishing that the voices of women and others were more prominent in our preaching and leadership.

There were several kudos for our individual and parish commitment to those who are poor and in need. Noted were our Saint Vincent de Paul, Family Promise, South Sacramento Food Closet, Pocket Area Congregations, and other outreaches to those in need. Some found this work inspirational and evangelistic. It was noted that our Church should always continue these activities and even expand them.

Many folks commented about the positive experiences of the scripture and small faith sharing groups. It reminded them that Christ is the center of our faith, and our job is to bring people together. One of the most interesting challenges was “feed the children.”

One of the overwhelming themes was the need for us, as an international Church and our local parish to be a more evangelizing and welcoming community. Comments were offered about Pope Francis as a model of evangelization. We heard many comments about the need to attract younger members and new families.

In the second question participants were invited to share what they experience in their encounter with Christ and the Church that was found to be burdening and challenging.

Again, there were comments about our lack of welcoming back our members who have not returned since the pandemic. There was a concern that we were not as mission focused as we are called to be, to evangelize. However, many expressed concerns that we are not welcoming all to the faith community, particularly those with disabilities, those who feel marginalized by racism, gender, or sexual orientation. There was a comment that we are so family focused that we make single folks feel less welcome. Mental and spiritual challenges need to be more a priority for our church. Some individuals shared stories of sadness of those who personally or with family and friends did not feel welcome in the Church community. Also shared were the sad stories of family members, siblings, children, and grandchildren who were not participating in the Catholic Church.

Of course, the issue of the sexual abuse scandal and its impact on how the Church is perceived by Catholics and others was noted. Other comments felt that the Church hierarchy is disconnected from the reality that most folks live.

The third question invited us to reflect and share where we thought the Spirit is leading us to grow more deeply and engage more fully.

Individuals shared their call to more prayer, to deepen relationships, to search for more community and to be closer to Christ. God loves all and we must celebrate as a parish more. Community is so important in our life of faith. Once again people shared about the call to be more welcoming, create more diversity and to be more inclusive. Some indicated that they and the Church are called to live the gospel more fully. There were calls for a married clergy and a more active role for laity in leadership. There was a consistent call to strengthen youth catechesis and specifically create the special time for children during mass. Lastly, we were impressed with the comments that as lay people we are called “to show up and speak up.”

The last question requested that we share what had caught our attention, touched us the most or that we thought was very significant.

Most interesting was the comment offered more than once that it felt unusual but good that the laity is being asked to offer opinions for this consultation. A significant comment was echoed by some that they were impressed that we were more alike than different. Again, the highlight for some was the importance of attracting the young to the faith by making the Church more relevant in the society, in short to evangelize better. An interesting comment shared was the hope that we could make the prayers of the faithful more practical and focused on the realities in our community, state, and world. Community is so foundational and important for our positive experience of faith.

We your council will prayerfully engage what was shared for the life of our parish. Thanks to all who participated. May the Spirit guide us as we grow in faith and pursue our mission.