



Synodal Report – April 2022  
Responses from online survey and in person sessions conducted in English  
St. Francis Xavier Parish  
Phoenix, Arizona  
Pastor: Rev. Robert Fambrini, SJ

Five of the synodal topics were chosen for reflection at SFX. Participants were asked to reflect on their experience at the parish as well as their experience with the larger church (e.g., the diocese or the church in the United States). Following is a summary of what was heard.

#### PART 1 – IN PERSON LISTENING SESSION

Conducted on April 2, 2022

41 participants

##### **A. Companions on the Journey – *In the church and in society we are side by side on the same road.***

Table Discussion

- The relationship with the church is viewed as personal and unique to the individual. Catholic identity is strong, but many people struggle with what is viewed as challenges to the tradition -- those things that hold the church and community together. What do we mean when we speak of unity in diversity? How do we remain faithful to church teaching while walking with those who feel disenfranchised?

##### **B. Listening – *Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart without prejudice.***

Table Discussion

- Participants felt heard at the parish level by and large. That feeling diminishes when considering the diocesan level and higher. The abuse scandal remains a concern as well as equality for women. The church would be better served if all its members (lay and clergy) had opportunities to fully respond to their common baptism and live truly authentic lives within the church. Teens do not feel anyone listens to them, they feel ignored or dismissed because they are youth.

##### **C. Speaking Out – *All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is in freedom, truth, and charity.***

Table Discussion

- The synodal process has tapped into a need to speak about matters important to the individual. There is hesitancy in speaking out reflecting some fear of rejection or retaliation (e.g.,

anonymous suggestion box) but moreover, there is a lack of clarity on the appropriate ways to make one's opinions and needs known. Parishioners wish to be consulted on key decisions and they need to know how to do that. The abuse scandal and perceived failure to fully address it has eroded confidence in speaking out on a range of issues.

**D. 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.*

Table Discussion

- Within this group, many of whom participate in parish ministries, there is a strong sense of connection to the church's mission. At the same time, there is a recognition that many are excluded, and their absence impoverishes the mission (Teens, in particular, feel excluded, but they also desire the community that they see at the parish). Inclusivity and belonging (e.g., welcoming women into leadership positions) are identified as key characteristics of a thriving church.

**E. Authority and Participation** – *A synodal church is a participatory Church*

Table Discussion

- Although there is a strong belief that all are responsible to participate in the mission of the church, there is once again a feeling that the laity is not authentically included in the decision making process. Some believe their input is not valued while others speak to a lack of transparency and opportunity. Top-down decision making is no longer accepted. Clarity is needed on the responsibility of the individual versus the responsibility of the institution. The mission must respond to the needs of today's church. Those needs cannot be assumed but rather revealed through dialog.

PART II – ONLINE SURVEY

Conducted from March 2 through April 4, 2022

Completed surveys: 241

**A. Companions on the Journey** – *In the church and in society we are side by side on the same road.*

Scale (1-100, 100 = strongly agree)

- Do you feel you are journeying with the Church? 70%
- Do you feel you are journeying with the Parish? 65%

## Open Responses

- The majority identify family members (spouse, parents, children) as accompanying them while some indicated that they are alone. Few identified non-related parishioners or church leadership. Some expressed lament over family members who are no longer engaged in the church. This is a recurring theme throughout the survey.
- A broad range of people are identified as walking alone – divorced, women, single persons, and the elderly are mentioned often. The responses were personal in nature in that they referred to themselves or those with whom they have a personal relationship.
- The majority of respondents indicated their spiritual needs were being met. There were requests for a stronger community and a focus on young families especially those who attend public school. There was an acknowledgment of a responsibility to make needs known. This is complicated by a lack of clarity on just how to do that. This sentiment will be reflected in the following topics.

## **B. Listening** – *Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart without prejudice.*

Scale (1-100, 100 = strongly agree)

- Do you feel the Church is listening? 50%
- Do you feel the Parish is listening? 59%

## Open Responses

- The responses reflect a sense that more attention is paid to the opinions of the wealthy contributor as well as ‘multigenerational families’ with strong ties to the parish and school. Men are heard more than women. Some believe more ‘liberal’ voices are heard while others believe the ‘conservative’ perspective is given a larger audience.
- Women are frequently mentioned as a group that is ignored by the church. There are indications of a lack of clarity of how or to whom to speak about a variety of issues or a belief that input will be dismissed. When asked if they themselves felt on the ‘periphery’ of the church, many answered affirmatively. Some feel excluded because of gender, marital status, age, or sexual orientation; however, confusion over the perceived direction of the church was also identified as a reason for feeling on the outside. The feeling of alienation is present among those we might identify as progressives and traditionalists.

## **C. Speaking Out** - *All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is in freedom, truth, and charity.*

Scale (1-100, 100 = strongly agree)

- Do you feel free to speak to the Church? 51%
- Do you feel free to speak to the Parish? 58%

### Open Responses

- Responses reflect a general perception that opportunities to speak are few or non-existent while at the same time strongly believing that parishioners should be consulted on issues impacting the parish. The clergy was most often identified as having the authority to speak.
- As to obstacles, responses reflect a general reluctance to speak out either because of a lack of opportunities (e.g., knowing the right channel), a sense of futility, or fear of rejection or judgment.

### **D. 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.***

Scale (1-100, 100 = strongly agree)

- Do you feel connected to the mission of the Church? 63%
- Do you feel connected to the mission of the Parish? 63%

### Open Responses

- Proclaim the Gospel, make disciples, and draw people to God are most often identified as the church's mission.
- Regarding the parish, Ignatian spirituality was identified as forming the foundation of its mission. Social ministry – reaching those in need – was explicitly stated as part of the parish mission.
- Several areas are identified as successful at the parish level (e.g., leadership, liturgies, formation, care for the poor) however, declining Mass attendance is cited as an indicator that the church is failing overall. Failure to effectively evangelize was cited even those the church does a 'good job of bringing the sacraments to the devout.' Success is inwardly focused.
- People want to be known by their church and to have the church recognize and respond to their needs. The parish fares better than the larger church in this regard.
- When asked about a personal role in the mission – responses reflected an outward orientation – a desire to be a good influence in the community and the world.

### **E. Authority and Participation - *A synodal church is a participatory Church***

Scale (1-100, 100 = strongly agree)

- Do you feel a responsibility for the direction of the Church? 61%
- Do you feel a responsibility for the direction of the Parish? 62%

## Open Responses

- The invitation to participate is seen less as a response to discipleship and more to ‘help the parish.’ Connection to the larger mission (‘something greater’) is weak although there is a desire for that as reflected in responses to the topic above.
- There exists a lack of clarity on how decisions are made and the channels of communication. There appears to be little understanding of the current leadership structure.

## PART 3: FINAL REFLECTION

### *What would the church look like if...*

- The in-person dialog and survey responses reflect a recognition of a growing alienation from the church. Relationships have been broken. Parents lament the absence of their adult children. Divorced persons do not feel welcome as does the LGBTQ community. The single person struggles to find a place among traditional families. The elderly are saddened by the empty pews and the disappearance of the church of their childhood. Young people feel silenced and then excluded from active participation despite the desire to belong. The church has struggled to respond to the ever more complicated needs of its members as well as the needs of those who have not heard the gospel. Yet, there appears to be a willingness on the part of this community to do just that, as well as a desire to mend relationships and create new ones.
- At the same time, a tension exists between church teaching and acceptance of those whose life circumstances place them in conflict with those teachings. How do we hold that tension and proclaim the gospel? How do we find unity in this diversity? How do we clearly articulate church teachings with the sincere merciful love of Jesus?
- The public conflict that is observed among our priests and bishops is a source of confusion and pain. Dialogue, not debate, among and between all levels of the Church hierarchy is a consistently expressed desire. The fruits of this dialogue are a more hopeful Church future.
- Participation of all the baptized is paramount to renewing the church’s mission. Trust must be restored. Clarity of mission must be articulated. Local ordinaries must respond to the needs of the parishes, which are uniquely positioned to carry the gospel to the local community.

NOTE: The synodal prayer invoking the Holy Spirit was incorporated into the planning process. The consultations began with a reflection on Acts 2:3-4 and an alternative prayer to the Holy Spirit.