

Synod Parish Synthesis Report Form

GENERAL PARISH SESSION(S) INFORMATION

Parish Name *

Church of Our Lady of Grace & St. Joseph

Parish City *

Hoboken

Parish County *

Hudson

How many sessions did you host? *

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- X – 5 “General” Sessions
- 6
- 7
- Other:

Date(s) of Session *

Jan. 9, Feb. 27 (2 sessions), Mar. 13, Mar. 21

Were the sessions held in person or online? *

- In-person
- Online
- X - We had some sessions in person and some sessions online

Total number of people who participated *

55 in "General" sessions (130 overall, including sessions for specific constituencies)

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Providing demographic information was voluntary for participants. However, we ask demographic questions because it is important to understand who participated. Whose voice does this represent?

Estimate the percentage of how many women attended. *

60%

Estimate the percentage of how many men attended. *

40%

Age range for those who attended.

- X 14-17
- X 18-25
- X 26-39
- X 40-55
- X 56-74
- X 75+

The largest percentage of participants were from what age group?

40-55

What was the race and/or ethnicity of those who participated?

- X Caucasian
- X African-American or Black
- X Asian
- X Hispanic or Latino
- X Middle Eastern or North African
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other:

What language groups do you have in your community?

- X English
- X Spanish
- Chinese
- Haitian Creole
- Korean
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Other:

Which of these language groups participated in a listening session?

- X English
- Spanish
- Chinese
- Haitian Creole
- Korean
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Other:

Help us understand more about those who participated.

- X Youth
- X Young Adult
- X Single
- X Married
- X Separated
- X Divorced
- X Remarried
- X Widowed
- Religious (priest, sister, brother, deacon)

Mass attendance of those who participated.

- Daily
- X Weekly
- Once a month
- Special occasions (holidays, weddings, funerals, etc.)
- Rarely
- Never

Tell us about the connection to the parish community of those who participated.

- X Parishioners
- X Religious Education
- Catholic school
- Youth group
- Campus ministry
- Faith sharing group
- Charismatic community
- Prayer group
- Liturgical minister
- Other:

Did the participants in the session(s) represent a cross-section of the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in your local community?

X Yes
No

Did you reach out to people with disabilities or families who have members who are disabled?

X Yes
No

Did you reach out to people who are marginalized?

X Yes
No

Which group(s) did you reach out to?

Our parish reached out to a diverse array of constituencies, including regular parishioners, young adults, LGBTQ+ community, our large Hispanic community, those who have left the church and/or feel marginalized, and others. To convey the specific feedback that we received from these various constituencies within our parish and wider community, our parish is submitting separate synod synthesis reports to the Archdiocese for the following: (1) General (this report), (2) Young Adult, (3) LGBTQ+ Community, (4) Hispanic Community and (5) Disaffected/Marginalized Individuals.

LISTENING SESSION(S) OVERVIEW

Provide a brief overview of session(s) - (Limit to 2 paragraphs or about 500 words.) If you hosted more than one session, you may wish to highlight how these sessions were similar or different.

Our parish hosted a total of five listening sessions aimed at general audiences: three at Our Lady of Grace, one at St. Joseph and one via Zoom. The in-person sessions were offered after various weekend Masses to encourage parishioner participation. Some sessions were larger gatherings with about 15 to 20 participants; others were more intimate with about 5 participants. In total, approximately 55 individuals participated in these five listening sessions.

A wide array of perspectives was shared, some more traditional/conservative and many more progressive. We noted all individual feedback from each listening session and carefully reviewed and synthesized this information afterward. We have included in this aggregated report those themes that emerged most frequently across the various sessions.

In addition to these listening sessions aimed at general audiences, our parish hosted a series of sessions that were aimed at more specific constituencies: (1) young adults, (2) LGBTQ+ community, (3) our large Hispanic community, and (4) those who have left the church and/or feel marginalized. An additional 75 individuals participated in these targeted sessions, so that, in aggregate, our parish synod process included approximately 130 participants. To convey with specificity the feedback received across our parish community, we are submitting to the Archdiocese this “General” synod report, along with four separate reports highlighting the foregoing audiences.

In addition to the listening session(s), did you use an online survey to collect feedback? If yes, please provide information about what you learned from the survey in a separate report.

Yes
X No

CORE QUESTION ONE

HOW IS THIS "JOURNEYING TOGETHER" HAPPENING TODAY IN YOUR COMMUNITY? Share 3 examples of "walking together" in your community. (Pull information from the worksheet to complete these sections.)

Theme for Example #1 (i.e. welcome, engaging youth, etc.)

Welcome and inclusion at the local parish level

Description of Example #1

Individuals from diverse backgrounds feel a sense of welcome and inclusion at the parish. There is a sense of acceptance and even celebration of differences: race/ethnicity, sexual orientation/gender, age, etc. Priests are welcoming, speak to real-life concerns and actively engage parishioners.

Some participants noted that they did not feel this sense of welcome and inclusion at certain other parishes and often do not feel that the Church hierarchy actively supports diversity and inclusion through its policies and pronouncements.

How often was theme #1 discussed? (i.e. 80% of the tables discussed this theme)

100% of sessions

Theme for Example #2 (i.e. welcome, engaging youth, etc.)

Close-knit community that celebrates Catholic tradition

Description of Example #2

Involvement in the parish generates a sense of belonging and close-knit ties, with the parish community becoming a Church family that is steeped in and celebrates Catholic tradition. This is fostered by Mass attendance, communal celebration of sacraments, in-person CCD, church social gatherings and various ministries. Some participants noted that there is an increasing level of collaboration and community spanning the sister churches, Our Lady of Grace and St. Joseph.

How often was theme #2 discussed? (i.e. 80% of the tables discussed this theme)

100% of sessions

Theme for Example #3 (i.e. welcome, engaging youth, etc.)

Commitment to community service

Description of Example #3

Initiatives led by the parish, its ministries and individual parishioners emphasize service to those in need in our community and to the wider community.

How often was theme #3 discussed? (i.e. 80% of the tables discussed this theme)

80% of sessions

What prevents us from “walking together?” What hinders people from being a part of the parish and/or speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly?

The power of the Church is still too concentrated in a patriarchal hierarchy and lacks leadership and voices from laypeople, women, LGBTQ+ individuals and families, people of color and other marginalized individuals.

People fear judgment, shaming, censure and/or being marginalized for being their authentic selves and speaking out on many issues, especially outdated and exclusionary Church teachings and policies.

The Church needs to return to the teachings and life experience of Jesus: acceptance, welcome and love for all others; walking with and uplifting the marginalized; less judgment and shaming and more forgiveness; and less focus on bureaucracy and hierarchy.

CORE QUESTION TWO

HOW ARE WE "WALKING TOGETHER" AS A CHURCH, AND WHAT STEPS DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT INVITE US TO TAKE IN ORDER TO GROW IN OUR JOURNEYING TOGETHER?

By our deep listening, what actions do you hear the Holy Spirit asking the universal Church to take?

The universal Church needs to undertake significant reform, modernization and outreach to increase Church engagement and attendance, bring in individuals who are marginalized and excluded, and restore its reputation and trust in its leadership.

What practical steps are needed to include people in the areas of leadership, governance, and inclusion in the universal Church?

Leadership:

National and diocesan Church leaders need to meet and engage with parishioners and the disaffected/marginalized to understand their concerns. There is not enough engagement of the hierarchy with parishioners and local parishes, leading to a disconnect and a lack of understanding of Catholics' lived experiences. This synodal process would not be needed if this outreach was already occurring.

Furthermore, Church leaders at all levels need to more actively market the good that is done by Church ministries and services. Better public relations efforts and improved use of technology, including social media, are needed. The Church's visibility needs to be bolstered in a positive way, and this marketing should extend to the secular world, beyond those already in the pews. Currently the Church (deservedly) receives much bad press due to outspoken and exclusionary leadership at the national and some diocesan levels. These loud and hurtful voices receive outsized attention from the press and are assumed to be the voice of the entire Church. They do lasting harm to the Church and turn many away from and against the Church. These changes in marketing and outreach need to be underpinned by the substantive governance changes recommended in the next section.

Governance:

In the universal Church, there is too much anti-democratic focus on maintaining the power of the Church hierarchy/patriarchy, as well as undue focus on fundraising and catering to key donors. This dynamic suppresses operational and financial

transparency, including with regard to the use of funds for abuse settlements, and diminishes accountability, including with respect to disciplining perpetrators of abuse. This power and control structure suppresses many marginalized voices and prospective leaders outside the Church patriarchy: laypeople, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, people of color and others.

In tandem with these reforms relating to power, transparency and accountability, the Church urgently needs to modernize its canon law, catechism and positions on key issues:

- LGBTQ+ inclusion (including acceptance of openly gay clergy) and human sexuality in general;
- women's leadership (overall, and particularly the diaconate and priesthood);
- marriage (amend restrictive policies regarding logistics and customization of the ceremony, limitations on involvement by non-Catholics, and outdated pre cana), separation, divorce, annulment and remarriage;
- restrictions on receiving the Eucharist and denial of other sacraments (gay union/marriage, treatment of divorce and remarriage);
- prohibition on married priests;
- inclusion of non-traditional families (single parents, LGBTQ+, divorced, adoptive/foster families); and
- restrictive and exclusionary funeral policies.

A revamping and modernization of the Church's approach to these matters will allow for alignment with the lived experiences of Catholics. The Church's positions on these issues are confusing and unwelcoming/alienating to many. The result is that many turn away or are pushed away from the Church: women, the younger generation, LGBTQ+ individuals and families, and others.

A final and more specific governance issue was raised with respect to the operation and consolidation/closure of Catholic schools, which often occurs with little input from families. There is concern that a lack of local input, funding and accountability have led to a Catholic school system that is in decline and failing to attract new generations of youth to the Church.

Inclusion:

Sincere and sustained outreach by all levels of the Church (the Vatican, USCCB, all dioceses and all local parishes) is needed to those who feel unwelcome in or

ostracized from the Church: LGBTQ+ individuals and families, divorced, women, people of color, youth and others. Pope Francis has moved in this direction and hopefully will do more. The USCCB does not show national leadership in this area. At a local level, some dioceses and parishes, including our own, in each case, are more supportive and taking steps in this direction; others are moving in the opposite direction. This exclusion, alienation and condemnation is hurtful to many, especially those who are already vulnerable, and results in much inconsistency across the Church. Some individuals and families are forced to search for a welcoming parish, while others do not have this ability and/or are driven away from the Church.

LOCAL QUESTIONS

How can the Archdiocese of Newark support you in your local parish?

The Archdiocese needs to foment local change as detailed below, when possible at the diocesan level, and be an agent for broader change at the national and universal levels of the Church.

What are 3 steps we can take in our Archdiocese to grow more collaboratively for the future?

Step 1

Boost outreach to and engagement with women, LGBTQ+ individuals and families, people of color, and other marginalized individuals. Elevate them into local and diocesan leadership positions.

Step 2

Modernize policies and positions on key issues at the diocesan level and advocate for change at the national and universal levels:

- LGBTQ+ inclusion (including acceptance of openly gay clergy) and human sexuality in general;
- women's leadership (overall, and particularly the diaconate and priesthood);
- marriage (amend restrictive policies regarding logistics and customization of the ceremony, limitations on involvement by non-Catholics, and outdated pre cana), separation, divorce, annulment and remarriage;
- restrictions on receiving the Eucharist and denial of other sacraments (gay union/marriage, treatment of divorce and remarriage);
- prohibition on married priests;
- inclusion of non-traditional families (single parents, LGBTQ+, divorced, adoptive/foster families); and
- restrictive and exclusionary funeral policies.

Step 3

Boost operational and financial transparency at parish and diocesan levels and involve local families in decisions about Catholic schools.

PARISH PLANNING

Refer back to Core Question 2. In your discussion of this question, participants were asked to offer specific actions for the local parish.

List 3 to 5 themes which you heard in the table discussions which will assist with your future parish with pastoral planning.

Theme 1

More opportunities for religious education, spiritual engagement, community service and socializing. Opportunities desired for parishioners in general and for specific parishioner constituencies (families, seniors, singles, preteen/teen youth). Promotes engagement, interaction, and sense of connectedness. Expand the outreach and event planning that occurs for young adults to other constituencies and the parish in general.

Theme 2

Bolster efforts to welcome and include marginalized individuals and communities. Promote more leadership by all laypeople in parish activities, particularly women, LGBTQ+, people of color and other marginalized individuals.

Theme 3

Invest in new and improved technology for outreach, Church news, following the liturgy, parishioner records, soliciting donations and donation history.

Theme 4

Bolster efforts for cooperation between and crosspollination of OLG and St. Joseph communities and the English- and Spanish-speaking communities to strengthen the parish as a whole.

Theme 5

Promote and invest in music ministry – encourage participation, modernize the selections and increase use of technology.

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

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