



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Dear People of St. Ann's,

Below is the text of our parish report to the Diocese of Richmond, submitted on March 25. We were limited to 2500 characters for each answer (about 500 words), so you'll notice that there are not many details or specific ideas offered, especially in the parts that pertain to our parish. Rest assured that **WE HAVE KEPT** all the suggestions we received via listening sessions, surveys, and interview cards. Those suggestions will remain part of our conversation and deliberations here at St. Ann's. At this point, we will pause for Holy Week and Easter, and then we will resume this process for our parish after Easter. Please watch for further information and invitations! Thank you, again, to all who participated in this phase of the Synod!

Demographic Information

The Diocese asked for the following information:

1. **How many Synod Consultations did your parish or community hold?** 12
2. **What was the total number of unique participants?** 141. This comes from 66 participants in the listening sessions; 46 youth participants; 18 surveys (this half of the 36 we received, but we know that some surveys were submitted by people who also participated in listening sessions; and 11 interview sheets)
3. **What were the general demographics of your participants? (Age, Gender, Ethnicity, etc.)**
Generally, with the exception of our youth group participants, our participants tended to be our older adults; only a few young adults or middle-aged adults participated. Participants were split about 1/3 male and 2/3 female. Our parish is somewhat diverse ethnically, but our participants skewed toward our white population; we did have participants from our Asian American, African American, and Latino American parishioners, as well as immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Question 1 – Journeying Together

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centered Church that “Journeys Together”?

Jesus called us by name and invited the disciples to join him by asking them in person. We should follow that example! “Journeying Together” as Church requires that the laity have a major role to play.

For the Diocese/worldwide Church:

1. Church leadership has lost moral credibility and focus, which is necessary at every level
2. There is a profound loss of trust in Church leadership because of the clergy sex abuse scandal and subsequent coverup, as well as financial scandals and other moral issues; on-going acknowledgement, apology, confession, and reform are needed.
3. There is a fundamental issue of exclusion – people in many groups feel unwelcome and are not ministered to: those of diverse cultures, LGBTQ+ Catholics, ex-Catholics, young singles, divorced and separated Catholics, etc. The Church cannot call itself universal and inclusive without those people.

4. The Church needs to cultivate an ethos of on-going renewal and reform in today's face-paced world; this will include more ecumenism and shared ministry with those of different denominations and faiths (and no faith).
5. There is a desire to open the Church to wider leadership by women and, in particular from our youth, to open the priesthood to women, married people, LGBTQ+, etc. Our youth said, "The leadership is all old, white men!"
6. We must learn from Pope Francis' example: more love and less judgment!

At St. Ann's:

1. We need to be a people that are truly Christ-centered, always asking, "What is it that Christ wants us to do?"
2. We are all called to be connected and help one another in the journey of faith. As our connections to each other grow, our connection to Jesus will also grow (and vice versa).
3. St. Ann's growing cultural and racial diversity is seen as an asset and an opportunity; brings an infusion of new thought, worship styles, and spirituality
4. We need to step out of the box and be willing to try new things; be open to discussing the difficult issues that divide our country/church with compassion and courage
5. Parishioners of every age and demographic (especially our young people) want to see better communication and more inclusion and transparency in parish decision-making, and many ideas have been suggested for how to do this better.
6. There is a strong desire to reconnect and renew ties within the parish through a variety of activities, ministries, and outreach both within the parish and to the wider community.

Question 2 – Communion

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centered Church that is a welcoming, Eucharistic community?

The Church is like an orchestra, needing each of its diverse parts and members to reach its full potential. To be a Eucharistic community we need to be thankful for all the gifts AND the gaps that each person brings. The gaps create opportunities for the gifts of others to fill and weaves a tight, flourishing community where everyone knows they're important and welcome.

For the Diocese/worldwide Church:

1. The Church (not just worldwide, but in the diocese and parishes) must continue to find ways to invite all people, everyone from so many ethnicities and backgrounds, feel a part of a Christ-centered community
2. There is a lack of clarity and consistency about many current issues: abortion and communion, divorced/remarried Catholics receiving communion, etc.
3. There is a strong need for more revision of the annulment process. "Any person going through this needs more support from Church leaders... People feel victimized again during Tribunal meetings."
4. We need greater collaboration and cooperation with other Christian churches so that we can be one community as Christ intended
5. While there is great respect for the history of the rules restricting communion, Scripture tells us that rules are never to be more important than offering Jesus' love to everyone; this should be a guiding principle

At St. Ann's:

1. The covid pandemic has had a profound effect on our community and our sense of welcome and participation

2. Many expressed real gratitude to Fr. Ernest for the ways his engaging homilies, enthusiasm, and love of God inspire the parish
3. We have work to do to make sure all feel welcome and invited in, no matter their situation, background, or anything else; we need to remember and recognize that Christ is present in everyone
4. Find ways to reach out to those who are “anonymous” Mass attendees; who have not returned since covid; newcomers; etc. Many ideas have surfaced in these areas
5. We want to be a community where there is a place for everyone
6. All have gifts to offer and should be actively involved (invited to become involved) in parish ministries and groups; personal invitations are most effective
7. Work on a variety of communication methods to make people aware of our ministries (bulletin, announcements, videos on website and Facebook, ministry fair, pew cards to allow parish to hear from visitors and parishioners, etc.)
8. Our youth are hungry for more youth-oriented activities and desire that Mass be more “youth-friendly”

Question 3 – Discussion & Dialogue

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centered Church that is open to listening, dialogue, and renewal?

There is a great desire for discussion, dialogue, and participatory decision-making at every level of the Church. But many are skeptical that this will happen even at the local level. “Until diocesan and worldwide church leaders provide an honest, humble plea for forgiveness and stop hiding behind the power structure of the institutional church, they mean nothing to me.” Others are more optimistic: “I would like to believe that the Holy Spirit is blowing hurricane force winds through the gathering of staff, lay people, and those silent members in the pews, calling all of us to see each other as worthy before any one of us speaks.”

For the Diocese/worldwide Church:

1. More transparency in the church at all levels
2. Parishes will start new initiatives for peace & justice, small faith communities, young adults, LGBTQ+, folks with special needs, ecumenism, etc. with support and training offered by the Diocese
3. Need to renew Diocesan training and support for parish councils
4. A young adult organization across the Diocese would be helpful
5. Support for more discernment around women deacons in the Church

At St. Ann’s:

1. Our parish council needs renewal: new members with term limits appointed or elected, a way for parishioners to volunteer; better communication of meeting times, agenda, and results
2. Strong support for on-going dialogue and participation in parish decision-making. Many ideas have been offered about how to do this.
3. Social media is not being utilized to the extent it could with youth and younger families
4. A desire for small faith communities/neighborhood groups for home Masses, Bible studies, mutual support, social connection, communication of needs and ideas to the parish council, pastor, and staff
5. We need to become comfortable with those uncomfortable issues that are a part of the Christian community; openly address and explore difficult issues; ground our discussions in “WWJD.” Our youth are particularly interested in “real world” issues of racism, LGBTQ+ acceptance, physical and sexual abuse, mental health issues, environment, navigating technology, etc. and what our faith says to and about them

6. Change will not happen unless we are willing to change ourselves

Question 4 – Evangelization and Mission

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centered Church that is fully engaged in evangelization and mission?

In order to be a Christ-centered Church engaged in evangelization and mission, we need to modernize on many levels. We need a church that is loving and welcoming to all, and leadership that is reflective of all those people.

For the Diocese/worldwide Church:

1. The Church needs to recognize that young people are never going to come back until the church can practice what it preaches
2. Bishop should visit parishes on a frequent basis (every few years) for listening sessions
3. Church must exit “defensive mode” before effective evangelization can take place
4. Church should compare and contrast communities where church is vibrant with those where it is not; determine what Church can learn and apply to those places where renewal and revitalization is needed
5. Develop lay leaders; Catholics are not being invited and raised up for leadership in their parishes. There are few opportunities for leadership, development, input, and involvement on the Diocesan or global level for anyone other than clergy and parish employees
6. Collaborative work with other faith communities is hamstrung by bureaucratic layers of the Church

At St. Ann’s:

1. The pandemic has had a profound impact on ministries, training, etc. We need to figure out a way to recover from that and re-engage folks in all kinds of ministries
2. Collaborate with area churches and non-profits to see how needs in the area can be better met; make sure there are no gaps in ministries/services
3. Appeal to young (14-35) with opportunities for catechesis, personal faith testimony, and fellowship
4. How do we engage in evangelization? We need to provide clear, practical examples/road map/testimony about how to share the Gospel in daily life
5. Continue listening sessions to hear concerns of community and progress on suggested actions
6. Our youth appreciate that our parish values issues of human rights and poverty, and gives them opportunities to volunteer and serve in the community

Additional comments

Question on Diocesan Form: Do you have any final thoughts or feedback that your parish/community would like to share with the Diocese?

Our parish identified this synod process as a hopeful, forward-looking opportunity, but many expressed skepticism that anything will “really change.” Many parishes are doing essentially nothing for the synod, and the bishop does not appear to have made it a priority with the priests. One group concluded, “This synod process is a good step forward, but if nothing happens as a result, it will become a big step backward!” A parishioner added, “If the bishops treat the input gathered from the faithful as having no value, it is as though they are saying the faithful have no value, and they are ignoring the Holy Spirit speaking through the *sensus fidelium*. Wouldn’t that be considered heresy?”

There was a strong desire expressed that the Diocesan synod process include publicizing the report that is sent to the USCCB through the parishes, the Diocesan website, and the Catholic Virginian.

Another important thread was the training of seminarians and on-going formation of priests. Many felt that no real change will be seen in the Church until seminarians and priests are trained not just in theology and liturgy, but in collaborative leadership, administration, non-profit organization, and finance and budgetary processes, as well as counseling, spiritual direction, Spanish, and the on-going importance of Vatican II reforms in the Church.