



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY
SYNOD SYNTHESIS REPORT



For a synodal Church



QUESTIONS FROM THE DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS SUBMISSION FORM

Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky

- Synod Coordinator
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- Has your (arch)diocese previously submitted your synthesis to USCCB? No
- Please name the top ten themes/topics that arose in your diocesan synthesis process.
 - o Youth/Young Adult Engagement
 - o Faith Formation
 - o Needs of Immigrants
 - o Disaffiliated Catholics
 - o Clericalism/Church Authority
 - o Role of Women in the Church
 - o Inclusivity – LBGT et al
 - o Polarization in Church and Society
 - o Different Realities for Parishes
 - o Communication
- Did you collaborate with any non-diocesan organizations during the Consultation phase of the Synod?
 - o With which organizations did you collaborate? LBGT Community, Disaffiliated Catholics
- What is the approximate number of in-person listening sessions in your diocese? **46**
- What is the approximate number of people who participated in in-person listening sessions in your diocese? **2670**
- What is the approximate number of virtual listening sessions in your diocese? **6**
- What is the approximate number of people who participated in virtual listening sessions? **80**
- What is the approximate number of reports your diocese received from parishes and other groups? **35 (26 parishes held individual sessions)**
- Did your diocese supplement listening sessions with an online survey? **YES**
 - o If yes, approximately how many people participated in the online survey? **170**
- Did your diocese focus upon any particular questions and/or draft focus questions?
 - o Did your diocese select particular questions from the Vademecum? **YES see appendix 1**
 - o Did your diocese craft unique focus questions based upon Synod resources? **YES see appendix 2** for High School Listening and appendix 3 for Disaffiliated Catholics – specific to a parish, and appendix 4 for general questions for Disaffiliated
- Does your diocese plan to make the diocesan synthesis public? **YES**
- Does your diocese have plans to use the synthesis for other purposes? **YES**
 - o If yes, please explain – our synthesis supports the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, as well as at the regional Deanery and local parish levels for planning purposes. There is much interest in regular, on-going listening sessions.
- Please tell us anything of note about the Synod process in your (arch)diocese. What brought consolation? Were there any surprises? *Please see report*
- Do you have any additional comments you would like to share with the USCCB Synod Team? *Please see report*



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY SYNOD SYNTHESIS REPORT

Synod Team: Deacon John Becerra, Doug Culp, Father Bob Dueweke, OSA, Clare Encomio, Greta Hernandez, Pam Johnson, Father Peter Joseph, Sister Robbie Pentecost, OSF, Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.

Prepared by Synod Coordinator, Kathleen Mattone
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BACKGROUND

The Diocese of Lexington was established in 1988 by Pope John Paul II. The diocese was formed from parts of the Archdiocese of Louisville and the Diocese of Covington, covering almost 16,400 square miles and representing 50 counties in Central and Eastern Kentucky.

The Catholic population of the diocese, at 3% of the total, is very small. In addition, an estimated 60% of the total population within the bounds of the diocese does not belong to any church or denomination, although most of the residents would identify themselves as Christian.

According to the 2021 Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, report, there are fifty-nine (59) parishes; 15,780 households, 41,004 people being served by seventy-one (71) priests and eighty-seven (87) deacons. However, according to the 2019 Hispanic Ministry Quinquennial Report, the Diocese of Lexington Hispanic community is conservatively estimated to be 46,000, many of whom are Catholic and unregistered. It is believed that 90% of Catholics, registered or unregistered, in the Diocese of Lexington, live within the five counties that surround the city of Lexington.

The Diocese of Lexington serves the Horse Capital of the World, with its lavish horse-farms as well as central Appalachia. The 40 Appalachian counties of Lexington are the "other America," where 74 percent of children

live below the federal poverty line.

The city of Lexington and the surrounding counties are a center of commerce, transportation and education; within this generally prosperous area, however, there are many people in need. Most of the counties within the diocese are rural and mountain areas, facing the challenges of high rates of unemployment, high rates of poverty, and the problems that affect communities when so many lack basic necessities.

Thus, the Diocese of Lexington is designated as a mission diocese within the United States: the geographic, demographic and economic characteristics indicate an acute need to evangelize Gospel values and to provide outreach services elevating human dignity and eliminating human suffering. www.cdlex.org

PROCESS

A Synod committee was formed in fall of 2021. A diverse group in gender and ethnicity which includes clergy, as well as diocesan and parish staff and Catholic laity. Each of the six Deaneries also has a Coordinator who organized the larger regional meetings, assisted parishes in holding their own listening sessions and some coordinators collated responses and wrote summary reports. A diocesan Synod Coordinator was named in late March 2022, to gather and collate materials, facilitate additional listening sessions and draft the USCCB report. Emphasis was placed on reaching out to those on the margins. Sister Robbie Pentecost, OSF, and Father Bob Dueweke, OSA agreed to facilitate the larger Deanery sessions and support the Synodal process in the Diocese of Lexington. Their faithfulness and leadership have been a powerful witness to the Holy Father's intent of Communion, Participation and Mission.

Challenges included confusion around the Synodal process, how to train people at the parish level to provide listening sessions and some hesitancy on the



part of clergy to engage the process. Many parishes thought the six regional Deanery sessions were the only option for participation.

The diocesan Synod website was created using the suggested materials from the Vademecum and contained training materials, and all necessary forms in both Spanish and English for a variety of listening sessions: general, parish council and youth. The general sessions were most utilized. A link to an on-line survey was also included on the website.

The on-line survey showed more diversity/anonymity in answers and theological/ideological perspec-



tives than the in-person sessions. The committee did wonder how broad of a representation there was from across the Catholic spectrum with the in-person sessions. Where there were a handful of comments lamenting the loss of the Latin Mass, and some around teaching doctrine, dogma and theology. From anecdotal observations, this smaller group either felt it (the Synod) was "not going to bear any fruit" and/or they have differences of opinions/political viewpoints with our current Bishop and Pope.

A consolation was how deeply people love our Catholic faith, the sacraments, and especially the Eucharist. Despite differences and conflicts, people were amazed how much we have in common. Overall, there is a reverence and respect for the hierarchy and a joy in being part of a universal Church.

The surprise was the remarkable and resounding gratefulness around the synodal process from those who participated. One older man shared, "I have been back in the Church for two years-after 50 years away-and this event (Synod listening session) has gone a long way in helping me feel good about my return. I felt like I was served the fattened calf."

PARTICIPATION

With participation of over 2670 people across the Diocese of Lexington, we held forty-six (46) in-person listening sessions, ten (10) Zoom sessions with eighty-five (85) participants, received thirty-five (35) listening session reports and had 170 people participate in our on-line diocesan survey.

We collaborated with one specific non-diocesan organization: Disaffiliated Catholics – those who no longer attend church. Our hope had been to also include sessions for the homebound, and homeless. Neither of these came to fruition.

Our diocese did focus upon the eight original questions from the Vademecum (appendix 1) with the addition of "What surprised you?" and "What would you like to tell the Bishop and/or Pope?" Bishop John Stowe faithfully attended every Deanery session and one larger group Hispanic follow up session. People were able to speak directly to him. This experience was profound and symbolic. The actual opportunity to be "listened to – BY the Bishop" was extraordinary.

We did craft unique focus questions from Synod resources. For our Lexington Catholic High School listening sessions, the teachers chose materials from the Diocese of Cleveland (appendix 2). And for our attempts to reach our absent brothers and sisters, one parish developed a resource loosely based on materials from Moving Towards Synodality (Cathy Harmon-Christian) in (appendix 3), and a more sim-



plified version was developed for the in-person and Zoom Disaffiliated sessions (appendix 4). Unfortunately, these were not well attended due in part to communication issues.

The Diocese of Lexington is planning to publicize the Synod Synthesis on the diocesan website and through its social medial channels and the Cross Roads publication sent to every Catholic household. It does support the current Diocesan Pastoral Plan. Interest is growing at the Deanery and local parish levels to use information gleaned from the sessions for planning purposes. It appears to be having a grassroots impact, as those who participated are excited.

Across the diocese there is confidence that there will be on-going and regular listening sessions. And that we can truly learn to be a more synodal church.

Here are the top ten themes/topics that emerged from our Synodal Listening:

• YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT ENGAGEMENT

In every Synod listening session, this topic was mentioned. Whether speaking in Spanish, Swahili or English, Catholic people are concerned about the future of our Church. Many young people participated in listening sessions at the Deanery and parish levels. And several days of "listening" were done at Lexington Catholic High School, where 260 students, mostly sophomores with some freshman and seniors participating.

At Lexington Catholic High School, the religion teachers chose materials from the Diocese of Cleveland (appendix 2). This format included a thirty-minute experience of the Examen, where each student reflected on their early memories of "church" and then concluded with small group sessions of sharing and then identifying emerging action items to submit to the diocese.

The high school students were most concerned that the Church be more welcoming, inclusive, current/ relevant in the world, outreach to those with drug and

mental health issues, women in leadership and opportunities to help those in need. Many felt that they are not invited to participate in liturgies as lectors, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist or musicians. Although some of their best memories of Church are around sacraments (First Communion and Confirmation mentioned most) and interactive rituals such as the stations of the cross or waving palms.

There was one session held at a Catholic Newman Center on the campus of Eastern Kentucky University, with fourteen participants. Primarily our young people are longing for connection through liturgy, small faith sharing groups, social activities, as well as opportunities to witness/evangelize in the world through good works.

College aged students in Lexington who attended the Deanery session tended to be more conservative and questioned the Pope's decision to limit the Latin Mass. Many were concerned with the COVID restrictions on reception of Communion (limiting the cup and receiving only in the hand) and expressed their desire for more Greek and Latin to be used in liturgy. When pressed on this subject, they shared, *"It is the way the Church used to be, originally."* And, *"We want to practice our faith authentically."*

Again, this was a small sample of students. The larger University of Kentucky Newman Center declined to have specific listening sessions for students due to timing of spring break and final exams.

An area of interest for all young people was the need for the Church to do more social justice. They seemed to long to participate in corporal works of mercy and felt this was an important way of "living their faith". Many also mentioned the need for more retreats, Catholic Youth Leadership events and the desire to attend World Youth Day.

Quotables: #1 answer to "What is the Holy Spirit calling you to..." Care for/serve others.

- *"We are being called to be inclusive to all types of people and welcome them. We also need to make the Church more relatable and exciting for all age groups."*



- *"Need to talk about current world situations in church and all churches should be connected."*
- *"Help those affected by drug use and depression."*
- *"Help those in need and spread the Word."*
- *"More women in leadership positions."*
- *"Be more forgiving."*

• FAITH FORMATION – "WE ARE HUNGRY!"

The topic of faith formation was discussed at every listening session. People seem to be especially eager to be in community again, perhaps considering the pandemic and its social restrictions. Many mentioned the need for education around the Vatican II documents, scripture, faith-sharing small groups, learning new prayer forms, multigenerational activities and retreats. Several groups across the diocese wondered why we didn't have a diocesan retreat center and director.

Interestingly, the rural parishes felt they were being excluded from the spiritual programming happening around Lexington. They wondered if there was a way to use technology to share across the state. The smaller parishes often don't have the staff or numbers of people interested to provide specific programs, but they hoped some resource-sharing could be worked out. "With all this Zoom technology, it seems like we should be able to have more going on!" quipped a parishioner from Eastern Kentucky.

And while there is an effort to restart programming, post-pandemic, there seems to be little or no coordination around consistency or specifics. Even when it comes to catechesis and sacrament preparation. Many wondered if there could be some standardization around these resources. Rural parishes pondered if they could combine their programming and share ministry support, especially when it came faith

formation, family and youth activities. Deanery picnics were suggested as well as social justice activities to "Combine forces and do more good work!"

Questions were raised about grief and bereavement care, homebound ministry and providing support to young families, single parents and immigrants.

Noticing: There was a strong undercurrent about teaching "correct theology" and Church doctrine. Especially in the on-line survey where people were able to anonymously share their deeply held beliefs about what is "truth". These questions could be used in planning for future listening and faith formation programs.

• NEEDS OF IMMIGRANTS – "CAN WE BECOME ONE CHURCH?" "WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM EACH OTHER?"

Our largest immigrant population is the Hispanic community who embraced the synodal process with great enthusiasm. Due in part to the incredible hard work of Deacon Eduardo Fortini. Over 600 Spanish



speaking parishioners and community members participated across the Diocese.

It should be noted that our Hispanic parishioners were very comfortable with synodal listening due to their participation in the on-going Encuentro process. Their deep understanding of the Catholic faith was obvious through the comments they provided (and translated for our benefit).

Here are some comments about the importance of



the listening sessions:

- *“To live the tradition of our Faith grounded in the principles of the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church.”*

- *“This is an opportunity for me to understand and, above all, to share ideas with others. An opportunity to mature in the obligation we have as part of this pilgrimage looking for ways to build a better future.”*

This community of believers, especially in the rural parishes would like to have more deacons and priests that speak Spanish. They are aware of prejudices and limitations that result from language barriers and are willing to work to overcome obstacles. Many voiced grave concerns over the education and engagement of young people. *“It would be important at every parish to put more attention to young people. Most of them are very lost in worldly things.”* Another insight, *“To recognize and value the leadership of the youth in the ecclesial community, in society, as agents of transformation.”*

There were also mention of women in ministry, *“To empower the active participation of women in ministries, leadership, discernment, and decision at the ecclesiastical level.”* Many who participated in the sessions shared the gifts they bring to the Church - leadership, education, youth ministry, prayer, maintenance of church buildings, altar society and music ministry. There were also frustrations about the lack of financial assistance and support for Hispanic families who struggle to make ends meet. *“I work two jobs to feed my family, I need help from the Church and I can’t get it.”*

It bears re-emphasizing the importance of the four pillars of the national Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry.

- **Pastoral de Conjunto** – to live the spirituality of synodality and ongoing conversation in an attitude of how to listen, communicate and work together, such as, with pastoral reflection and planning.

- **Evangelization** – support and promote Bible



study, prayer groups charismatic movements, ACTS, Cursillo etc.

- **Missionary Option** – drawing those who have left back to the Church.

- **Formation** – we must promote and educate Hispanic Catholics to be equipped to lead at all levels: parish, deanery, diocesan and national.

Communication and strong leadership are vital to all our immigrant parishioners. The Congolese community repeatedly shared that communication and community connections are critical to them. Their deep love of God as expressed in their Catholic faith is life-giving as they face financial and cultural challenges. One person beautifully stated, *“I have very little, but I give what I have to God to help others.”* Gospel living is inspiring.

• **DISAFFILIATED CATHOLICS - WE ALL KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS LEFT THE CHURCH**

This was a mantra heard at every listening session. *“What is the Church doing to bring people back?”* One person mused, *“Wonder why we never do exit interviews?”* Families shared stories of brokenness and anger around the topic. Difficulties over discussions, past hurts, feeling unwelcome, unwanted and frustrated over the Church’s position on issues such as the LGBTQ community, the sexual abuse scandal,



clergy accountability, the treatment of indigenous people and people of color over the centuries, appropriation of land and property. Many felt the Church was out of touch with the modern world and struggled with exclusion from sacraments, based on sexuality, politics, and marital status (divorced). There were matters raised on the Church's position on birth control, the treatment of women in general as well as the role of women in the church. *"If women are 52% of the people in the pews, why don't they have equal representation and a voice in the Church?"*



In our listening sessions with those who have left the Church, it was found that people often leave in response to how they were treated by someone in ministry. Several shared hurtful comments and actions by priests or parish staff who created a hostile environment, or one of fear, shame or guilt. One person stated that their greatest hurt with the Church is *"Not knowing if God really loves me."* While there was not a large turnout for the sessions held for Disaffiliated Catholics, one parish, developed a resource that could be shared with families or friends to open the conversation about faith/religion (appendix 3).

There were significant questions around annulment processes (even from our youth), treatment of divorced Catholics and those who left the Church because they or someone they love was not welcome – particularly with LGBTQ people. Suggestions were made to *"Open up Communion to anyone who*

desires Jesus" and *"A hope that one day all Christian churches would be united."* *"I want my grandchildren to have the great joy of being Catholic, how can I share that with them?"*

• CLERICALISM/CHURCH AUTHORITY

While many people did not specifically call the divide between the clergy and the laity, "clericalism" it was discussed openly, and frustrations shared. Angst was felt among those in the pews as well as parish staff, both paid and volunteer. Concerns included: priests that wield too much power and did not include the laity in decision-making, planning or education. One small parish shared that they could never have Holy Day Vigil Masses after 6 pm, because *"Father doesn't like to be out past 7 pm."* Even though most people in the parish are working families (who commute to jobs) and are unable to get home in time for a 6 o'clock service. *"People just don't go to Mass."*

There were examples of priests not including staff in pastoral planning. One staff member shared that they had only had two staff meetings in ten years. *"How can we help further the mission of the Church, if we don't have a shared vision and plan?"*

Politics and polarization were mentioned over and over again. Even people who might share political affiliations with their pastor/deacon felt it was inappropriate for them to preach or share about political issues from the pulpit.

Another parishioner said that when their priest is out of town, the church building is locked, *"It sends a message that Father is the Church. Last time I checked, we are the Body of Christ."* There were many examples of disconnects between the clergy and "people in the pews". Rural parishes were particularly vocal about priests (both American and for-



eign-born) not understanding their culture and trying to impose standards that are not consistent with their lived experience.

It bears repeating that there was a general lack of clergy support/interest in the Synod Listening Process across the diocese. Only twenty-six of fifty-nine parishes held sessions.

The reality of and on-going perceived lack of accountability over the clergy sexual abuse scandal was one of the most mentioned responses to “things that break my heart about the Church”.

Quotables:

- “Be more transparent in the things we do.”
- “Better communication.”

• Role of Women in the Church

There were multiple conversations around women’s roles in the Church in nearly every listening session. During our high school sessions, young women asked repeatedly, “Can women be deacons or priests?” A high school senior asked, “Why can’t women preach? I am tired of never seeing anyone who looks like me or has the experience of being a woman telling me how to live my faith life.”

As the number of religious women in parish support roles declines, parishioners are worried about what will happen if/when the “sisters leave”? Many women on parish staff feel underappreciated and not supported in their desire for additional formation. They also felt underpaid for work they are expected to perform and shared about the long work hours. There seems to be a lack of education and modeling for the laity around self-care, with discussions around burn-out and the future with so few young people working in or being trained/educated for church ministry.

A significant number of people mentioned their desire to see women ordained as deacons, some mentioned women in the priesthood as well. Across the age spectrum, gender and ethnic groups there was a resounding call for an expanded role for wom-

en in Church leadership.

One retired deacon shared that his wife went through his five years of formation, “...every step of the way, and at the end, I got a collar and she got to sit at the back of the church.” The voices of women were clear about their desire to be recognized for the sacred gifts they bring to the Church.

• INCLUSIVITY – LGBT ET AL

“What is the Church’s position on the LGBTQ members?” If only everyone could read the comments by those who participated in the sessions for this community. The shared pain of feeling unwelcome, shamed and targeted by the Church was heart rending. Family members found little or no support within the Church. In our diocese there is only one parish who openly welcomes LGBT people. A parishioner of a small, rural church gave an example of “church hypocrisy” when he said prior to one recent Sunday Mass, the pastor stood up and stated, “If you are gay, homosexual or lesbian, don’t bother coming to Communion.” Ironically, the opening song at Mass that day, “All Are Welcome.”

At many sessions there was confusion about what the Church teaches regarding LGBTQ people. Politics often were a part of this conversation. And parishioners feel unsure about what to believe and how to treat people who are not like them.

This topic seemed especially significant to our youth. A high school student wondered, “How would Pope Francis feel, if he found out his best friend was gay?” Clearly a dilemma for this student as he struggled to reconcile how much he cared for his friend in contrast with what he knew of Church teaching about homosexuality.

In an email received: “I did not choose to be Gay but was born this way and I tried for a majority of my lifetime to be straight, and it never happened and will never happen. I don’t want a pill to change who I am. I am born in the image and likeness of God, not an abnormality. My love for my partner who loves me so much is not immoral but a part of our lives.”



From a listening session: *"LGBTQ+ people are invisible. Last year, five teenagers committed suicide in our community. A gay friend adopted three children, one of whom has mental issues. The church is missing an opportunity to bring these kids into the faith and show them love."*

Inclusivity extends beyond the LGBTQ community. There was concern over how we treat all "others" who are not "like us". Racism, segregation and exclusion were all mentioned in the sessions held for non-English speaking parishioners. Immigrants, the disabled, those with hearing impairments and the autistic were given as examples. On a Zoom listening



session a woman cried when she talked about not being able to attend Mass due to her severe allergies, she wondered if it could be announced/published when incense would be used, so she would know if a service was safe to attend.

• POLARIZATION IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

A theme echoed throughout the entire Listening phase. *"We need to get back to being one, holy, catholic and apostolic church."* The sense of polarization and divisiveness in the Church and the world concerned most participants. There wasn't so much a call to be right or wrong, but a need for reconciliation,

to get back to *"...living as Jesus did – caring for the poor and marginalized."* Repeatedly people shared the delight and hope their faith provides as well as the desire to make the world a better place. From the youngest participants to the oldest in this synodal process people have shared their deep yearning for unity, understanding, respect and compassion. They long for opportunities to come together for the healing of our troubled world.

• DIFFERENT REALITIES BETWEEN PARISHES

Due in part to geography and population, there are disparities between the central Kentucky parishes (those near Lexington) and those in Appalachia. Laments were shared particularly around resources. Again, communication was mentioned as a source of frustration. Staffing of parishes, religious formation and programming, financial resources and lack of oversight were all listed. There seems to be a renewed interest (post pandemic) in how to use technology to connect people. Parish staff appreciate being in communication with oth-

ers doing like-ministries, such as those who are in catechesis and youth ministry. Hope revolved around being able to initiate and maintain these connections, not only for resources, but also for moral and spiritual support. At one Deanery follow up meeting, the priests described people dying weekly of fentanyl overdoses, families who may not have access to clean water much less the internet. Their ministry is often driving into rural areas to connect with people who have no job, poor living conditions and no hope for the future. The challenges are very different from the wealthier, more urban parishes. One person pondered, *"What would the diocese look like if we could get back to Gospel living?"*



• COMMUNICATION

This theme resonated through all the others. Dissatisfaction over communication at the parish and diocesan level was an undercurrent of the Synod Listening phase. Related in part to the pandemic, and people's need to feel connected, it also spoke of a deeper expectation. There were issues on the very basic levels, where people were unable to reach a priest for anointing, or family emergencies, to examples of

waiting days to weeks for email to be answered as well as how to effectively connect people to parish and diocesan programming. Communication is always a two-way street, but maybe there is something worth noticing that parishioners feel their concerns are not being heard. Perhaps because our faith is such an intimate part of who we are, we want to feel confident in those whom we have trusted with our spiritual care. We pray that the synodal process will teach us new ways to hear and respond to each other.

DIocese OF LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY MISSION STATEMENT

*Guided by the Holy Spirit,
we witness to Christ's saving love
as disciples and missionaries in the
fifty counties of our mission Diocese.*

*As a Eucharistic people,
we celebrate the sacraments,
promote justice in word and deed,
minister to the spiritual and material needs of all,
and evangelize by living and sharing
the Word of God and the teachings
of the Catholic Church.*

Promulgated December 8, 2007



APPENDIX 1:
DIOCESAN LISTENING GUIDE



Synod 2023

Listening Session

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Opening Prayer - Lectio Divina
3. Videos on Synod
4. Ground Rules for Conversation
5. Small Group Discussions
6. Large Group Recap
7. Evaluations and Next Steps
8. Closing Prayer



Discussion 1 (15 minutes)

- 1) One thing our parish does really well is...
- 2) One thing I think we could do a better job with is...

Discussion 2 (15 minutes)

- 3) One thing that is a source of joy or sustenance for me, spiritually, is...
- 4) One thing that is a struggle for me, personally, in the faith is...

Discussion 3 (15 minutes)

- 5) When I show up to church, the one thing I am most looking for is...
- 6) One gift that I, personally, bring to the church is...

Discussion 4 (15 minutes)

- 7) One thing that breaks my heart about things going on in the church is...
- 8) One specific hope I have for the church moving forward is...

Ground Rules for Conversation

- 1. Listen with love:** we commit to listening to each person with an open mind and heart.
- 2. Listen humbly:** we remind ourselves that each person speaking carries untold burdens and bears unseen wounds. We commit to listen with compassion and without judgment.
- 3. Listen without interrupting:** only one person will speak at a time, and we pledge to do our very best not to interrupt—even if it is to express support or agreement! (“You nailed it!” or “I know exactly what you mean!”) If we hear something that really resonates with us, once the person has finished speaking, we can express our support, sympathy, or shared experience.
- 4. “I Statements”:** we often use “you statements” in everyday language. (“You know how when you’re driving downtown and you see a person on the corner with a cardboard sign, and you feel bad, but you also know that there are services available?”) Similarly, we sometimes invoke generalizations, absolutes, or the opinions of others. (“Everyone loves the annual fish fry!” or “I hear people tell me all the time that they stopped going here because of the music.”) We will be intentional in using “I statements” and sharing firsthand experiences, instead of generalizations or universal assertions.
- 5. Discussion, not debate:** our goal is to listen and discern where God is at work in our lives, not to argue or repeat talking points. We commit to sharing honestly, without snark or sarcasm.
- 6. Sharing, not seminar:** we are here to share about our faith journey, not to debate doctrine or tackle thorny theological questions. People may struggle with particular aspects of Church life or Church teaching, and it is entirely legitimate to share one’s personal experiences, as it pertains to living out the faith. But the conversation should not become an academic seminar or catechesis session.
- 7. Constructive, not complaining:** individuals may have legitimate and important critiques of how the Church has failed fully to live out its mission at all times and in all manners. We pledge to avoid personal attacks and gripe sessions, instead utilizing these experiences as a starting point to ask how the Holy Spirit would like to utilize each of us in addressing those failures and shortcomings.
- 8. Confidentiality:** when we share with the larger group or provide a report to the diocese, we will not attribute statements to individuals by name, but say, “One member of our group said...” If we wish to follow up with someone about something that was said, we will do so privately and only with that person’s explicit permission (“My husband has said the same thing about a lack of a men’s group... would you mind if I told him that you would be interested in forming one?”)
- 9. Full participation:** some of us are natural extroverts with lots to say. Others are more introverted and may need more time to process. No one is required to speak, but all should have an equal opportunity. We commit to limiting our own contributions so that there is adequate time for all to respond, and to making sure everyone has had a chance to speak at least once before anyone shares for a second time.
- 10. Silence is okay:** our entire conversation is grounded in prayer and guided by the Holy Spirit. There may be times when the group is silently meditating on a question or pauses to allow a previous speaker’s words to sink in more deeply.

APPENDIX 2:
**LEXINGTON CATHOLIC HIGH
SCHOOL LISTENING GUIDE**



Synod 2021 - 2023

LCH Listening Session - Leader Guide

(adapted from diocese of Cleveland, Ohio materials)



Your voice matters!

Welcome – if the gathering is large, divide groups into 6 people each – establish a scribe for each group

Introduction to the Synod – may use Diocesan Videos (<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjXDiyLIbgn1FKq-x2Ti-BwmEjcCxgpj9>) or YouTube Sketch Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5IAktuejwo>)

Explain the process – and what will happen with the gathered information

1. Everyone will have an opportunity to be heard. It's important that we all be sensitive to allowing space for everyone to speak.
2. Silence is OK. Sometimes the silence allows us to formulate our thoughts.
3. In my role as facilitator, I may at times gently interject to keep our conversation moving and not sidetracked.
4. We will be taking notes so we can submit your thoughts to the diocese/vatican
5. If you would prefer to send your thoughts personally, you can email Greta Hernandez at Ghernandez@cdlex.org or complete the brief survey on our Diocesan website. <https://cdlex.surveyparrot.com/s/synod/tt-d5fce6>

Begin with a moment or two of silence and if it seems appropriate, lectio or you may also consider the use of music

Lectio – with a quote (choose one below – or one you feel is appropriate)

- *This blessing takes one look at you and all it can say is holy. Holy hands, holy face, holy feet, holy everything in between. Jan Richardson Circle of Grace*
- *Food for the body is not enough. There must be food for the soul. Dorothy Day*



You will be prompted to move through the questions and there will be time for a large group recap at the end.

LCH Listening Session

Share and listen, round 1

Each person in the group or circle takes 2-3 minutes to share aloud with the group the fruits of your individual prayer, and say how you are feeling using these lead-in statements:

“In my prayer today... And I feel...”

Anyone in the group can begin, and the person on their left is the next person to share. If that person is not ready to share, move on to the next person but remember to come back around. Continue clockwise around the circle, until each person in the group has had their turn. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.

Reflect

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 2 minutes. During this time, think about what you have heard the people in your group say, and ask yourself:

“What am I hearing the Holy Spirit saying to us?”

You may wish to journal, to draw or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

Share and listen, round 2

Each person in the circle takes 2 minutes to share with the group from their reflection. What have you heard the Spirit saying in the voices of the group? Use these lead-in statements: “Listening to the Holy Spirit through the voices of this group, I have heard... And it leaves me feeling...” This time when sharing, do not add anything new to the conversation – just your response to what you have heard already shared.

Reflect

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 2 minutes. During this time, think about how you are feeling and about your experience of prayer and listening today.

Share and listen, round 3

This third round of sharing and listening is open, less structured than the previous two rounds. The purpose of open conversation is to reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what the Spirit is asking of us. Any person who wants to speak is invited to share. During this time, remember to listen deeply when someone else is speaking, and to respond to the conversation with an open and kind heart. In light of all you have experienced today, share your thoughts and feelings with the group. When sharing, you might like to begin with these words:

“From our prayer and conversation today, and thinking about how God is calling us to be a Church that journeys together...”

When the time is right, close the conversation

by saying thank you to one another for sharing and invite everyone to enjoy a short break. Remember to note the time to get back together after the break.

Possible break

LET'S THINK LOCALLY (20 minutes)

Reflect

The whole group reflects in silence for 2 minutes. During this time, think about the concrete, practical steps which could be taken to move forward as a Synodal Church that journeys together.

Share and Listen

Each person in the circle takes 2-3 minutes to share their ideas with the group. If you are using post-it notes, place these in the center of the group as you speak about them. Anyone in the group can begin, and the person on their left is the next person to share. If that person is not ready to share, move on to the next person but remember to come back around. Continue clockwise around the circle, until each person in the group has had their turn. When others are sharing their ideas, remember to listen with an open and humble heart. You can ask the person sharing about their idea for understanding, and be sure to resist critique.

Group discussion, towards decision

Once everyone has shared their ideas for action, your group's task is to identify 2 or 3 emerging actions that can form the group's submission to the Synod contact person for your parish, school or organization.

Below are some questions to guide your group's discernment:

- **What feelings and/or experiences did we all resonate with?**
- **What actions do we feel strongly called towards? In our personal life? In our parish, PREP or school community? As a diocese?**
- **In our group, what are concrete practical steps we can take to journey together as church?**
- **What is the most loving response that the Spirit is calling us to?**

Remember, these actions need to be:

- clear
- stated as a positive
- as specific as possible
- a real action (practical, achievable and measurable)

Write down the 2 or 3 emerging actions that have been drawn from the discussions.

Reflect

An important part of discernment is listening to the voice of God within each one of us. This means we need to take notice of how we are feeling. Before submitting your group's response, take some time to reflect and pray individually on the emerging actions the group has identified. Ask God for a feeling of consolation— a feeling of peace or fullness of your heart about your decision.

“How do I feel about our proposed actions, our group decision?”

LET'S GIVE THANKS (5 minutes)

You may like to say together the prayer provided below or just speak to God from your heart.

**Holy Spirit Prayer
of Saint Augustine**

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
That I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
To defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
That I always may be holy.

LET'S RESPOND

The class teacher/catechist is asked to compile the input from the small groups and their whole class and provide a completed Report Form. The information gathered should be shared with your diocese. The form below may be completed and sent to Greta Hernandez ghernandez@cklex.org



LCH Small Group Discussions:

Share and listen, round 1

Each person in the group or circle takes 2-3 minutes to share aloud with the group the fruits of your individual prayer, and say how you are feeling using these lead-in statements:

In my prayer today...

And I feel...

Reflect

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 2 minutes. During this time, think about what you have heard the people in your group say, and ask yourself:

What am I hearing the Holy Spirit saying to us?

Share and listen, round 2

“Listening to the Holy Spirit through the voices of this group, I have heard... And it leaves me feeling...”

Reflect – 2 minutes

During this time, think about how you are feeling and about your experience of prayer and listening today.

Share and listen, round 3

From our prayer and conversation today, and thinking about how God is calling us to be a Church that journeys together...

LET’S THINK LOCALLY (20 minutes)

Reflect

The whole group reflects in silence for 2 minutes. During this time, think about the concrete, practical steps which could be taken to move forward as a Synodal Church that journeys together.

Share and Listen

Suggested Practical Steps:

Group discussion, towards decision

Once everyone has shared their ideas for action, your group's task is to identify 2 or 3 emerging actions that can form the group's submission to the Synod contact person.

Write down the 2 or 3 emerging actions that have been drawn from the discussions.

ACTIONS:

1.

2.

3.

Reflect

An important part of discernment is listening to the voice of God within each one of us. This means we need to take notice of how we are feeling. Before submitting your group's response, take some time to reflect and pray individually on the emerging actions the group has identified. Ask God for a feeling of consolation— a feeling of peace or fullness of your heart about your decision.

“How do I feel about our proposed actions, our group decision?”

APPENDIX 3:

MARY QUEEN OF THE HOLY ROSARY DISAFFILIATED LISTENING GUIDE



MARY QUEEN OF THE HOLY ROSARY
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR WILLINGNESS TO
PARTICIPATE IN A LISTENING SESSION!**

We look forward to hearing your thoughts. We are gathering information from a variety of listening sessions for a Church Synod. Synod is a Greek word (*synodos*) meaning a meeting or assembly. It is a combination of the Greek words *syn* meaning “together” and *hodos* meaning “way or journey.” This process of synodality is therefore a process of journeying together. During the listening session, you will be provided the opportunity to answer these questions...



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one vivid memory you have from a past experience at church?
2. What factors in your own life have impacted your participation at church?
3. What do you need from a church?
4. What thoughts or experiences come to mind when you hear mention of the “Catholic Church” or “being Catholic”?
5. What is one thing positive about the Catholic Church?
6. What is one thing the Catholic Church could improve?
7. What would you say to the Pope if you could speak directly to him?

IMPORTANT CONVERSATION DETAILS

Everything said must be kept confidential. Do not include names on conversation notes.

Everyone should commit to listening with love, with an open mind and heart, humbly, without judging. Understand that this is a time for sharing and discussion, not a seminar or debate. Speak constructive comments. Avoid complaining and criticism.

Allow one person to speak at a time, with no interruptions. Keep in mind that all should have an opportunity to speak, so limit contributions to allow time for everyone to respond. Each person is not required to speak. Also, silence is okay and may be needed to reflect on the question or to allow a previous speaker’s comment to sink in more deeply.

Remember it is acceptable and expected for varying thoughts and feelings to be shared. Listen empathetically.

Again, thank you for participating!

APPENDIX 4:
**GENERAL GUIDE FOR THE
DISAFFILIATED**



Synod 2021 - 2023

Listening Session - Leader Guide

Your voice matters!

Welcome – if the gathering is large, divide groups into 6 people each – establish a scribe for each group

Introduction to the Synod – may use Diocesan Videos ([link](#)) or YouTube Sketch Video ([link](#))

Explain the process – and what will happen with the gathered information

1. Everyone will have an opportunity to be heard. It's important that we all be sensitive to allowing space for everyone to speak.
2. Silence is OK. Sometimes the silence allows us to formulate our thoughts.
3. In my role as facilitator, I may at times gently interject to keep our conversation moving and not sidetracked.
4. We will be taking notes so we can submit your thoughts to the diocese/vatican
5. If you would prefer to send your thoughts personally, you can email Doug Culp at DCulp@cdlex.org or complete the brief survey on our Diocesan website.

Begin with a moment or two of silence and if it seems appropriate, lectio or visio you may also consider the use of music

Lectio – with a quote – would avoid a scripture passage or anything “too” Catholic

- *This blessing takes one look at you and all it can say is holy. Holy hands, holy face, holy feet, holy everything in between. Jan Richardson Circle of Grace*
- *I don't want balance, I want harmony. I want to let my life flare up. I want to let my life sing. Valerie Kaur in A Seekers Guide to Spiritual Direction*
- *Food for the body is not enough. There must be food for the soul. Dorothy Day*
- *Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes. Maggie Kuhn*

Visio – some groups have had success using the symbol of the Synod (which should be on the papers at the tables) as a visual reflection, invite people to look at it and share “what they see”.

You will be prompted to move through the questions and there will be time for a large group recap at the end.



5. What would you say to the Pope if you could speak to him directly?

Notes:

If there are concerns or issues around abuse: Laura Napora, LCSW, the diocese's Victims Assistance Coordinator: (859) 338-5695 or victimsassistance@cdlex.org

Family/Friend sessions: very small group around the dinner table or on Zoom

These can be very powerful opportunities for families/friends to come together to talk about religion/faith. It is important to be open, non-judgmental and to create a safe space to have these conversations. Families/friends will need to check their own biases before the session. The intention is not to “bring someone back to the Church”. And we must guard against the use of shame or guilt. This should be a time of compassionate listening without any agenda.

DO

- Spend some time in personal contemplation/prayer before the session
- Set aside personal biases
- Be open to the Holy Spirit’s movement in the preparation and conversation
- Listen without judgment – this takes practice
- Share the questions ahead of your meeting time
- Explain the process and that you will be taking notes
- Take a moment of silence as you start – if it seems appropriate, use a quote or saying and after reading it twice to the group, ask what they “heard”

DON'T

- Bring your own agenda
- Criticize or try to discount what they are expressing
- Make excuses for the Church
- Try to answer their concerns – this is their time to be heard
- Counsel – if something comes up, that needs to be addressed, ask if you could talk with them after the session, don’t hesitate to reach out for professional help if the problem is an obstacle for them
- Expect change, remember this is simply a time to listen with love

Comments from family sessions:

“Just the fact that the Pope wants to hear my thoughts makes a difference for me.”

“I feel better just being able to say out loud that I disagree with the Church.”

“Thank you for just listening.”

“I wish I could find a church, it is important to have a faith family. I just don’t feel welcome in the Catholic church.”