



## Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky Synthesis Interim Phase of the Synod on Synodality 2024



*“The Holy Spirit had something to do about getting this group of people together.”*

**Background:** The Diocese of Lexington was established in 1988 by Pope John Paul II. Formed from parts of the Archdiocese of Louisville and the Diocese of Covington, covering 16,400 square miles and representing 50 counties in Central and Eastern Kentucky. There are 41,000 members in 59 parishes with an additional estimated 50,000 Spanish-speaking members. Across the diocese there are multicultural liturgies for communities of Catholics from Mexico, South America, Niger, India, the Congo, Korea and the Philippines. Divided into five deaneries, the diocese of Lexington covers a diverse landscape and population. Designated as a Mission diocese, Catholics are only 3% of the total population of the state of Kentucky.

The diocese participated in the Initial Phase of the Synod on Synodality and the report can be found on the Diocesan website ([www.cdlex.org](http://www.cdlex.org)). The same committee gathered to plan for the Interim Phase with the addition of folks from Youth/Young Adult and Communication ministries as well as two women in parish leadership from the Appalachian region of the diocese.

**Synod Committee:** Mike Armstrong, Deacon John Becerra, Doug Culp, Father Robert Dueweke, OSA, Edward Bauer, Greta Hernandez, Lori Helfrich, Pam Johnson, Father Peter Joseph, Ward Kline, Kathleen Mattone, Sister Robbie Pentecost, OSF, Bishop John Stowe, OFM, Conv. and Kirsten Thorstad. The committee is grateful for the faithful help of Deacon Eduardo Fortini.

**Process:** The Diocese of Lexington Interim Phase of the Synod comprised three listening sessions during Lent 2024. Two in Lexington one in English and one in Spanish one in London (closer to the eastern part of the state) which was bi-lingual - Spanish and English. A total of 160 people participated.

In response to the Vatican recommendations to engage with diocesan ministries, the committee reached out to leadership to consider additional in-person or virtual sessions. Due primarily to limited time constraints and the “busy-ness” of the Lenten season, all declined to sponsor or offer listening sessions.

Despite the challenges, the listening sessions were well received by those who attended. Using materials developed by Father Robert Dueweke, OSA ([www.cdlex.org/synodality/](http://www.cdlex.org/synodality/)), participants were enthusiastic and energized by the Conversation in the Spirit method. A unanimous response to the sessions, *“We need to do regular, on-going discussions like this.”*

Participants were given time to reflect on a scripture passage and then respond to two questions which were asked in the three-round conversation in the spirit method. Periods of silence were observed after individual sharing and each round. Table summaries or conclusions were offered in a final plenary gathering.

The questions were adapted from the Vatican document, *“Towards October 2024”* and were designed to follow the direction of the Interim phase by going deeper. Four documents created for our sessions can be found here [Materials for Listening Sessions](#)

**Question 1: How do we become a Church that listens to everyone? How do we discern the voice of the Spirit as we listen to our hearts and one another? What gets in the way?**

**Question 2: Having listened to the Spirit, how do we engage all the baptized in Christ’s mission? What gets in the way?**

In reviewing the summaries of the final round of listening from each session, the themes that emerged generally reflected what was discovered in the initial Synod listening sessions in 2021-22, as well as listening sessions held in 2018-19 during the development of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

One loudly expressed theme - a deep and abiding love of our Catholic faith. A second unanimous declaration was gratitude for the opportunity to gather, listen and to be heard. Despite short notice and communication challenges there was an energy in each session that can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit.

#### **Biggest Challenges:**

1. Limited time frame for holding listening sessions, during the Lenten season.
2. Participants were unfamiliar with the process of Conversations in the Spirit.
3. Table summaries/conclusions may have been more focused on individual responses to the process.

**What we heard:** In distilling down the sharing from the table groups here are summaries of our findings. These are listed in order of priority as in most mentioned.

#### **Faith formation – Lifelong, Multigenerational and Intentional**

A deep desire for faith formation was shared at every session. This included improved catechesis for children and adults, but also multigenerational experiences, instruction on prayer forms, more times for adoration, retreats, small faith sharing groups and cross-parish, deanery and diocesan opportunities. The importance of individual prayer and silence were identified as neglected in the world today. There was a longing noted for education about Church teachings, Vatican II documents, synodality, mission and the Church in the modern world.

“Formation/catechesis is crucial and a challenge.”

“Let’s grow faith as individuals, families, parishes, dioceses and Church.”

“The gift of the Holy Spirit was present to open our hearts to share, often we do not make time to do this.”

## **Youth and Young Adult Engagement**

Our youth and young adults were present at the second session of listening and were primarily from the Hispanic community. Concerns were expressed at every listening session about how to keep young people involved in the Church. Parents, grandparents, pastors, youth leaders and catechists were especially worried about this phenomenon.

“There is a hunger for God.”

“We need to lead by example starting within our families.”

“It is not just about talking but about being a generator of change.”

“Youth have fear. They need discernment. Overcoming lack of trust. We are all one body. Overcoming shame.”

## **Evangelization/Mission**

This topic seemed vital to participants. Primarily around the questions of “How?” Spanish speaking Catholics were very focused on this aspect and shared great wisdom. The idea of developing and nurturing one’s own faith was significant and then extending that to families, parishes, communities, and beyond. It should be noted that this topic was identified as one of five priorities in our Diocesan Pastoral Plan developed in 2018-19.

“Avoiding sin in order to live our mission with a sense of responsibility according to each one’s vocation.”

“Can we be filled with joy and go out and attract others to the mission of Christ?”

“The voice of God is calling us.”

“Unity and Mission is an active response – we model it.”

“Care for the poor of all kinds as mission.”

## **Church Leadership**

A shift in people’s experience from the Initial Listening Phase to the Interim was noted. Less conversation about clericalism and more about polarization and politics. Some clergy who participated voiced frustration about how to engage with their parishioners when challenging issues are raised and how to invite participation in parish life. Several participants shared that they did not feel informed about the Synod, locally or globally.

Role of Women in the Church – discussion around this topic came primarily from women who are currently working in ministry.

Disparity among parishes - the emphasis seemed to be on the need to share resources, and collaboration. Differences between our urban and rural parishes are a reality. What resources, best practices in ministry, education and technology are needed to bridge the gaps? There was a palpable desire to find ways to come together for prayer, faith formation and service.

“We need strong shepherds who follow Christ’s teaching.”

“The clergy is not supporting synodality.”

“Women must have a bigger role in the Church.”

“Organize our parishes to pray together, share ideas, invite others, listen to more voices, evangelize, reflect on scriptures and communicate.”

## Unity/Diversity

This topic seemed to shift slightly from our initial sessions. It became more about unity in our diversity. The longing stemmed from the need to communicate across cultures and find ways to come together to share in the work of Jesus in our world. There was discussion about being more inclusive which centered on building relationships, trust and seeking out the marginalized. Lament was heard over those who have left, especially young adults/families and those who have been hurt by the Church.

“We need to make space for the “quiet ones”, the marginalized, who are they?”

“How do we heal those who have been hurt by the Church?”

“Eliminate prejudices, celebrate diversity and have mutual acceptance.”

”Recognize fears – politics, social media, lack of knowledge about Church teaching, with people we don’t know such as immigrants, and those we may not understand like the LBGTQ community.”

## Desire for Regular, On-going Synodal Listening

The enthusiasm of participants was tangible. Many asked when we would gather again, and several indicated a desire to get involved with the Synod.

“The Synod itself is a huge step – sharing and listening.”

“According to Pope Francis, the Synod is not a congress but a conversation.”

“New listening does not negate old teachings and confirmation of the Spirit.”

“Start with yourself, start listening.”

## Summary

Did we achieve our goal of defining **“HOW can we become a synodal Church in mission?”** (syod.va TOWARDS-OCTOBER-2024\_XVI\_II-Session.pdf). We are a diocese who longs to walk together in faith.

Conversations in the Spirit discernment is a new way of “being” Church for us. An opportunity to tune our hearts and minds to listen to each other and to the Holy Spirit. A majority of those

who attended an Interim listening session reported that they truly enjoyed the experience and would welcome further participation. There may be great benefit in a coordinated effort to teach and practice the process of deep listening in the Lexington diocese to help us grow into a more synodal Church.

The fruit of this Interim Phase echoed the Initial Synod Phase as well as previous listening done in development of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. The people of God of the diocese of Lexington are hungry for faith formation, engagement with youth and young adults, strong church leadership, evangelization, and unity/inclusivity. We need and want to listen and be heard and are called by virtue of our baptism to mission.

*“We want to grow more in our humanity and to achieve holiness.”*

*“I am a talker who is now a listener and a listener who is now a talker.”*

*“We all want to be validated, loved and heard.”*