



Synod 2021-2023 Report

Diocese of Lubbock, Texas

Introduction

The Synodal Process within the Diocese of Lubbock was conducted in almost every instance through the personal facilitation of the Diocesan Bishop, Most Reverend Robert M. Coerver. Listening sessions were conducted by the Bishop with Deacons, Priests, Diocesan Staff, the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and at every parish celebrating Confirmation in 2022 before June 15.

Prior to the announcement of the synodal process, Bishop Coerver intended to conduct listening sessions in the parishes this year as a means of reconnecting with the parishes and faithful across the diocese as conditions caused by the pandemic improved and people began returning to the Sacraments and parish activities throughout the diocese. Bishop Coerver has an advanced degree in Counseling and Guidance and utilized his skills of group facilitation and encouragement.

Common Concepts: The Journey

In considering the experience of the life of Faith as a journey, several concepts emerged in the process, and common threads surfaced through those concepts.

The journey is, first, an individual one. The Church needs to be more serious about evangelizing and living, teaching, proclaiming the Word of God. The Sacraments of the Church are integral to that journey. One of the devastating effects of the pandemic experience was the lack or reduction of availability of the Sacraments for a period of time. Sentiments of “abandonment” were expressed by some, even though protection and safety of the Faithful was the purpose intended.

The journey is both communal and individual. The individual must assume primary responsibility for the journey. For many people, it is very difficult to connect with the diocesan Church. There is a lot of tension between “Lubbock” parishes and the rural parishes.

Sometimes it seems like the local parish is a closed system without reference to the diocesan (especially) or universal Church’s journey – pointing to the need for work on unity as diocese and as Church Universal. The number of people refusing or declining to be active on the journey, especially through the local faith community, is disheartening.

There are a lot of people drifting away from the journey and the life of the Church. How can we get them back? Our secularized society is having a profound negative impact on the journey.

The journey is very generational. Concern for the faith journey of young people – in Church and outside of Church— involvement was a consistent, probably the single most dominant, theme in the entire synodal process. Youth are longing for an experience of the transcendent – is the Church tending to that longing?

In addition to youth, our “elders” seem to be neglected. Generally speaking, the people involved in the listening sessions had a lot of faith in the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the

journey – the journey of individuals and the journey of the Church even during times of division and polarization, even if hindered by scandals over the years.

The journey certainly consists of ebbs and flows, but the Spirit is still active therein. A task of the Church's preaching ministry, especially, is to help sensitize the Faithful to awareness of the Holy Spirit at work in their midst — in every circumstance.

The Church's role in teaching the principles of the Faith during the various phases of the journey is essential – and that role has not been well actuated in recent decades. The Holy Spirit's presence is most readily perceived and impactful through retreat opportunities, especially Cursillo. However, every member of the Church needs to encounter God's Spirit in their experience of prayer.

Significant companions on the journey were noted in several settings. The parish priest is certainly a very important companion. However, fellow members of the local faith community also play a significant role as companions. Distance from the journey seems to be caused by people leaving the Church, divisions within the Church, and the pull of society which is alienating people from Church.

Common Concepts: Communication

Within the Diocese of Lubbock, almost every listening session considered the topic of listening, so central to the synodal process. Many people feel listened to in their parish community, but many people also feel that they do not have a voice in the Church.

Involvement in Church activities surfaced as an opportunity to get one's voice heard. In a number of instances, the local clergy were pointed out as actually being hindrances to listening; in other instances, they were cited as the Church's most effective instrument of listening. The Church's hierarchical structure can impede the process of listening.

Cultural differences can hinder listening. There was also strong sentiment expressed that members of faith communities need to listen to one another more attentively and deliberately. Overall, work needs to be done within – and by the institutional Church – on all levels (parish, diocese, universal) to be better at the art of communication.

However, the Faithful also acknowledged that they need to listen to the Spirit at work within them by being faithful to prayer and attentiveness to the Word of God, as well as the Spirit's presence in the Church's teaching role. Again, the single most frequently mentioned shortcoming of listening on the Church's part is contact with youth and young people.

However, the Church must not be neglectful of the "elders" either. Finally, several gatherings explicitly mentioned the synod process as a good "start" at becoming a more "listening" Church.

Common Concepts: Formation

Regarding speaking out, the Faithful feel that they do not know the Faith well enough to be credible witnesses to the Faith. Members involved in the Catholic Campus Ministry at a major university said, "We know what we do as Catholics, but we don't know why do it." More formation in the Faith is needed for all ages. And the Church does not make good use of the media, while the media controls so much of people's lives.

The Presbyterate of the Diocese expressed significant opinions regarding celebration of our faith journey. There is a need to respect the tradition(s) of the Church, but we must also work to integrate our rituals with what is going on in the daily lives of the Faithful. More attention needs to be paid to the meaning and quality of the celebration of our Sacramental Life.

It is important that clergy respect and draw from the practices of the community they serve, and not adopt an imposing attitude upon the community. There is still much work to be done to help the

Faithful appreciate their baptismal commitment and commission. The Mass needs to be better understood, which the Eucharistic Revival — now starting — might help to bring about. People need to be invited into full, conscious, and active participation.

Sharing responsibility for our common mission demands of the Faithful far more involvement than they are giving currently. The pace of life makes involvement difficult.

Common Concepts: Relationship

As Church we are not always as welcoming and inviting as we ought to be. Our youth, our young people, feel very distant and neglected. We need to find ways of reaching out to our young people — doing it the way we always have is obviously not working. One rural parish's example — given by elderly members of the parish — was that they themselves need to stop telling the younger women in the church kitchen that they are cutting the potatoes the wrong way.

Our young people do not feel welcomed, cherished, served. That has got to change!

Dialogue within the parishes should be taking place through gatherings and pastoral/finance council meetings. Of course, the pandemic made such gathering impossible, and in many places parish pastoral councils have languished since the pandemic.

Dialogue with society needs to take place through the various modern means of communication. As mentioned above, the Catholic Church seems to lag way behind secular and social media communication, causing many people to lose interest in and/or concern for living the life of Faith.

The Presbyterate of the Diocese feels rather strongly that divisions within our society/nation are causing dialogue to be virtually non-existent. The Diocesan Staff feel that Church entities need to encourage dialogue and examine ways to reduce the “hoops” people must jump through to include

Church in their lives. Dialogue is particularly difficult in rural areas. Diocesan personnel might need to take initiative to begin dialogue with the parishes.

Within the Diocese of Lubbock there is not much dialogue with other Christian denominations – at least blatant anti-Catholicism has dwindled in the past few decades. There are opportunities where dialogue could be initiated (e.g., at funerals), but are those opportunities seized? As Catholics we have a tendency to maintain a somewhat “closed society.”

Much effort needs to be put forward by Church members and institutions to invite greater participation in the life of Faith and within our communities of Faith. Indifference dominates our Catholics and our society. Specific groups within parishes need to join with other groups more frequently and serve as sources of unity within the parishes.

The parish priest can assist this by effective and responsible delegation, by being a listening presence, and by actively sharing responsibility for the life of the parish. All too often the priest is perceived as a barrier to growth and movement forward for the parish. Parish leadership needs to invite, involve, and empower the parish members.

The priests do not always represent or “pass down” the model of governance which is actually at work on the diocesan level. On the level of the universal Church, governance continues to be primarily “top-down,” male dominated, without much opportunity for teamwork. The Presbyterate of the Diocese has experienced the use of consultative bodies and organizations as a benefit for local governance.

The Priests appreciate the need for the Faithful to speak up, and they realize that the priest can assist that by developing more of a listening approach. The Presbyterate feels strongly that we need to listen to the people and let them talk about THEIR needs.

Common Concepts: Discernment

It is apparent that the Faithful of the Diocese of Lubbock understand the necessity of prayer and explicit invocation of the Holy Spirit for genuine discernment to take place. In recent years leadership efforts within the Diocese have served to help the Faithful understand and appreciate the role of discernment. Discernment is threatening to some because it leads to change. Others appreciate the need for change within the Church today. Such change must result from genuine discernment.

“Walking together” must begin with gathering together. Gathering requires a welcoming attitude and atmosphere. And when gathered, listening is essential. Retreats would be of benefit to the process of “walking together.”

The synodal process has, perhaps, set a tone for the future. And, of course, our gathering must be inspired by the Word of God and celebration of the Eucharist.

Conclusions

To summarize, the single greatest need in the Church of the Diocese of Lubbock today is our ministry to young people. We must welcome them. We must teach them effectively and in ways they can understand (the Aristotelian and Scholastic categories used in our theology do not have much meaning for young people today). We must include them, not as the Church of the future, but as the Church today. Our communication with them needs to make use of contemporary methods.

Our elders must also be tended to. Especially in the wake of the pandemic, there is a lot of isolation, absence from the Church and the Sacraments, and there is still a lot of fear of the disease. The elders of our parishes know and have expressed that they must also do better at communicating among themselves and with the larger community of Faith.

The middle generation is in desperate need of knowledge of the Faith. The basic teachings of the Church need to be presented to them in appropriate ways. They need help to apply those teachings to their daily lives. They need support in raising their families amid the pulls of the world of work, societal pressures, and overly busy lives.

Many people deeply appreciate their Priests. But the local Priest is often perceived as a barrier to listening, discerning, and moving forward. Sometimes the role of Pastor is handled in an autocratic way rather than involving true collaboration with the members of the parish and their legitimately constituted leadership. Pastoral Councils must be bolstered in our parishes. Pastors are not helping to make the Diocesan Church present in the parishes.

Finally, an atmosphere of dialogue and toleration needs to develop. Listening is not always easy; and it is not highly valued in the public forum today. Events of the past few years have shown that as a nation, and within Church as well, greater appreciation of our multicultural reality needs to be manifested.

We must gather together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, be involved, work together, and build up the City, the Kingdom, of God, which is our task as Missionary Disciples of the Lord Jesus.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert M. Coerver". To the left of the signature is a small blue cross symbol.

Most Reverend Robert M. Coerver
Bishop of Lubbock

July 1, 2022