

Region X Synthesis Report

Introduction

(1) The (arch)dioceses in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas and the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter comprise the Episcopal Region X of the Catholic Church in the United States of America. The geographic area includes people of many different cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, and people of many different generational ages living in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

(2) Among Catholics, different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as different generational ages are representatives of the rich variety of the People of God in the region. Some of the fruits of the synodal process – revealed in the (arch)diocesan reports — were the value of the diversity in ages, cultures and opinions and the consultation – and listening to — with those participating, and how each with their own gifts contributes to the building of the Body of Christ.

(3) The 19 syntheses from the (arch)dioceses and the Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter each expressed gratitude for the synodal process. Some noting the embracement of the process by participants after initial apprehension of the Catholics of each diocese. The report from the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter explained initial apprehension due to distrust and previous experience with “synod” as former Protestants, particularly from the Anglican tradition. Reports noted the gift of the process and some movement to unity in the Church after feeling heard and “listened to” after participating in listening sessions.

(4) Some reports noted the work of the Holy Spirit in the timing of the synodal process, with listening sessions beginning while many areas of the region entered a phase of waning severity of the COVID-19 pandemic with people returning to the Sacraments and parish activities. The summaries acknowledged the impact of the pandemic on the Church including on the areas of worship, fellowship, Church finances, social outreach, and communication efforts among many others.

(5) The reports demonstrated the differences and consistencies in the journey of faith, gratitude, and consolation, as well as struggles and desolations of the Church and Her people in the cities, towns, parishes, and missions across Region X. The reports revealed faith journeys that included adding people to the journey — seeking input from non-Catholic voices and welcoming returning Catholics as the COVID-19 pandemic waned — and losing people on the journey—losing those who felt underserved: youth, young families, divorced and remarried, and people who have not returned to Mass.

(6) Some of the (arch)diocesan reports focused more on the human aspects of the Church— participation in ministries, fellowship, governing bodies, and procedures, among other aspects. While other (arch)diocesan reports focused on worship aspects, or spirituality, of the Church – love and appreciation for the Holy Eucharist, liturgical celebrations, and the need for faith formation, among others.

(7) Some of the reports focused more on the struggles of the Church with acknowledgement that work can be done to address each topic. The reports also recognized gratitude for the process from all levels of participation for the opportunity to come together and the invitation to have their many voices heard to work on a more evident journey together.

(8) Many of the reports show that the synodal process was a fruitful part of the faith journey and of the spiritual life of the Catholics in the region. The reports emphasized a need to help those on the journey to listen to the Holy Spirit at work through prayer, the Word of God, and in the voice of the Church as mother and teacher.

(9) There is a desire for openness to dialogue between the members of the Church, and the Church and society without compromising the integrity of the deposit of faith handed down by the Apostles' teaching. In addition, a need for outreach to those on the margins continues to exist, and language, cultural, differences, and political opinions can be a barrier to fruitful dialogue.

(10) Many Catholics want to cultivate a welcoming, inclusive, less judgmental Church for people in many different circumstances, and to embolden Catholics to speak and share ideas –in society and within the Church— with courage and Parrhesia that is, in freedom, truth, and charity (*Preparatory Document, 30*).

(11) The reports concentrated on *Communion, Participation, and Mission* expressed in areas of (in no particular order) – *Worship, Fellowship, Formation, Vocations, Communication and Outreach, and Governing Bodies of the Church*. These concentrations included many aspects of the Church including community building opportunities, evangelization, the desire for formation to prepare Catholics to evangelize, cultivation of vocations, formation and support for priests, care of the young Church, and the importance of the centrality of the celebration of Mass in the life of Catholics.

(12) Many of the reports also concluded that a continuation of a synodal process in (arch)dioceses of Region X – with recognition that this is not an isolated moment, but an ongoing occurrence – is welcomed by many Catholics across the United States and Canada (as part of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter) in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The Church should continue calling on the Holy Spirit while reflecting on the results and responses of this synod.

Worship

(13) Many of the reports of the (arch)dioceses in Region X described the celebration of Mass as central to the faith journey, for “the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian Life” (*Lumen Gentium, 11*). The reports comment on needs that affect worship in the region — from the Eucharist, involvement of young Catholics in the communal and sacramental life of the Church, concerns for social justice, and Catholic teaching during liturgies.

(14) The Catholic Faithful in Region X appreciate their baptismal promises and commission. In addition, the reports revealed that Catholics love and appreciate the Eucharist, however, a better understanding of the Mass is needed and can be accelerated by the Eucharistic Revival commencing in the United States.

(15) “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10*). Understanding the celebration of the liturgy, the reports said, can help uphold the Mass as central in the spiritual faith life of the region’s Catholics. Care needs to be given to the importance and value of the celebration of sacramental life with a chance for more robust Catholic teaching from the pulpit and for priests to develop the courage to preach essential Church teachings.

(16) An (arch)diocesan report mentions parish worship settings, especially Eucharistic celebrations, and reverent liturgical celebrations, as providing a sense of community particularly because of the involvement of lay members of the Church. The report refers to community building in times of joy— such as baptisms, weddings, anniversaries— and in times of sorrow, such as supporting grieving families after funerals.

(17) In the region, some participants expressed the desire for the celebration of Traditional Latin Mass, indicating a desire for a “more reverent liturgy.” However, reports expressed that advocates of the Traditional Latin Mass perceived it as “better” or the “true Mass.” Formation and catechesis are needed to help Catholics appreciate and understand the celebration of the liturgy.

(18) Multiple reports agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected worship in the Church with grief due to the closure of buildings and deaths, many due to the virus.

(19) Reports noted that Catholics thought that building closures were due to political pressure, and they were unable to participate in the Sacraments at a time when the graces of sacraments to strengthen one's faith were most needed. Some parishes said they have not recovered, and some parishioners have not returned.

(20) Other faith traditions shared that COVID affected their churches, regardless of denomination or affiliation. During the Fall of 2021, a report noted, there were signs of hope when cases would drop and attendance at Mass, parish festivals, and (arch)diocesan events increased.

(21) Other common themes concerning the Coronavirus pandemic were of joy and gratitude for the ability to participate in the Sacraments of the Church after the closures, and grief due to the experience of deaths — many related to the pandemic as well as a sense of isolation and fear, that many still struggle to overcome.

(22) The faith journey of young Catholics— in and outside the Church— was another common concern. This was a consistent, prevailing, theme in each report from the (arch)dioceses in Region X. This concern for the young Church includes the absence of young people in the Church, leaving the Church, and the lack of youth and young adult engagement in ministries and in the communal celebration of the Eucharist.

(23) The reports recognized that we, as the Church, are not always welcoming or inviting. Young people feel distant and neglected. More effective outreach and engagement of youth, young adults and young families is needed to help faith become central to their lives.

(24) The reports revealed that young Catholics in Region X want joyous and festive liturgies with homilies addressing issues in their daily lives, to have a better understanding of liturgy and ability to serve in liturgical ministries. They are discouraged to participate in sacramental preparation when there are “too many hoops to jump through.” They desire sacramental preparation processes that are more substantive and foster a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

(25) The reports said that young Catholics should also be empowered to participate in other areas of Church life as catechists, liturgical ministers, and in other leadership roles — the fellowship opportunities could make faith central in their lives and lead to even more involvement. Examples of empowerment included: providing childcare, opportune scheduling of training or meeting times, and outreach and significance of young Catholics in leadership roles.

Fellowship

(26) “As Church, we are not always as welcoming and inviting as we ought to be,” a report said. “Our youth, our young people, feel very distant and neglected.”

(27) The reports of Region X revealed that Catholics of all ages and of faith journeys, seek engagement and support, but each report comments on the need to connect young people and the Church. The development of fellowship among parishioners, (arch)dioceses and parishes, and the universal Church were the focus of many of the region’s reports.

(28) Recognizing that the celebration of liturgy is the main source of unity and fellowship, participants acknowledged that the liturgy should not be the exclusive approach. Fostering community-building opportunities will bond the community bringing vitality and cohesion to groups and movements positively impacting parish life.

(29) This is especially relevant after the experience of the pandemic which reshaped the Church and society. Reports showed parishioners see the importance of outreach to those who have not returned to Church since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants in listening sessions also saw the importance of building relationships with those who have become alienated from the Church for “if [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy”. (*1 Corinthians 12:26*).

(30) We, as the Church, are called to be welcoming, not judgmental or rigid, in imitation of God, who “wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (*1 Timothy 2:4*). Members of the body of Christ have different backgrounds and diverse gifts and are called to the unity of the Christian family. The Church should overcome political, cultural, demographic — noted, especially, in Region X reports, rural vs. urban — and ideological divisions.

(31) The Church has the special mission to welcome those who are excluded. Discrimination based on race, gender, place of origin, or social status has no place within the community of the baptized, although, many have found a way to infiltrate and persist unnoticed, in different forms of exclusion: indifference, subjugation, assimilation, expulsion, and organizational wear out.

(32) The reports revealed that Catholics in Region X understand the importance of encounter, welcome, hospitality – serving migrants at the southern border— of family building, participation, inclusion, relationship, and community to the building the Body of Christ — with the understanding everyone is called to be ministers of hospitality.

(33) There are individuals and groups who, though they belong to the Church, are still not invited to the table – excluded from the community for various reasons. Catholics in Region X know the need for increased outreach to young people, single people, those who are divorced and/or remarried, families – including single-parent families, kinship families, blended families — people who struggle with same-sex attraction, people who identify with a gender not in line with their biological sex, parents of both groups, elderly people, people with disabilities, people in poverty, migrants, and people in the existential peripheries.

(34) The Church is aware of the need to evangelize and become witnesses — to make a personal invitation. It is time to respond to that call.

(35) The Church needs methods of reaching out to young Catholics – Catholics of all ages recognize that many current methods are not working. One (arch)diocesan report noted a rural parish’s example that elder parishioners know the need to stop telling the younger women in the church kitchen they are cutting the potatoes the wrong way.

(36) Reports found that in many rural communities in the (arch)dioceses, young people must be engaged as part of the present of the Church, so they may also be part of the future of the Church. In the future, the young Catholics could lead the rural parishes. They may also leave to larger metro areas for employment and educational opportunities, and parents expressed hopes they formed their children in faith to be engaged members of the Church.

(37) Many (arch)diocesan reports showed a desire of Catholics across the region for more ecumenism. Some reports said there was very little to no interfaith or ecumenical communication. Other (arch)dioceses reported listening sessions with interfaith and ecumenical religious leaders. The reports described ecumenical work in social ministry to those in need and participation in other public events.

Vocations

(38) Another major theme was appreciation and discernment of vocations, the gift of the priesthood and women religious in the Church and recognition of the need to create and cultivate a culture of vocations within the (arch)dioceses and Catholic families in Region X. Catholics in the region love and appreciate their priests — foreign-born and from the diocese — and their faithful service to the Church.

(39) There is also the acknowledgement of the need to encourage vocations from local communities and families for “they [Parents] should encourage their children in the vocation, which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state” (*Lumen Gentium, 11*). A (arch)diocesan report acknowledged a desire for priests to be from and serve in small rural communities. The report also noted the need to help local families encourage their children to listen to the voice of God and respond to His calling.

(40) Many of the (arch)diocesan reports also focused on the need for discernment support to be included in support for vocations. The reports said that vocational ministry also continues to be almost exclusively associated with religious vocations — to the priesthood and religious life — but there is a need for many other forms of being “companions on the journey” in the discernment process.

(41) The reports said vocational ministry and discernment could be ways to accompany Catholics to the priesthood or religious life, but the ministries could also become companions on the faith journeys of single people, and those whose journey will include the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, too.

(42) The COVID-19 pandemic stopped and reduced the main ways of gathering— retreats, ministries, and camps, but, perhaps, the synodal process sets a new tone inspired by the Word of God and celebration of the Eucharist.

Formation

(43) “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14). According to the reports, many of the Catholic faithful feel they do not know their faith well enough to be “credible” witnesses to the faith. They recognize their mission to evangelize, become witnesses, and to make a personal invitation. The baptized are called to be missionary disciples, witnesses of a personal encounter with Christ.

(44) They also shared the need to offer evangelizing and catechetical opportunities to parents so that parents can create the domestic church and embrace their role as first catechists of their children (*CCC 2225-2226*). It was also mentioned that catechists need training so that they can work collaboratively with parents. Included with that training, catechists need further training to focus on catechizing effectively to children, youth, and young adults.

(45) “The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself.” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15). To prepare for the mission, the disciples need to be formed. There is a need for catechesis as well as leadership formation. They recognize that catechesis and in-depth formation in prayer and spiritual life are needed for the faithful of all ages. Participants mentioned (arch)diocesan guidelines for sacramental preparation, religious education teachers could help in formation.

(46) They also requested guidelines for books, writings or publications from the diocese or bishop focused on prayer, with particular prayers for liturgical seasons or other occasions, devotions, or lay groups and, even, training on how to pray with one another, and spiritual discernment.

(47) Many of the reports shared that the pandemic affected the conventional methods of formation in churches across Region X. Because gathering was not recommended, parishes were forced to be creative and moved to different forms of catechetical formation for children — changing to online lessons and handouts.

(48) The changes to methods of formation also helped some families to recognize the need to nurture the domestic church, learning and relearning foundational teachings of the Church as they shared lessons with their younger family members.

(49) Catholics in the region recognize that the disciples also need to become familiar with the tools at their disposal for the mission, including new technologies. Communication between the faithful at the parochial and (arch)diocesan levels needs to be strengthened so that an effective evangelization can take place.

Communication and Outreach

(50) The reports from Region X revealed listening, central to the synodal process, as the beginning of a valued process of consultation and listening, gathering, and journeying with many different voices inside and outside of the Church. Participants noted feeling heard in their parish community, but many also felt they had no voice in the Church.

(51) Reports showed a need to improve communication in many different areas. Improvement in communication between (arch)dioceses and parishes, between parishes and parishioners, and between parishes in the same (arch)dioceses could lead to unity and reduce the spread of misinformation. This could also magnify the connection of individual Catholics to the universal Catholic Church in the world.

(52) Many reports from the region mention groups building relationships and communion through fellowship opportunities, small discipleship groups, ministries, and participation in the celebration of Mass and increasing the communication of opinions and ideas.

(53) The reports also showed that the Church needs to foster better communication, dialogue, and consultation between clergy and laity, which could be more focused in clergy formation. This would be a focus on the development of interpersonal skills and conflict resolution skills.

(54) Improved communication skills in leadership would cultivate a value of diversity in ages, cultures, and opinions in the clergy and in the laity of the Church. Valuing cultural diversity supports work toward unity with an increase of empathy and compassion and preparation for outreach.

(55) If no value is placed on respect of culture and language, they could become barriers to necessary listening and to journeying together in faith. However, cultural importance, listening, empathy, and compassion should not be opposed to the Magisterium's teaching. When in opposition to teaching, the Church—the baptized—is called to accompany, to nourish, to heal, and to learn to forgive to align with Church teaching.

(56) This communication includes outreach to groups – as encouraged by Pope Francis — on the margins. This would create the chance for invitation and to be welcoming. Catholics in the region recognized that these invitations create opportunities for missionary discipleship.

(57) In addition, the Region X reports showed a desire for transparency in decision making and in processes and procedures. The ability for the Church to share "reasons" for decisions— or as much information as permissible— would increase transparency and trust of the Church. The procedures mentioned in reports focused on the annulment process.

(58) Another focus of the reports of Region X was the Church’s needs for improvement in using media and technology for communications to serve in missionary discipleship —sharing the gospel— and covering geographic distances, to serve as the Church’s voice in social and political arenas, and to be a place to learn demographics and needs and connect the Church and society.

(59) An outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic was the use of various methods of technology to continue to attempt to connect Catholics to the Church when not physically possible — due to closed facilities or to communicate with those across the distances within their pastoral boundaries. Parishes used social media to create opportunities to bond with the Church, but they also used television and radio to continue sharing celebrations of the liturgy and the journey in faith.

(60) Reports shared tensions between the Church and society —in terms of morality, and also in terms of schedules. Parents and children must make choices between Church and other activities, rather than being active in both. Reports said there is no longer a widely accepted day dedicated for Church involvement in communities— activities, practices, or games can happen any day of the week.

(61) Active parishioners in the community and opening dialogue with school, civic and other community leaders could help with the stresses of busy schedules and encourage involvement in the Church and civic communities.

Governing Bodies

(62) Many of the reports from Region X also focused on governing bodies and decision-making structures present in the Church. Catholics in the region understand that all members of the community are called to participate in service and in decision-making.

(63) Region reports revealed that lay members of the Church want to participate in decision-making positions of authority in the Church. Lay members of the Church want recognizable empowerment and encouragement of women in proper roles of authority.

(64) Reports showed that Catholics in the (arch)dioceses recognize that women currently serve the Church in decision-making roles as chancellor, on consultative boards such as (arch)diocesan and parish pastoral councils, but they would like to reevaluate the roles of women in the Church.

(65) Participants saw the participation of lay members as possible support for the response of calls for transparency and as methods to overcome clericalism. The participants also saw lay member participation as an effective method of outreach and empowerment for younger members of the Church to be part of decision-making processes.

(66) Contributions to leadership and governance structures of the Church were also seen as possible paths to better communication, dialogue and consultation between clergy and laity. The consultation and listening begun by the synod could propel those journeying in the Church.

Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter

(67) While the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter belongs to Episcopal Region X, their uniqueness in geographical extension - the entire United States and Canada— their non-territorial nature and organizational structure deserves a dedicated heading within our summary.

(68) The primary themes in the Personal Ordinariate’s report included many consistent with those in the (arch)dioceses in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas – lay involvement in administration; collaboration with local Church; clergy care and support; catechetical efforts; and (arch)diocesan communication. Some of the themes unique to the ordinariate’s report include: the identification of the mission of parochial communities; strategic planning for development; suspicion of synodal process; local demographics; and property and finance.

(69) The report from the Personal Ordinariate expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the synodal process of the Catholic Church. The report explained that entering the process of shared discernment was relatively easy due to their collaborative approach to ministry. However, there was initial apprehension due to distrust and previous experience with “synod” as former Protestants, particularly those from the Anglican tradition had suffered and experienced instability due to the constant changes of essential elements of doctrine discussed and legislated through such entities.

(70) Other difficulties reported by the Personal Ordinariate were the difficulty of gathering in person for listening sessions because the ordinariate covers the United States and Canada — geographic distance and differences in time zones, created schedule obstacles. Also, the different types of parochial communities -

each with specific needs and challenges - as well as the fact that many of the parishes are “destination parishes” given that as personal parishes they are not territorially bound.

(71) Overall, the synodal process required creative thinking and was embraced, beneficial and fruitful for the ongoing development of the parochial communities of the Personal Ordinariate and anticipate that the model of synodal conversations will be not only positively remembered but will continue to be used.

Conclusion

(72) Gratitude for the Synodal process is evident in the people of God flowing from the Church’s willingness to listen to their voices. The faithful want to continue with opportunities for collaboration through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Church is called to a continued discernment, guided by the Holy Spirit, to continue walking together towards God. This discernment leads to a personal and pastoral conversion of the Church’s vision and structures.

(73) Catholics in Region X recognize the need to make a synodal process an integral part of the workings of the Church. Synodality is “a constitutive element of the Church” and the path “which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (*Pope Francis, Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*).

(74) The Catholics in the region acknowledge that the utilization of – and reinvigoration of – current structures and systems in the Church can empower a relationship of collaboration among clergy, the Church hierarchy, and lay members of the Church to answer many of the needs identified.

(75) Empowering more Catholics into service in decision-making roles and governing bodies in the Church boosts their faith journeys and gives them a view and better understanding of the workings of the Church.

(76) Catholics in Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma love and appreciate the Body of Christ – the Church. They want the Church to grow and thrive. They want to spread the Good News to their families, friends, and communities. The Catholics of Region X want to be missionary disciples — they just want preparation for the journey.

