

#ListeningChurch



DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN

SERVING BROOKLYN AND QUEENS

PHASE ONE

Consolidated Synod Report



“When the stranger in our midst appeals to us, we must not repeat the sins and the errors of the past. We must resolve now to live as nobly and as justly as possible, as we educate new generations not to turn their back on our ‘neighbors’ and everything around us. Building a nation calls us to recognize that we must constantly relate to others, rejecting a mindset of hostility in order to adopt one of reciprocal subsidiarity, in a constant effort to do our best.”

Pope Francis
Address to Congress, 2015



PART I: The Synodal Experience

In his remarks to the Congress of the United States, Pope Francis captures the apostolic missionary spirit of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn. Founded in 1853, the Diocese of Brooklyn seeks to address the needs of millions of Catholic immigrants who arrive in the two boroughs, Brooklyn and Queens, of New York City that comprise the Diocese. It is presided over by the eighth and current Bishop of Brooklyn, His Excellency, the **Most Reverend Robert J. Brennan.**

The boroughs' combined population is more than 4.9 million, of which 1.5 million identify themselves as Catholics. Due to its multicultural and diverse populations, Masses are regularly held in 33 different languages across the Diocese, throughout 177 parishes in over 200 churches. Its 26 ethnic ministries promote cultural events and provide an opportunity for immigrants to belong to the larger community while preserving and sharing their uniqueness and traditions. The Diocesan Statistical Overview from January 2021 reported the celebration of 7,199 Baptisms, 5,507 First Communions, 6,115 Confirmations, and 1,021 Catholic Marriages annually. The Diocesan average weekly attendance is almost 230,000 parishioners participating in 1,000 weekly Sunday Masses celebrated in Brooklyn and Queens.

The Synod process began with the formation of a Synod Committee formed by Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio. Bishop DiMarzio appointed Sr. Maryann Seton Lopiccolo, SC, Diocesan Delegate for Religious, and Rev. Joseph R. Gibino, Vicar for Evangelization and Catechesis, as co-chairs. Members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council were also appointed members. Msgr. Sean Ogle, Vicar for Clergy, and Mr. William Maier, Secretary for Communications, served as consultants for the process. Currently existing Diocesan structures became the organizing principle guiding the Synod process.

The 177 parishes of the diocese are divided into 22 deaneries. Each parish was asked to prepare a listening session or multiple listening sessions based on the pastoral

needs of the parish. Following the listening session, each parish submitted a report to the Synod Committee based on the results of the listening session. A second deanery phase then began. Each of the 22 deaneries hosted a "deanery listening session." The pastors of the deanery, parish representatives, other members of the local community, and members of the Synod Committee attended a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Bishop Robert J. Brennan. Following this liturgy, the pastors and representatives attended a listening session for the deanery. Bishop Brennan attended all twenty-two (22) of the deanery listening sessions. Several other listening sessions were held: Youth and Young Adults Listening Session, the Vicariate for Spanish Concerns Listening Session, the Polish Apostolate Listening Session, Ecumenical Session, four (4) Consecrated Life sessions, and the Diocesan Pastoral Council Session. Bishop Brennan was not able to attend several of these special listening sessions which took place after his appointment as Diocesan Bishop.

In addition to the in-person listening session, De Sales Media Corporation configured a QR code to download the Diocesan questionnaire. Approximately 1000 responses were received. This enabled the committee to gain insights from those not able to attend listening sessions, those who are alienated from the Church, and those who are listening on the margins.



PART II:

Synthesis: Discernment

The guiding principle in the organization of collected data originates in the command of the Lord, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Our attempt is to organize the data to ensure Apostolic Mission Sustainability. The data is classified by three categories: Spiritual Sustainability, Institutional Sustainability, and Synodal Sustainability.

In the first category, Spiritual Sustainability, the data revealed major areas of concern: These include but are not limited to Eucharistic Devotion, Worship and Liturgy, and Evangelization. As regards Eucharistic Devotion, the data reveal that as a community of faith we need to evangelize based on the life and teachings of Jesus. Our faith is rooted in the Eucharist, the Real Presence of Jesus Christ. Faith formation must be directed to both active as well as inactive parishioners who may not truly understand the importance of the Eucharist to an active faith life.

As regards the areas of liturgy and Worship, there are several significant issues of concern. First is the issue of cultural diversity. The Diocese of Brooklyn is noted for its cultural diversity. Many parishes minister in several languages. When parishes celebrate liturgy in these languages, separate communities form. There is the sense that there is not one parish but several. When parishioners are not afforded the opportunity of celebrating the Eucharist in their native language or to celebrate their diverse cultural traditions, they may have a sense of alienation from the worshipping community. The conclusions presented at the listening sessions call for ongoing dialogue on this issue at the local and Diocesan levels.

Evangelization is associated with Worship and Liturgy. Many respondents reported that there is a need to increase Mass attendance. In order to fulfill our shared Baptismal promises to become an apostolic missionary Church, we must become evangelizers for those who are inactive, those who are waning

in their faith, and those who do not yet know Jesus.

The data supports the conclusion that in order to accomplish evangelization goals, parishes and the diocese must direct more energy into the area of adult faith formation and programs for youth and young adults. It must be noted that parishioners sense that these are crucial for the spiritual identity of the parish. Many expressed both active and inactive parishioners will benefit from more adult faith formation. Also noted was that the Diocese of Brooklyn does offer programs for the laity to grow in faith. Parish leaders must take a more active role in promoting these programs and making them available to parishioners.

A major concern in all parishes is the lack of participation on the part of youth and adults in the spiritual and social life of the community. Many reported that the parishes and Diocese need to do more to invite youth and young adults into full and active participation in the life of the church. The Diocese of Brooklyn has an active Youth Ministry Initiative guided by the Catholic Foundation of Brooklyn and Queens, an Office for Youth and Young Adults, and programs geared specifically for youth and young adults. The general sense is there needs to be more and better communication on the local and diocesan levels.

Also closely associated with Spiritual Sustainability is concern for family formation. Parishioners revealed that many families want to be included in the parish community. In order to support all families, both traditional and non – traditional, greater awareness must be paid to the diversity that now exists within the family unit. This includes family members living on the margins of church and social life. Groups identified as being marginalized or having a sense of fear or rejection include but are not limited to: divorced and remarried couples, single parents, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the homebound, families living with special needs, victims of domestic violence, and those families living with addictions.

The issues which emerged in the conversations concerning Spiritual Sustainability lead to the issues concerning Institutional Sustainability. Four critical issues surfaced. First is concern about clergy availability. There is an earnest concern for the clergy. The numerical decline in priestly personnel and an increase in administrative responsibilities create a situation in which parishioners sense that their pastors are not available to them. The parishioners maintain their clergy needs to be more visible within the neighborhoods and on the streets. This also implies that there needs to be a reduction in administrative responsibilities. For this to occur the laity must take a more active role in administration.

The data present an explicit desire for more lay leadership roles in the governance of the Church both on the local and Diocesan level. This includes both volunteer roles and salaried positions. This allows pastors to shepherd their people. As the laity assumes more administrative responsibilities the clergy will use their time and talent for more pastoral duties. Parishioners also wish for a plurality of personalities to emerge within the local community. Currently pastors rely on the same parishioners; diversity allows for more involvement. There is also a sincere hope that while many women are involved in positions in the Church, they are not invited to more prominent roles, including prominent leadership responsibilities, involvement in decision-making, and in active ministerial service.

Closely aligned with these concerns is the consistent call for better communication on the local and diocesan level. Parishioners want to know more about the financial situation and governance of both the parish and Diocese. People expressed a need to be “heard”. The consultation process of informing constituents of situations and needs must be expanded. There is also a call for full and open disclosure of information on all levels.

A better use of technology could enable this disclosure to take place. There is a growing sense among the People of God that a better use of technology would enhance the role of the Church in the modern world. Youth and young adults respond to social media. We experienced the role of communication technology during the covid-19 pandemic in keeping parishioners confined to their homes in contact their local faith community. It has proven to be a helpful tool in ministering to the homebound. New forms of media technology provide inroads for reaching inactive Catholics those registered parishioners who rarely attend parish programs. Technology provides opportunities for the transmission of information on every level of Church life.

The final level of concern as regards Institutional Sustainability involves a desire for greater levels of collaboration and cooperation on local and Diocesan levels. Given the growing demands made on clergy personnel, structures must be put in place which allow for growth and flexibility. New protocols allowing for shared responsibilities and interaction within Diocesan organizations must be developed. There is a call for more consistency in policies in the Diocese. At the same time, the faithful wish to see Traditions upheld. The message of unity in essentials, flexibility in non-essentials and charity in all cases is consistently presented in the data.

The final area of analysis is that of Synodal Sustainability. Many expressed a desire for a continuation of open discussions such as those the synod process provided. Many shared their hope to have more of a dialogue as the Church moves forward. However, it is on this point that some laity did express their concern and fear that the clergy did not want the synodal process to continue.



Next Steps

Now that the Diocese of Brooklyn has completed the first phase of the Syndal process, we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit for growth in our apostolic missionary efforts. The first is in relation to the spiritual life of our parishes. Each pastor should be encouraged to continue listening sessions. This desire is clearly expressed in the reports that have been submitted. The Presbyteral Council of the Diocese with the College of Consultors are asked to begin a program of pastoral planning that will lead to the reduction of administrative responsibilities on the part of the pastor freeing him to shepherd the people entrusted to his care. Lastly, greater efforts are encouraged within deaneries for co-operative and collaborative ministry fostering awareness of the life of the Church beyond parish boundaries and in light of the fundamental question of the universal nature of the Church.

Secondly, currently existing diocesan offices are asked to expand adult faith formation programs. This may involve more coordinated efforts in communication with parishes about these programs, formation of courses designed for leadership, and courses designed for the education of the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The aim of this step is to enable formation for Missionary Discipleship. The use of media and technology could enhance the effectiveness and growth of such programs. A second aim of this action step is to enable parishes to design and maintain grass-roots programs themselves that meet the specific needs of the parish.

A third action step involves the Youth and Young Adults of the Diocese. Crucial for the success of this recommendation is parish support for a vibrant youth and young adult ministry. The Catholic Foundation of Brooklyn and Queens provides funding for the Catholic Youth Initiative. Pastors should be encouraged to apply for available grants. Priestly involvement in this ministry is also recommended. The aim of this recommendation is for the development of effective youth ministry, greater involvement of youth and young adults in the spiritual and

social life of the parish, and spiritual growth in the understanding of youth and young adults as missionary disciples.

The fourth recommended action step involves lay leadership. The Holy Spirit Institute for Lay Leadership is an endeavor sponsored by the Diocese. A new mission and vision statement supported by the pastors of the Diocese seems necessary. The aim of this recommendation is to address specific requests that emerged in discussions at both the parish and deanery listening sessions. Lay men and women would have opportunities for spiritual and educational growth. This would enable them to assume leadership roles in their parishes and help in the development of growth identified earlier in this synthesis.

Lastly, the fifth action step responds to the request for greater community building and growth. At Synod listening sessions parishioners asked for more opportunities to share and reflect on their Catholic experience. Their request is for more active listening. This includes greater involvement in larger community issues, more ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and outreach to those who live on the margins.



Conclusion

The Synod Listening Process leads the Diocese of Brooklyn to the words of Jesus found in St. John's Gospel:

Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth. "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. and I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

The Synod 2023 is a gift from God to the Church. The People of God of the Diocese of Brooklyn are also a gift to the Church from the Lord Jesus. We pray that the work of the Synod will send into the world apostolic missionary disciples to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ entrusted to the one, Holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church.