

SUMMARY REPORT
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
SYNOD/LISTENING SESSIONS

The following is a summary of the 31 listening sessions conducted at St. Francis (Feb-May, 2022) as part of Pope Francis's call to synodality. This report includes key learnings that address the 10 themes provided by the Archdiocese of San Antonio grouped by the two questions posed at each listening session. While it is not a representative sample of what all parishioners might be thinking, it's the result of excellent sessions where we prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit, and then listened to one another as we voiced our perspectives and lived experiences of the Church, Archdiocese, and parish.

Our parish feedback was sent to the Archdiocese along with reports from other parishes within the Archdiocese of SA. The Archdiocese summary report was then used as input to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) National Synthesis of the Diocesan Phase of the Synod, and ultimately, the Vatican Working Document for the Continental Phase of the Synod. We've provided links on our website to these three additional summary reports which reveal some similarities in the feedback from our parish participants. We thank all our parishioners who took the time to participate in this synodal process and look forward to other opportunities as we journey together as a Synodal church.

- I. In what ways do we journey together as church?
 - Welcoming reputation: We're known for being a welcoming parish with a spirit of hospitality. Examples include the greeters and hospitality ministers, the conversations before and after Mass, and the layout of the church facility. The large offering of ministries, activities and organizations provide opportunities to journey together. We have a challenge to guard against the impression that participation is limited to those who are already involved. What is our personal responsibility to invite larger participation with new parishioners?
 - Communication to the parish—Weekly bulletin, My Parish app, Facebook postings and weekly email newsletters keep parishioners informed about parish activities, faith formation offerings, parish needs and service opportunities. We have a good following on social media that includes a variety of subscribers, including family members and out of town, former parishioners.
 - Parishioner generosity – Parishioners are generous with time, talent, and treasures. Our challenge is to grow our levels of participation beyond 13%.
 - Parish acceptance: Parishioners share a common belief in God and speak with kindness while being accepting of all backgrounds, race, lifestyles, and viewpoints.

- Adaptability to Covid – We provided opportunities for parishioners to continue to enjoy the liturgy and many faith formation events through the effective use of technology.
- Active ministries and organizations – We have a variety of liturgical and outreach ministries led and often initiated by the laity. We have a robust group of organizations formed around mission, commonalities and interests. Good examples of reaching out to other parishes include Habitat for Humanity funding and builds, Mobile Loaves and Fishes meal and clothing service, and COPS/Metro civic engagement.
- Liturgy – Our weekend Celebration of the Eucharist liturgy is beautiful, participative, meaningful and universal. Our rituals, especially the Triduum, are what keep many coming back to the Mass. Our Children’s Liturgy of the Word is a favorite learning activity of our children.
- Faith formation - Our faith formation opportunities for adults and youth serve as invitations to full, active and conscious participation in parish life. RCIA and ACTS, sacramental preparation for Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation and Marriage provide opportunities to draw close to God and community. Sponsors and sponsor couples accompany persons in formation for receiving the sacraments. We promote strong prayer life – Centering Prayer, Taize, Holy Hour Adoration, Women in the Spirit and praying of the rosary in both personal and communal settings.

II. In what ways is the Holy Spirit calling us to better journey together?

- Young families – We heard a call for better support for young families so they can participate in parish life and deal with child-care issues that often present barriers to their participation. How are we addressing the real-life concerns of families?
- New parishioners - Newcomers may not feel as welcomed or invited to participate. We heard a call to find new ways to meet them, make them aware of ways to be engaged and personally invite participation. We are being asked to guard against perception of cliques which might be limiting engagement. How can we strengthen our processes to better welcome our new brothers and sisters to this parish family?
- Those Who Have Left – We need to reach out to those who are missing or have left the Church and find out why. We heard many express concern for their adult children who are struggling with sexual orientation, marriage and divorce status, personal hurts experienced in church settings, etc. Additionally, we are not perceived as relevant by teens and young adults. We’re losing them. What attracts people to our parish? What drives or keeps them away?
- Worship – There was a desire to have our worship better address the diversity of our community and challenge our response to the gospel in both attitudes and actions. In what ways can we grow in accompaniment, inclusion and action for justice? There were

real questions of how relevant we are to teens, young adults and young families in teaching, preaching and praying.

- Divisiveness in the Church – We heard many stories of divisiveness caused by political ideologies and other controversies. Parishioners are often fearful and avoid conversations about controversial topics. They seek understanding of the Catholic teaching, as well as pastoral approaches. Social media polarizes and distracts and can be a barrier to listening respectfully and engaging in healthy dialogue.
- LGBTQ+ community and the Church: At many sessions we heard the concerns of individuals, parents, friends and allies of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. Some feel "welcome" if they are "attend only" Catholics - not represented in ministries or family events. They fear if they tell their story, they will be denied participation in ministries. We heard that LGBTQ persons who want to come to church with partners and/or children are seeking acknowledgement, support and encouragement.
- Inclusivity - The Church can be very fundamental, judgmental, and inconsistent about who is welcome or not. "All are welcome" means "ALL" are welcome. Ex. LGBTQ, divorced Catholics, people on the margins, women in leadership, those who vote a certain way, those of different or no faith. We heard questions about access to sacraments and the role of the laity, especially women, in leadership.
- Catholic teachings about justice – We heard a call to be courageous to use voices for advocacy and activism just like Jesus and live the Gospel of biblical justice. How can we be more visible in witnessing to the injustices in today's social & cultural context? We heard a call to talk about things parishioners are doing around justice (end of the death penalty, gun safety, voter registration efforts, voter education, and sexual orientation).
- Opportunities to dialogue - Make "synodality" a continual process in the parish. We need to teach and encourage respectful listening and loving, responsible, dialogue. We need to foster respectful dialogue within and across Small Church Communities (SCCs). There is a desire to provide time and space for the community to gather regularly for conversations that form us as community and address concerns in parish life. There is also an interest in creating opportunities to dialogue with groups not in the mainstream - LGBTQ, those with mental health issues, parents of special needs adults/children, persons experiencing domestic violence, etc. Additionally we heard parishioners express these desires for more listening sessions around **all** pro-life issues - abortion, immigration, racism, women's rights, gun violence and gun safety, death penalty.
- Laity involvement – Role of laity (especially women) is limited. We heard that liturgical ministries seem to be reserved to ordained clergy even when there are precedents and models: lectors, acolytes, ministers of Holy Communion. We also heard a call to enlarge our laity involvement and personally invite others to ministries and leadership opportunities, especially young people. Many parishioners are over-extended and burn-

out and aging-out occurs. Parishioners observed limited opportunities for the 35-45 age group. Time of day is often an issue.

- Partnering with other parishes and faiths – We heard a desire to learn, commune, and partner with those from other parishes and denominations. How do they welcome others? We heard a desire to create more fellowship opportunities across other parishes and faiths. We heard calls to expand our experience of the Catholic Church in San Antonio to more than our Northside location.
- Church decision-making and leadership – There is the perception that there is limited laity participation in decision-making. Few parishioners even know about the Pastoral Council and its role or when and how needs of the parish are determined. At several sessions, we heard a request to share issues Pastoral Council is considering and find ways for parishioners to provide input. Some expressed a need for women to be acknowledged and given visibility as co-leaders. We heard concerns about diaconate being limited to males only and a desire for expanded leadership of women at all levels of church life. We heard concerns about priest and diaconate formation, specifically their initial and continuing formation, to be welcoming, open to lay leadership, and collaborative.
- Adult Faith Formation – We heard a call for more adult faith formation opportunities (time slots and topics) and enthusiastic promotion of it as part of life-long, continuous learning and formation as disciples. We also heard requests to share reliable, resources about Catholicism, understanding the Mass, what a Bible Study is about, ways to pray, etc.
- World is in need of God—We heard concerns about the neglect of religious influence, and about a lack of teaching about morality. Concerns were also expressed about the real presence of evil and how de-sensitized we have become to it. We also heard a desire to recognize more intentionally that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and each person and creation is a child of God.
- Becoming more welcoming— Parishioners acknowledged their responsibility to get out of their comfort zones to meet someone new perhaps by going to different Masses or sitting in different sections of the church. Make "welcoming" contagious and rediscover our social skills we lost with COVID. We heard recognition that we should all be "hospitality ministers" and renew parishioners' sense of commitment to the community.
- Living our Mission – We heard a desire to live as if the people of God are in fact the "Church". The Mass never ends; we go out to live it. Being Catholic means more than attending Church. 10% do the active ministry for the other 90%. Participants expressed a need to educate and promote opportunities for service/engagement in parish life. There was a desire to create more opportunities to reach out to those on the margins -

those in our neighborhood who are poor, those needing spiritual support or grief counseling, support for mental health, those who are homebound.

- Reaching teens and young adults - We need to find out what our youth (teens and young adults, especially young professionals) need to be fed by the Church. Life Teen is great, and we also need to make sure we are focusing on listening and dialogue as much as the social aspect. Incorporate Catholic social teachings into Life Teen.