



Beloved People of God,

Pope Francis has invited us all, through the synodal process, to engage in an experience of intentional sharing and listening with the Church and one another. St. John-St. Paul Collaborative (SJSPC) responded to this invitation to journey in synodality. Over 450 faithful responded to their baptismal call and engaged in varied ways throughout our local process. The Collaborative Synodal Committee is grateful for every participant in this diocesan consultation and wishes to acknowledge their decisive value in the life and mission of the Church. We thank those as well who have taken the time to read and consider this document which is a synthesis of our findings.

As was exemplified by the process itself, we are taught by the Holy Spirit to walk in a posture of constant response to the will of God. St. John-St. Paul Collaborative commits to an ongoing culture of synodality at the local level. SJSPC also looks forward to engaging fruitfully with our local Bishops in communicating the needs of People of God, to dialogue about the current reality of the local Church, and to discern the signs of the times.

Inspired by the words of the Holy Father, “Let us not soundproof our hearts; let us not remain barricaded in our certainties. So often our certainties can make us closed. Let us listen to one another.”

To aid in this reading, here are a few items of note:

- ❖ **Approach and Format:** Our report includes information on how the local phase of the Synod on Synodality was implemented within our Collaborative, details about the opportunities offered and the participation by the community, and a discussion of the major themes that emerged.
- ❖ **Next Steps:** This report will be submitted to the Archdiocese of Boston and to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops where it will be joined by reports of dioceses across the globe. The Synod on Synodality will discern these documents in October 2023 at the Vatican. SJSPC will continue to hold annual listening sessions to maintain the culture of listening and journeying together.
- ❖ **Limitations:** Nearly all of the data retrieved from the SJSPC is qualitative in nature. Quantitative data is included in the introductory material of this document. The majority of this report is illustrative of what participants shared most predominantly.

- ❖ **Quotations:** Direct quotations are used from participants. They are sourced from in-person and online respondents. They have been included where anonymity can be completely maintained and where they are widely representative of a common perspective.

- ❖ **Terms:** The body of the report separates the content into Major Themes.
 - A 'Major Theme' is to be understood as a theme that emerged consistently throughout the listening process and was surfaced by the majority of participants.
 - The order of themes does not reflect priorities or frequency of responses.
 - The terms 'participants', 'respondents' and 'faithful' are used interchangeably throughout the report.

This report is a culmination of our collective journey of faith at SJSPC. While the Synod's purpose is not to 'produce documents', we have endeavored through this document to faithfully capture and convey the major themes raised by the participants.

Those who did participate have opened themselves to the ongoing process of being a listening Church and to journey with one another in the Church's path of synodality. With trust and confidence in the Holy Spirit we offer this report.

Sincerely,

The 2022 St. John-St. Paul Collaborative Synod Committee

Synod on Synodality Report

St. John-St. Paul Collaborative

Introduction

The St. John-St. Paul Collaborative (SJSPC) advanced and participated in the local phase of the Synod on Synodality in the following ways:

- **The establishment of a SJSPC ‘Committee for Synodality’.** In September 2021, our Collaborative Pastoral Council (CPC) began the process by actively discerning and promoting the Synod within our Collaborative. An outcome of this discernment was the establishment of a ‘Committee for Synodality’, composed of parishioners and staff, to organize the synodal journey for the Collaborative.
- **A ‘Synod Launch’ weekend in February 2022.** Our bulletin was dedicated to introducing and explaining the ‘Synod on Synodality’ and how it would be unfolding at our Collaborative, and our celebrants focused their homilies on the meaning and history of ‘synodality’ and what it means for us and for our Church.
- **A robust SJSPC Synod online presence** via our [website](#) and social media platforms ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#)). Our website served as the ‘hub’ for the Synod, providing information, education, updates, and a portal for online participation. Our social media platforms were used to share information about the Synod here at the Collaborative, within the Archdiocese of Boston, and around the world, and to engage participants in the work of the Synod.
- **An extensive catechetical process on ‘Synodality’** throughout the season of Lent, including:
 - A community read of the Pope’s recent book *‘Let Us Dream’*
 - Invited speakers on the topic of the history of synodality in the Church
 - Weekly bulletin and website articles on the concept and history of synodality.
 - An article (“*Wellesley Catholic churches seek all voices and stories during Synod process*”) in our popular local online newspaper, *The Swellesley Report*, to reach those in our community who might be disconnected from the Church
 - A Lenten Gift campaign surrounding the lived synodal work of *Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program*.
- **A ‘Question of the Week’ campaign** throughout the Easter Season to allow participants to respond either on physical cards or online via our website to the following six questions:
 1. *When have you felt most welcome in the Catholic Church? When have you felt most excluded?*
 2. *If you were having coffee with Pope Francis what would you say?*
 3. *If I could change the Catholic Church in one way it would be... And this is why...*
 4. *How could the Catholic Church be more relevant?*
 5. *How can the Catholic Church more effectively celebrate diversity?*
 6. *What should leadership in the Catholic Church look like?*

- **Open Intentional Listening Sessions** (both in-person and via Zoom) respecting and adhering to silent and contemplative listening (as outlined by the Vademecum and Archdiocese of Boston training) surrounding the following open-ended questions:
 1. *One experience I've had in the Church that gave me comfort was...*
 2. *One thing that is a struggle for me personally with the Church is...*
 3. *One thing the Catholic Church could do to make me really hopeful is...*
 4. *What should leadership in the Catholic Church look like?*
 5. *If you were having coffee with Pope Francis what would you say?*
- **An online version of our Intentional Listening Session** to allow participants to respond remotely and anonymously to the Listening Session Questions above.
- **A closed retreat setting Intentional Listening Session with over 45 teenaged confirmandi** exploring the Listening Session Questions above.
- **A closed listening session at a local Adult Living Community.**
- **Prominent signage at both parishes to inform and engage the larger community.** Accessibility and inclusivity were major focuses of the SJSPC synod committee, with particular faithfulness to the Vademecum's appeal to reach out to the most marginalized in our midst.

Large banners were placed on the grounds of both parishes, prominently featuring the Synod logo, our website address, and the tagline *"Feeling disconnected from the Church? We want to hear from you!"*



Our Synod banner at 39 Washington Street in Wellesley in front of the St. John Parish Center.



Our Synod banner at 502 Washington St. in Wellesley in front of St. Paul Parish.

This signage on very heavily-traveled Route 16 in Wellesley invited the curiosity of residents, commuters, and passersby - including the almost 25,000 athletes running by both parishes during the Boston Marathon this year! Above all, it shared the message that our ears were open. We are a listening Church.

The qualitative data surrounding these efforts are as follows:

- **Question of the Week Participation (Cards Submitted)**

Question of the Week Participation: Reponse Cards Submitted												
Responses		Gender			Connection to the Church				Age			
Question	Cards	Female	Male	Blank	Deeply	Somewhat	Unconnected	Blank	60+	30-60	> 30	Blank
Question 1	21	10	1	10	8	3	0	10	11	1	1	8
Question 2	22	5	2	15	4	1	0	17	5	1	0	16
Question 3	20	5	1	14	4	1	0	15	2	2	2	14
Question 4	22	5	2	15	5	1	0	16	6	1	0	15
Question 5	6	0	2	4	2	0	0	4	1	1	0	4
Question 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total:	91	25	8	58	23	6	0	62	25	6	3	57
Percent:		27%	9%	64%	25%	7%	0%	68%	27%	7%	3%	63%

- **Question of the Week Participation (Online Responses)**

Question of the Week Participation: Online Responses												
Responses		Gender			Connection to the Church				Age			
Question	Cards	Female	Male	Blank	Deeply	Somewhat	Unconnected	Blank	60+	30-60	> 30	Blank
Question 1	46	35	10	1	28	15	3	0	25	18	2	1
Question 2	46	33	10	3	31	12	0	3	30	12	0	4
Question 3	40	27	8	5	27	8	2	3	26	8	0	6
Question 4	22	14	5	3	15	3	2	2	13	5	0	4
Question 5	8	3	1	4	4	1	0	3	2	2	0	4
Question 6	8	6	1	1	7	1	0	0	6	0	1	1
Total:	170	118	35	17	112	40	7	11	102	45	3	20
Percent:		69%	21%	10%	66%	24%	4%	6%	60%	26%	2%	12%

- **Open Listening Sessions (1 session held on the Zoom platform**

121 people participated in a total of 6 90-minute sessions.

- **Online Listening Sessions Respondent**

47 people responded to the 6 open-ended listening session prompt questions

- **Confirmandi Retreat**

46 students (age 15-16) responded to the 6 open-ended listening session prompt questions.

From these efforts, several major themes emerged during the aggregation of the collective experience of the Church shared by the participants:

- Leadership, Transparency, and Accountability
- The Role of Women
- LGBTQ+ Outreach
- Priestly Ministry
- Family Life

Discussion of Major Themes

Leadership, Transparency, and Accountability

A strong sentiment of lack of transparency and accountability emerged throughout our preparation for and execution of the local Synod consultation. Many of the lay faithful voiced suspicion that the clergy were not open to hearing the views of the laity. The erosion of trust was primarily rooted in the clergy sexual abuse crisis, but that was not the only source of their uncertainty. While the Synodal Committee and many participants expressed satisfaction and even optimism at the opportunity to come together for synodal listening, and a desire for it to continue, many expressed concern that their thoughts would ultimately not be read or received by local bishops, nor shared with the Synod of Bishops.

Many participants shared that *“avoiding scandal”* and *“trying not to draw attention to horrific past events”* seem to be the overarching priority of the Church. This created a general level of ambivalence about the process that mirrored an oft-repeated sense of futility regarding the hierarchy of the Church itself: *“Unless the Church sheds its rigid and closed hierarchical structure true equality cannot happen.”*

One teenage confirmation candidate said: *“Even if you want the Church to change, it won’t because only the Bishops vote. The Church should represent everyone!”*

A participant from a local nursing home shared: *“Bishops have too much power and focus on the wrong things. They need more varied perspectives.”*

Participants expressed the view that leadership in the Church should look like the people in the pews. One participant noted: *“Every person reflects the divine image of God. Isn’t Jesus equally present in each of us?”*

There is concern among the faithful regarding the lack of diversity and what is perceived as rigid adherence to “tradition” in the decision-making processes of the Church. One participant described the Church as *“...suicidal in hiding behind Tradition. Tradition has always evolved. False Tradition is a fatal problem”*.

From a parish perspective, participants feel that they are warmly welcomed by their current Pastor. One new parishioner noted: *“Father Jim could not have been more warm and welcoming. My interest in learning to be a lector was met with great enthusiasm and generosity, which led me to rich involvement in parish life”*.

A sentiment shared by many is priests who are approachable and empathetic result in deeper lay involvement. The antithesis - a culture imbued with clericalism - is seen as creating an enormous barrier between the faithful and the altar.

The Role of Women

The most frequently repeated refrain throughout all the gathered data was the need for acknowledged roles for women at every level of the Church, and specifically in ministerial roles. An 80-year-old retiree shared: *“It breaks my heart that women are still marginalized in many*

aspects of Church life. There is such a lack of respect for women and their roles are insufficient.”

The vast majority of respondents strongly desire the Church to restore women to the Diaconate as an essential element to preserving and growing the Church. This view was the most frequently shared viewpoint. One participant said: *“Women are already serving like Deacons in our parish, why wouldn’t you assist them with the grace of the Sacrament of Ordination to fortify their ministry?”*

Excluding women from the Permanent Diaconate seemed arbitrarily patriarchal to most respondents, particularly as the order is an established part of the Church’s history. Many participants also noted that women perform the overwhelming majority of the volunteer and paid work of parishes.

One 60 year + male wrote: *“In society today, women are recognized for their prominent roles in education, law, academics, medicine, and the corporate world. The Church fails to do so and women are not recognized adequately for their gifts to the Church. Ordaining women as priests would create an environment wherein the Church serves more meaningfully, especially to younger women.”*

One young mother shared that she felt the task of explaining to her daughter that women couldn’t be ordained was an impossible one *“in a time when every other avenue has become available to her if she thinks God is calling her to that.”*

One respondent quoted Galatians 3:28 ‘there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in the Body of Christ’ and wrote: *“Until women are officially validated as equals it gives tacit approval for women to be abused everywhere”.*

One female respondent (when discussing a woman’s call to the vocation of deacon) wrote: *“Why did God put it on her heart? Doesn’t God want to use her desire to open previously closed doors? Why does the Church skimp on her?”*

Most respondents felt that including women in ordained ministerial roles would both alleviate the current burden of overworked and elderly priests and inspire vocations in general. Many spoke of a need to hear the voices of gifted women preachers and their natural charisms in baptismal and funeral ministry: *“The Church needs the two lungs of the Catholic Church through which the Holy Spirit can breathe more fully!”*

LGBTQ+ Outreach

Among the confirmandi of our parishes, inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community is integral and pressing. One shared: *“I have gay and trans family members, are they welcome here?”*

When describing the Church’s disposition toward members of these communities, they asked for Her to be *“accepting and inclusive”* yet instead find her *“homophobic, non-accepting and hateful.”* They vocalized their desire for gay individuals to be married in the Church and to be afforded the same access to all the sacraments.

These feelings were not limited to the young people of our parishes. One participant shared that she had raised her son in the Church and was heartbroken that he and his partner weren't welcome to raise their young family in the same parish where he'd been baptized. She asked: *"How does the Church expect parents to stay when we did everything we could to share the faith with our gay children?"*

One young unmarried Catholic said: *"You see so much hate in a religion that professes love as its central message."*

Others expressed feelings of hypocrisy for attending a church where they are welcome, but their gay friends and family (whom they love) are not.

One adult gay male shared that the Church could more effectively celebrate diversity by means of *"truly recognising and allowing for it, especially in terms of gender and sexuality. I grew up in the Church and was a deeply religious child. I miss the ritual and community."*

Many cited Jesus as our best example of inclusivity, noting He often defied societal norms and expectations and never turned anyone away. *"Instead of acting as gatekeepers looking to exclude others from the table, we need to do a better job making sure people know that everybody has a place and a home here."*

Priestly Ministry

Our parishioners universally commend our parish priests on their warmth and attentive ministry. One spoke of how Father Jim always greeted parishioners by name, and made them feel *"seen and valued."*

One wrote about how she had not received the Sacrament of Reconciliation in over 20 years, and Father Hehir, with no judgment and all grace, said: *"Then I will help you."*

One respondent shared how welcomed she feels every time Father MacKay thanks the faithful for allowing him to celebrate the Mass with them and says *"Thanks for coming"*.

Participants expressed how important the role of the parish priest is and that they need to be *"compassionate, empathetic, and approachable."* They noted how blessed they felt to have these holy men in our Collaborative, and recounted many stories of other priests who did not embody the above values.

Some participants expressed concern over the level of cultural shift that can happen when a different priest is appointed to a parish who doesn't fit the culture. Others spoke of the disconnect between their local parish experience, nurtured by their priests, and the institutional Church.

Some expressed that the younger generation of priests being formed are *"so rigid and judgemental. They have no clue what real life is like."*

Many shared concerns over seminary vetting and formation. *"Not every person is suited to be a priest, they need to have excellent personal skills."*

There is a strong desire to allow priests to marry if they desire. The majority of participants feel this would address the clergy shortage, offer a less isolated existence for priests, give variation and inspiration to their homilies, and allow them to *“understand the complexities of parishioners’ everyday lives”*.

Family Life

Many participants expressed a need for the Church to rethink its approach to family issues. Inclusivity of diversity of race, interfaith couples, and gay couples were a frequently shared topic. *“The Church needs to modernize its view on social issues.”*

Another recurring refrain was surrounding the process of divorce and annulment in the Church. One male respondent shared that he would like to be remarried but has grown children from his first marriage, and considers them and his first marriage *“fully valid.”*

Many shared concern that the painful process of annulment and the inflexible attitude of the Church has alienated many faithful Catholics from the pews. *“I’m still struggling with this area and may very well leave the Church as a result.”*

Many single mothers shared their inability to feel connected to the Church when they were raising their children alone. *“I was good enough to teach CCD, but my family was never invited to bring the gifts up to the altar.”*

One 60+ male who considers himself deeply connected to the Church said: *“I recommend a re-examination of the ban on contraception. Polling shows that it is very widely ignored by Catholics. It is difficult to believe they are all guilty of a mortal sin.”*

Many women also shared this feeling: *“I use birth control (as a married woman) because I feel there is a limit to the number of children I can parent well. But I feel very judged and unwelcome because of it.”*

Conclusion

This journey of synodality is both a gift and a task. As was true with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we are to journey together, always attentive to the presence of Christ in our midst. The Church too is tasked to learn through Her experience, live in communion, invite participation, and open Herself to the ongoing revelation of Her mission.

The experience of synodal listening in St. John-St. Paul Collaborative wasn’t without its challenges, as is always true with important learning. Overcoming the initial disillusionment regarding whether our voices would be heard was a significant challenge.

However, after participating, the overwhelming majority of participants spoke of a renewal of their feeling that they are heard and belong to an active ecclesial community - a community endeavoring to live the mission expressed by the Second Vatican Council, and indeed established by Christ Himself.

This synthesis is not a strategic plan. It is not accompanied by tactics and next steps. Rather, it is better understood as an opportunity to shift the culture surrounding listening to our sisters and

brothers in Christ. It is a continuing commission, individually and collectively, to respond faithfully to the Holy Spirit's movement in the Church. We recall how throughout the history of the Church the Holy Spirit has guided Her journey and today calls each of us to be witnesses to God's love in the world. Let us find in the Lord our unity, so that we may complete our pilgrim journey together walking in God's holy will.

Regardless of whether you participated in the local Synod, you are invited now and always as we journey as the People of God. Thank you for taking the time to read the thoughts of your fellow members of the Body of Christ and to reflect on our shared journey as a family.