

Synod – Church of the Resurrection

Report Presented to the Diocese of Cleveland Ohio

Introduction: Pope Francis formally initiated the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of Synod, which is a two-year process of listening and dialog. The theme for the 2021-2022 Synod is communication, participation, and mission. Pope Francis asked each parish world-wide to participate. The Church of the Resurrection asked participants to respond to three questions: (1) What do you find life-giving in/about your Catholic faith today? (2) What do you think are the pressing issues challenging the Church today? (3) Given the challenges in our Church and world, what is an action step you think the Holy Spirit is leading us to consider to be more a more vibrant meaningful Church?

In addition to practicing Catholics, Pope Francis wanted to hear from those who no longer regularly attend mass, practice their faith, or who have left the Church. The questions asked of this group acknowledged their status and were slightly different. (1) Do you or did you have a positive experience as a practicing Catholic? (2) What has disappointed you? What has been a negative or hurtful experience for you. What is the issue that does not “fit” for you? (3) What are action steps that could lead to change? Even though the two sets of questions are not exact, oftentimes the responses were strikingly similar.

We are especially grateful to those young people from our RTC (PSR) and confirmation classes who shared their thoughts and feelings. Their voices are embedded of our report.

All participant responses reflect their feelings and beliefs about (1) the Catholic Church as an Institution and (2) the Church of the Resurrection specifically.

1. What do you find life-giving in/about your Catholic faith today? Do you or did you have a positive experience as a practicing Catholic

The Institutional Church: Participants agreed that Catholic traditions, particularly the focus on faith, the gospels, the sacraments, especially sharing in the Eucharist, rituals, different paths to spirituality, including the teachings of Jesus, devotions to the Blessed Mother and the Saints, and reciting the rosary provide a basis for their faith. The Catholic Liturgy is beautiful, meaningful, moving, and powerful as we experience our faith. They value a church that sends its people forth through various ministries and outreach. Participants embraced the Catholic faith as comforting and a means to calm anxiety. Additionally, and of equal importance, is the leadership of Pope Francis. His focus on the marginalized, his commitment to social justice, his desire to “take the Church (as an institution) out of Rome and put it at the local level resonated with parishioners. Many parishioners stated that their deep roots in the Church were handed down by the faith of their ancestors. The parishioners used the term “the Church as the people” rather than the “Church as Rome.”

Those participants who no longer practice the faith on a regular basis indicated that at one time, they felt connected. They cited that the tradition of the Catholic faith had been valuable, and that their faith was part of their lives. They also indicated that the gospel messages had value in their growth and development. In addition, the opinions of Catholic writers such as Thomas Merton and Fr. James Martin fueled some optimism, but their voices are in the minority. This group felt that the Church as an Institution was “running away” from them. They expressed a personal faith – one that needed to find a place to connect to God’s word with everyday living. They do not see the “Church” as that place.

Resurrection Parish: All parishioners overwhelmingly share in Resurrection’s mission of social justice and how it manifests itself through liturgy, ministries, faith, spiritual opportunities, a sense of community and pastoral collaborative leadership. The homilies relate to Jesus’s teaching and His outreach to the marginalized. All are welcome to the table. There are opportunities to live our faith through action. Many parishioners participate in multiple ministries: Worship, Charity and Justice, Wellness, Parish Life, Stewardship to care for the parish grounds, Administrative Support, Adult Formation, and Youth Religious Formation. Our pastoral staff believes in collaborative leadership, not only among themselves but also as they join parishioners on committees, such as Parish Council, Finance Council, and Charity and Justice, to ensure that all voices are heard. The pastoral staff and parishioners collaboratively teach PSR, Communion and Confirmation classes. Our participation is based upon the conviction that we are a gift to one another. We are guided by the question “What would Jesus do?” This enables our community to embrace the belief that we must “walk the talk.” Our sense of community is strengthened each week through the sharing of the Eucharist. This is our community Thanksgiving. Resurrection also joins with other faiths and cultures to better appreciate that we are all sisters and brothers in the eyes of God.

2. What do you think are the pressing issues challenging the Church today? What has disappointed you, or been hurtful? What does not seem to fit?

The Institutional Church: Issues confronting the Church expressed by both adults and young people clustered around four major categories: (1) The Church as a Patriarchal Institution (2) Secular politics replacing the moral high ground (3) Apparent double standards (4) Relevance.

Many participants view the larger Church as a Patriarchal Institution. A main concern expressed was the refusal to ordain women and the lack of women in leadership roles. Rome uses history and tradition to justify these actions toward women. Additionally, some stated that women are often silenced. Yet, in other traditions, women lead congregations and are viewed as equal to men. Participants view the Church wedded to clericalism.

Participants perceive that secular politics have entered the culture of the Church. Many stated that the Church focuses on the single issue of abortion rather than the broader issues that fully encompass Right to Life. Gun control, immigration, and racism are all life issues, yet the Institutional Church does not speak out forcefully about them. When some bishops question

who is “worthy” to receive communion, and single out individuals like President Biden because of his stance on choice, it further solidifies the idea that the Church speaks in concert with one political party. Secular politics also manifests itself in the treatment of the LGBTQ community. When the Church hierarchy denies this community the sacrament of marriage and the Eucharist, the Church appears to align itself with those political leaders who support legislation to deny this community equality under the law. At weddings, funerals and even at mass, some priests state that only “Catholics in good standing” can receive communion. The Eucharist is the center of our faith and yet many are denied.

There is also a split within the Church between conservative factions of bishops and cardinals and those who are more open to change. There is division between which bishops and cardinals follow Vatican II and those who desire to revert to “what was.” Participants stated that the more conservative Church leaders do not appear to be in communion with Pope Francis.

Many participants look at the Church and see a double standard. One major reason is Rome’s handling of the abuse crisis. Participants expressed sadness and frustration that the Church says certain behaviors are wrong and refuses communion to gay people, divorced people who have remarried without an annulment, and those who practice birth control, and yet protected abusive priests.

We speak of inclusion -all are welcome, yet some stated that many Church leaders do not embody this teaching. Jesus went out to meet the marginalized and He welcomed them. Both adults and young people expressed that the compassion and outreach to the marginalized lived by Jesus doesn’t seem to be practiced by a number of priests, bishops, and the members of the Church Hierarchy.

Our young people support racial and social justice. They express concern that the Church isn’t always a reflection of the community in which they live where there are people of all ages, ethnicities, genders, races, special needs, and different abilities. This also reflects what has been identified as a quiet racism of the Catholic Church.

The perception of a double standard leads to a lack of credibility and causes some Catholics to question whether they should remain.

Relevancy, especially for our younger people is a major issue. Many adults shared that their children and grandchildren no longer practice Catholicism. Our young people who participated in the Synod openly expressed reasons. They shared that some Catholic leaders twist the teachings of the Church to meet their individual beliefs rather than the teachings of Jesus. They believe that the Church needs to call out racism and homophobia. They expressed that many people in the Catholic faith can appear to value “religion” over “relationship” yet, we are called to make disciples and find the intersection of truth and grace. There is an emphasis on sin and negativity rather than on our inherent goodness.

Some participants expressed pessimism. There was a sense of sadness, and some felt that the Institutional Church would never change. They asked, “How can the Church be relevant in the Twenty First Century?”

Some believe that the Synod will not produce any real change in the Church because of its deeply rooted institutionalism.

Resurrection Parish:

Participants’ positive statements about Resurrection, as reflected in their answers to the first question, suggest that they strongly support Resurrection’s mission and focus on good liturgy, and social justice. The various ministries fill their spiritual needs and the homilies relate Jesus’s teaching to our everyday lives. They feel a sense of community.

However, both adults and young people expressed that Resurrection might enhance efforts to address racism, to find ways to better live our Gospel value that “all are welcome,” and to reach a broader community.

3. Given the challenges in our Church and world, what is an action step you think the Holy Spirit is leading us to consider to be a more vibrant Church? What action step could lead to change?

The Institutional Church: Overall participants expressed that the Universal Church must grapple with the following issues:

- The sex abuse scandal, which still plagues the Church, should be addressed once and for all in a more open way. Every participant (adults and youth) stated that the Church failed far too long to admit there was an issue and then protected the abusers.
- The Church must separate its moral authority from secular politics by focusing more on the “why” of Catholic beliefs and not on positions taken by various political leaders.
- The issue of right to life encompasses more than anti-abortion. Church leaders should begin to speak out about gun control, immigration, and racism. These issues also impact the right to life.
- Women should be recognized as equals in the church through ordination, opportunities to preach and leadership roles in Rome.
- The Church should determine ways to reach the disenfranchised and welcome them. This includes people of color, the LGBTQ Catholics, divorced Catholics who have not received an annulment.
- The Church must fundamentally heal itself and find a way to address internal conflicts.

Participants overwhelmingly stated that they have found a “home” at the Church of the Resurrection. They do believe the Catholic Church is worth fighting for and have not abandoned

their faith. Even those who do feel hurt or disenfranchised have not left the Church to join other religions, but there is a sense of abandonment by the Institutional Church. Many participants stated that this Synod would not change decisions coming from Rome, but they support Resurrection and have faith and confidence in our Pastor, Father Thomas Dragga, the pastoral staff, and our “community.”

Resurrection Parish:

Many participants stated that through the leadership of Father Dragga, the pastoral staff, and our ministries, Resurrection could enhance and strengthen its efforts to live our mission.

Responses from the young people in (RTC) PSR and Confirmation classes highlighted the need for more relevancy as they engage in learning about the Catholic faith. They expressed the desire for a teen mass where young people could lead in prayer and music. Some requested that Resurrection include a youth reflection at regular masses so they could share their perspectives. They suggested that Resurrection offer additional classes for teens that broaden their horizons and promote acceptance. Those in the Confirmation class want to continue the journey of faith beyond Confirmation and see faith as a life-long journey.

Some expressed that the Holy Spirit seeks to bring us back to the “why” of what we do. They said that the Church is made up of individuals and they believe it is important to find ways to think about what difference we can make in personal interactions in our small sphere of influence. What actions can we take?

The adult responses focused on Resurrection’s mission statement which emphasizes “all our welcome,” and how we, as the Resurrection community, might enhance and enrich our efforts to live our mission.

Several participants suggested that Resurrection offer more faith-sharing opportunities and programs through small group gatherings in homes or at the Parish. Resurrection also could expand formation opportunities through scripture studies, film discussions, and guest speakers.

Many stated that we could become more welcoming in little and traditional ways: extend personal invitations to supplement our advertising, engage more people in our ministries; introduce new people at mass, place their photos in the gathering area and highlight their names in the email blast. During COVID, parishioners phoned members of Resurrection to see if they needed any assistance. This type of one-on-one strengthens our sense of community and could continue.

Many suggested that Resurrection develop outreach support for the LGBTQ community.

Several participants indicated that Resurrection parishioners worship with a congregation at a Black Catholic Church and invite those parishioners to join us for mass at Resurrection.

Both adults and youth stated that Resurrection develop a thoughtful survey to distribute to parishioners (especially younger members) to identify their gifts and talents and to engage them more fully in the Resurrection community.

Participants stated that they want the results of the Synod report shared. Some suggested a follow up meeting.

To conclude, "What remains constant is our identity as a Eucharistic community – week after week we gather in our beautiful worship space so that we can be nourished and be inspired to live the mission of Jesus 'out into the streets,' in our neighborhoods and cities and as far as our imagination takes us."