

The Diocese of Winona- Rochester is incredibly pleased with the amount of participation we had for the listening sessions for Synod 2021-2023. Not only did nearly all of our parishes participate, but we also were able to receive summaries from a handful of unique groups including college students, nursing home residents, and grade school students. The most frequent response that we received was how pleasantly surprised the facilitators were at how the process went.

Besides the fact that the experience was a pleasant one, the second most positive response in our collected summaries is that many people requested that the listening sessions would continue. The gathering of parishioners to pray, talk and listen was very well received and because of the opportunity it afforded to strengthen community, many facilitators and participants discussed concrete ways in which these sessions could be continued in the future.

In terms of the needs of the parishes in the Diocese, many people were very pleased with the way their parish was already going. Those who expressed areas in need of improvement spoke primarily of the need to reach out to those on the margins. Our parishes all feel that they do well in serving those who already attend the church, but most people admitted the need to reach out and to welcome in those who either have fallen away or those who have never been in a Catholic Church.

Many of the summaries reported on the lack of youth and young adults among the participants. The lack of a younger audience at the listening sessions presented for many a challenge that has been ongoing in the parishes: attracting and maintaining the participation of the next generation in parish life. Another group that was clearly missing from the listening sessions were those “on the peripheries.”

A frequently seen need that the Church has is a greater understanding of what the Church teaches. Faith Formation was seen as a great need because the lack of good catechesis was seen as the direct result of a lower attendance among the young.

The need for stronger prayer lives was mentioned several times. Several mentioned the importance of the Eucharist. A desire was expressed that a greater emphasis be placed on the Eucharist. Eucharistic processions, adoration and a more extensive catechesis around it were all called for.

There were also a variety of desired changes that some participants believed might point to steps that the Spirit is inviting us to change in order to more better journey together: A greater hospitality towards people with same sex attraction, the opportunity for married priests or women priests or deacons, a greater involvement of women in leadership in the Church, a Church that would be more involved in social justice initiatives, an easier route for divorced and re-married to receive Communion, the return to old traditions such as Latin Mass and Communion rails, an increase of Marian devotion.

In terms of journeying together, the synod process was an eye-opening experience. Many people had a general idea that attendance was down and that the way things were done in the past can no longer sustain the way things are now, but they were able to hear from others about how that directly affects their parish. Gone is the day when there is more than one priest available in the Rectory. Now our priests are spread out over several parishes and our laity recognizes the need to work with our pastors so that the missionary work of spreading the Good News does not just get delegated to him.

Overall, the listening sessions provided an opportunity for people to come together and recognize the common love that we have for the Church. Even if someone came to air their grievances with one thing or another, they did so because they want to see growth in the Church and because they want to see the Church as a credible witness in our world that is in such great need of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is clearly calling our Diocese to make more Missionary Disciples and it is a blessing to know that we have so many who are already disciples of Christ. We pray that the results of this Synod process will help us to recognize the gifts that we have and to know how best to utilize these gifts to further the Kingdom of God.