

FINAL SYNODAL SYNTHESIS

DOCUMENT PRÉCIS

DIOCESE OF ORANGE IN CALIFORNIA

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Diocesan Coordinators for the Synod on Synodality



Upon the appointment of His Excellency, the Most Rev. Kevin W. Vann, J.C.D., D.D., Bishop of Orange in California, of us, Fr. William B. Goldin and Mrs. Katie Dawson, as the Diocesan Coordinators for the Synod on Synodality in the Diocese of Orange in the autumn of 2021, we have spent the past several months putting into effect the Synodal plan Bishop Vann approved for our local church. Following the format provided on the Holy See's own Synodal webpage (<https://www.synod.va/en/synodal-process/the-episcopale-synods-phase/suggestions-for-dioceses-and-episcopal-conferences-on-the-prepar.html>), we present herein a précis of our final Synodal "Synthesis" document that we will be submitting to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (the USCCB), in three parts: First, we introduce the structure of our Synodal experience here in the Diocese of Orange; second, we elaborate the ten main themes, and the two "minority report" themes, that we drew from the collected contributions we received from that experience; and third, we provide some brief suggestions and conclusions as to where we believe the Holy Spirit is leading us both as the local church of Orange and as part of the Universal Church of Christ.

I. Introduction: Our Synodal Experience in Three Parts

a. Deanery-Based Synodal "Consultations":

Each of the seven deaneries of the Diocese of Orange conducted "consultations" with the faithful, which began in early 2022 and concluded on 28 April 2022, to which each parish was asked to send a group of six individuals, representative of various constituencies, selected by the pastor. These parochial representatives were asked to speak to the joys and hopes, worries and desires, of individuals in similar walks of life (married ((including the divorced/annulled)), single, young, old, and those with special needs or interests). Through these "consultations" across the entire Diocese, we learned from the real-life experiences of the faithful in Orange County, California.

b. Synodal "Team" Member Interviews:

With Bishop Vann's permission, we also identified eleven Synodal "team" members from different walks of life and backgrounds (lay and clerical, male and female, old and young, from different ethnic backgrounds, and with different areas of expertise, life experience, and concerns) whom we tasked with conducting interviews of twenty people from their various constituencies. We gave each of these "team" members full freedom to conduct their interviews as they saw fit; however, we also asked them to follow a general framework, which we sent to them via email. We began that framework with the following quotation of the Synod's "Fundamental Question":

The Synod on Synodality states: "A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, 'journeys together.'" And asks: "How is this 'journeying together' happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?" (V §5.3, PD 26).

c. Website Survey and Integration of Previous Diocesan Synodal
“Consultations”:

The Diocese of Orange also developed a webpage to highlight the Synodal process, and to provide access to its relevant documents (<https://rcbo.org/synod/>). In order to reach as broad of an audience as possible, Bishop Vann recorded a Synodal message in English on video, which we translated into the other main pastoral languages of the Diocese (Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, and ASL), and we included videos for the faithful who speak those languages. In addition, on that webpage, we included a survey with three basic questions about “communion”, “participation”, and “mission”, which allowed a broader degree of participation from Catholics throughout Orange County, and we received many submissions.

II. The Fruits of our Synodal Experience

In all three of our consultative methods, we heard many of the same themes concerning how best to “journey together” as the pilgrim People of God. In this section of this précis, we will first present the ten main recurring themes that we heard from many different people of diverse ages, backgrounds, and interests; and second, we will then present a short “minority report” including two other significant themes that emerged in our consultations, albeit to a lesser degree.

A. The Ten Main Themes of the Consultation of the Faithful in the Diocese of Orange:

1. Desire for Substantive and Well-Prepared Homilies from our Bishops, Priests, and Deacons:

“The Church (Priest) needs to speak the truth [on] controversial issues. [We need] passionate preaching. [People are] ready to leave the Catholic Church for a better homily or sermon” (Deanery Consultation, 24 March 2022).

2. Need for a Greater Experience of Community Life (Faith-Sharing):

“[We need to] ask questions to better understand the faith when unsure; community outreach for feedback; coffee and donuts; Friday fish-fry; to come back together in Nativity and Easter plays; [to be] open to diversity; [to] make the Church community fun; [and to] ask questions to involve the children” (Deanery Consultation, 24 February 2022).

3. Evangelization of Youth and Young Adults:

“[In terms of] getting the young adults back to the church ([in the] big gap between college age and marriage), [we need] (1) more activities geared towards young adults; (2) more positions that minister to young [should] be paid positions; and (3) better catechesis” (Deanery Consultation, 17 February 2022).

4. The Impact of COVID-19 on the Experience of Ecclesiastical “Belonging”:

“We need to [have] church access to go pray. We need to focus on ‘journeying together’ [after the] journey of COVID [in order] to come back as a community” (Deanery Consultation, 24 March 2022).

5. Call to Service in Organizations and Ministries:

“[We experience the Church through] community outreach, Ladies in Faith Together, Bible study, Knights of Columbus, small groups, 40 Day devotions, the “Catholics Invade the Bar” ministry [at Our Lady of Fatima Church], Stephen Ministry, Children’s Ministry, Newman Clubs, South County Outreach, almsgiving during Lent, food baskets, etc.” (Deanery Consultation, 10 March 2022).

6. Navigating Multi-Cultural Parish Life and Integrating Disparate Groups of People:

“[We] need to be united [and to] bring all communities together with their cultures, food, and experiences instead of separating them” (Deanery Consultation, 7 April 2022).

7. A Plea for Traditional Worship According to the Roman Missal of 1962:

“[We want] daily Mass in the traditional form...[and to] embrace Catholic architecture (i.e., [the] tabernacle in the center” (Deanery Consultation, 23 February 2022).

8. Greater Transparency and Communication from Church Leadership (namely, from Bishops and Priests) and a Willingness to Listen to the Voice of the People:

“[We need] good leaders that are willing to listen and to act on new ideas. Priests need to be available to parishioners’ input. Priests need to validate suggestions” (Deanery Consultation, 17 February 2022).

9. Greater Consciousness of Accompaniment as a Key Value:

“Pastors need to know the needs and problems of the different ministries in the parish. Pastors should hold gatherings outside of the church to get to know the people in the community” (Deanery Consultation, 17 February 2022).

10. Better Catechesis for Adults, especially in Understanding the Liturgy and the Scriptures:

“[We] need to re-catechize our community in order to evangelize. [We are] losing the young people. [We] need to teach our people, kids, etc. We have a routine but don’t teach why we do what we do. [We] need someone who can explain the Mass [and the] readings (Priest or Deacon during homily)” (Deanery Consultation, 24 March 2022).

B. Minority Report:

1. Outreach, Recognition, and Inclusion for Individuals who Experience Same-Sex Attraction and/or who have Gender Identity Concerns:

“[We need to change] our stance with the LGBTQ community and [allow] them to be involved” (Deanery Consultation, 24 February 2022).

2. Desire for the Ordination of Women as Deacons and Priests, as well as for the Appointment of Women in Church Leadership:

“Women need a stronger role and voice and to be respected. Women need more of an equal role opened up for them. [There is a] lack of inclusion for [the] universal church...[the] Catholic hierarchy [is] homogenic. We need to be more inclusive [and] not just [have] white male[s] lead” (Deanery Consultation, 24 February 2022).

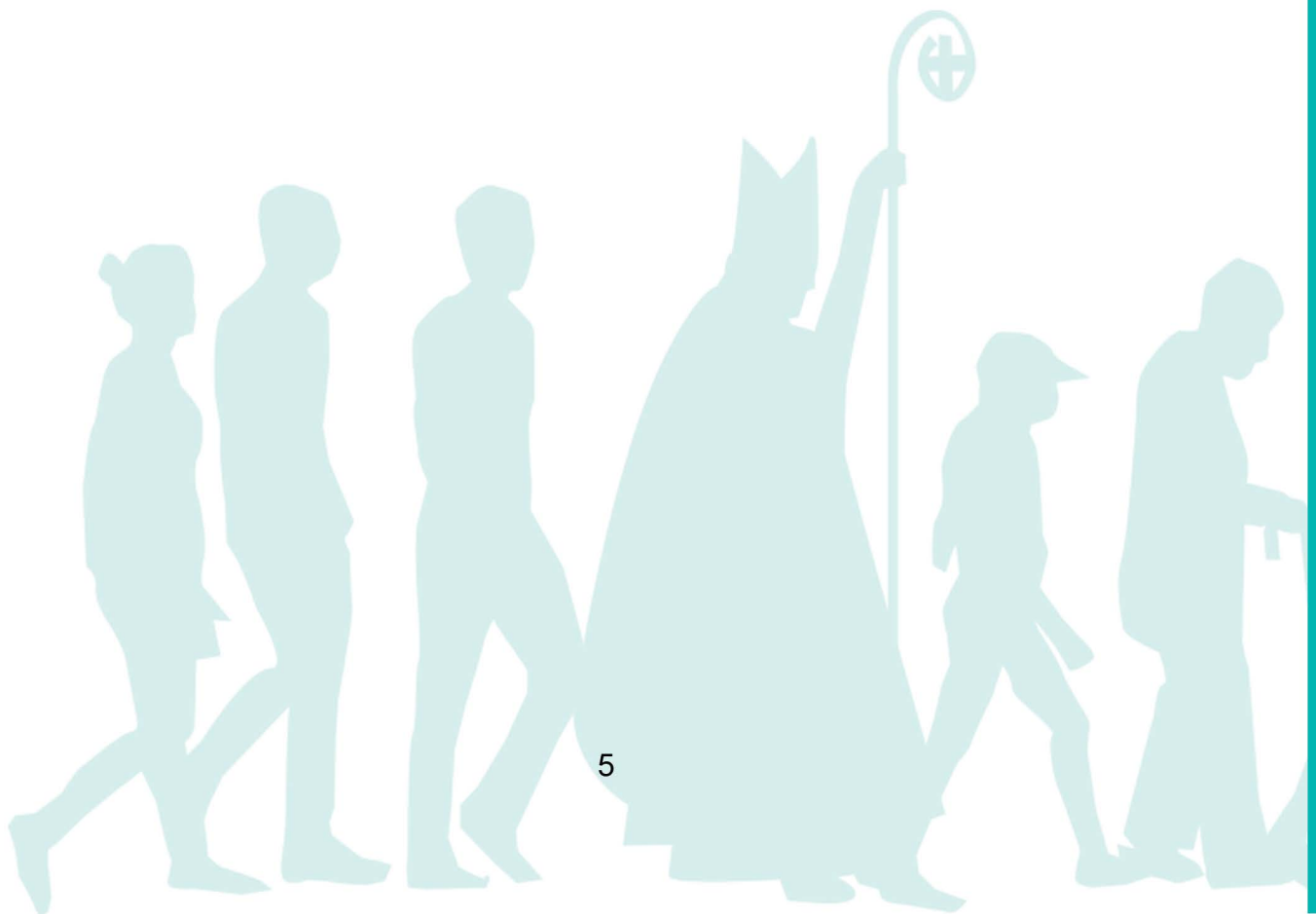
III. Conclusions and Suggestions: Where is the Holy Spirit Leading Us?

If one thing is clear from our consultation of the faithful, it is that we have a wonderful Catholic community in the Diocese of Orange, filled with pious men and women from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds who truly want the best both for our local church as well as for the Catholic Church globally. For instance, we were genuinely surprised by how appreciative the consultees who attended our deanery-based gatherings were to have an opportunity to share their faith and interface with others during these consultation evenings. As such, from our perspective as the Diocesan Coordinators for this phase of the Synod in Orange County, perhaps the most significant suggestion we would like to share with the (Arch)Bishops of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is simply that the faithful need and desire more opportunities for “listening sessions” and “consultations” on a regular basis, in which ordinary people can share their faith journeys and feel that their sacred pastors have listened to their joys and hopes, as well as their concerns and difficulties. In other words, perhaps the medium of this Synodal process is, in fact, its most important message.

However, we would also like to suggest, in all humility, one principal concern that we have ourselves, and also that our consultees shared with us over the past six

months. The majority of the People of God in Orange County, ourselves included, do not want to see any doctrinal changes emerge from this Synod that could be critiqued for being in serious discontinuity with the solemnly defined magisterial teaching of the past. If our “journeying together” is to be authentic and credible, then the continuity of our doctrinal teaching is a matter of no small importance. Indeed, the ability of many to take the Church’s faith seriously depends on whether the doctrinal content of that faith seems solid and unshakeable. If the content of our faith can shift substantially in ways that mirror modern shifts in secular thinking, then people can easily critique our faith as being blown about by the winds of change, with no certitude whatsoever. If something taught by the Catholic Church can be true today, and false tomorrow, then why is the Catholic Church’s message worth listening to at all? What we heard from the overwhelming majority of our consultees, notwithstanding those whose contrary opinions are represented in the “minority report”, is that most people want a Church that teaches the truth, even if it is unpopular.

As the ancient Latin phrase and motto of the Carthusian Order puts it so beautifully when speaking of how the Christian faith holds firm even when all else fails: *Stat crux dum volvitur orbis*—the cross stands while the world turns. We would like to suggest that the Synod on Synodality make an emended version of this phrase its own: *Stat ecclesia dum volvitur orbis*—the *Church* stands while the world turns. And finally, we pray that as our “journey together” progresses first to the national consultative phase at the USCCB, and then to the Synod in Rome itself in October 2023, we will learn how to reap the fruits of this consultation, while also remaining true to who we are, to what we believe, and above all, to Our Lord Jesus Christ, the source and reason for our hope.





Appendix

Congregational Synod Submission from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange



Our Congregational Synod Submission

Based upon December 3, 2021 process

1. What stands out from the small stories of synodality that you have shared?

The various stories from our congregational listening session reveal a mixture of joys and sorrows. Here are some of our experiences:

❖ **Covid pandemic and its effects:**

The global Covid pandemic has offered us the opportunity to form smaller home faith communities; this is life-giving. Parishes have used technology to reach beyond their borders, nationally and internationally.

❖ **Our lived experience of synodality vs. current Church reality:**

In our congregational life, we have had many years of experience with mutual dialogue and journeying together, where all have a place and a voice at the table. This is a great joy for us. From our perspective, as we look at our Church today, we experience that our potential contribution to synodality as vowed religious is not often valued. We experience that we are at times overlooked because we are not in habits.

❖ **A deep spiritual hunger vs. Church's response:**

We experience a deep spiritual hunger among lay people while, at the same time, our parishes are largely empty on Sundays. We have lost many young people. While some pastors are very personable, many (especially newly ordained) are often underdeveloped in pastoral skills. We sense a growing tendency toward legalism/clericalism in the newly ordained. There is inconsistency among parishes in a

diocese. Many people 'church hop' to find homilists who can feed their spiritual hunger.

❖ **Role and influence of women:**

We grieve the absence of women in roles of authority. Are our gifts truly recognized by Church leaders?

❖ **Different models of the Church in the US**

We experience different, opposing models of Church at work in our nation: the hierarchical, clerical model vs. the pastoral, communion model. Politics and money have often more influence, especially in the US and our current social/political environment. Bishops rely on wealthy donors to help with diocesan financial needs, yet these donors can have a more conservative agenda.

2. What are the main seeds of synodality that you detect in yourselves, in the Church, in the world?

❖ **Our congregation is ready for this:**

Our congregational processes over many years have helped us do this type of journeying together and deepen relationships. We know how to facilitate such engaging conversations. Our newest members are very excited about the Synod and Pope Francis. We experience that we can make a difference at this moment.

❖ **Interfaith relationships grow and bring a great deal of life.**

Small steps reaching out beyond our own Church boundaries, including inter-faith action.

❖ **Growing involvement on the part of laity**

Our parish schools are thriving under the able leadership of our lay colleagues. Where this happens, we see positive relationships among clergy and laity to be a bridge to the future.

❖ **Fruits of Covid pandemic:**

The web based outreach of parishes has enabled a connection with people all over the world. Parishes witness increased lay participation and engagement. There are examples of small Christian communities being born.

3. What are the main ‘weeds’ that, mixed with the good wheat, threaten synodality and render it unworkable or inoperative?

❖ **Attitudes of ordained clergy**

The current division among the US Bishops causes sadness and confusion throughout the country. Clericalism and a sense of entitlement threatens the ability of the ordained to work with laity, including religious women. Some pastors act like ‘kings’, while others struggle to be pastoral. Absence of suitable pastoral formation for seminarians.

❖ **Influence of money promotes a return to a more traditional Church**

The influence of conservative Catholic money can promote a more conservative, exclusive, and politicized agenda and image of the Church as a place for the privileged, rather than a welcoming community. EWTN, now located in our diocese, can be a divisive presence, with its often anti-Francis messaging.

❖ **Burden of parish administration on ordained**

The work of a parish, both administrative and pastoral, may be too much to carry. Added to the financial needs that result from the priestly scandals, this results in a very heavy burden for the priests to carry. We experience them as lonely and isolated from a supportive community, and dependent on the donations of those who seek to influence Church direction. There too many administrative tasks being carried by these men who were ordained for sacramental and pastoral work. Can parish administration be done by others?

4. What is the fruit of your discernment on God’s dream of synodality in the global, particular and local Church?

❖ **The moment is now**

This moment offers an opportunity to listen and discern, both for clergy and laity. We would love to see our own congregational processes of synodality

expanded to the entire diocese and beyond. We sense that Covid pandemic has given us a way to see how important it is for us to move into a new, more relational way of being.

❖ **Relationships are key**

We are convinced of the importance of our staying in the relationship and modeling what we wish to see happen. It is all about relationships and inclusivity: a new way of being Church. We hope to give birth to a more human church, open to the desires and the diversity of all people. We want to give birth to a truly intercultural Church as People of God.

❖ **A time to build bridges**

We want to speak beyond divisions, to build bridges within and across faith traditions. We want to reach out to bishops and priests to strengthen relationships and renew mutual support.

5. What are the consequences for our consecrated life today so that God's dream can become a reality? Any concrete proposals for action?

❖ **A call to be inclusive and welcoming**

We feel called to go beyond our present disappointment and stay in relationship with all members in the Church: traditional, progressive, cleric, lay. We have a unique opportunity to reach out beyond traditional boundaries, to include those often marginalized.

❖ **Continue to support active lay involvement and participation**

We encourage the involvement of laity in administration of parishes. We suggest that this may be a moment to expand the influence of laity, especially in the selection of pastors and bishops.

❖ **Offer formation in pastoral, facilitation, and spiritual skills**

We have significant gifts and skills for the formation of all levels of followers of Christ: priests, lay leaders, deacons, young. Because of our decades-long experiences of consultative processes, we recognize how we can be a training center for facilitators who can lead such inclusive dialogues

throughout the faith community: on boards, at local parish and diocesan levels.

❖ **Reach out to the young**

A key action that is needed would be finding effective ways to reach out to the younger generations who are so connected via social media and other forms of technology.

6. Are there changes that the Church must bring about in order to become more synodal?

❖ **Re-imagine parish life and organization**

Can we re-imagine how parish life is organized?

❖ **Address ongoing complicity with unhealthy structures of power**

Can we look carefully at how complicit we might be with hierarchical use of power and influence? How can we empower those (such as immigrant communities) who may tend to be more submissive to Church authority?

❖ **Provide effective pastoral, spiritual, and psychological support systems for priests**

How can we address the woundedness, the loneliness our priests experience?

❖ **Address the tension between models of the Church present today**

At a macro level, is there a way to get beyond the legalism that can be so destructive of the human spirit? It seems that the different models of what it means to be Church are constantly in tension.

Upload an image of the Church that captures your experience:

Our proposed image of the Church is a kitchen table, surrounded by many people.

