



# Synthesis of Synod of Bishops Interim Responses Diocese of Salt Lake City



April 5, 2024

## Introduction

In the Diocese of Salt Lake City, we conducted 94 listening sessions with 1,192 people participating. Our responses comprised of 82% of our parishes (including their missions and stations), and 100% of our Catholic schools (principals and vice principals) during their annual faith formation day. Compared to our 2022 Listening Sessions, the number of people participating fell dramatically from 4,993 to 1,192 (76% reduction). Was the drop due to the rushed nature of responding quickly, the overlap with Lent, not enjoying the 2022 listening sessions, or some other reason? What is clear is that our parishes stepped up big with an increase of 22% more participation.

Many of our responses focused on the Church’s “life” or local experiences. Although we received some responses to the “structure(s)/organization/leadership” aspects, it seemed people were most interested in responding given their local reality. In essence, much of the responses were a rehash of the responses of 2022, to the point of sometimes not answering the asked question. Nonetheless, this shows where the heart and mind of the faithful is yearning for the Church’s response to them.

Due to the constraints of this document’s maximum length, all comments, ideas, and positions cannot be presented. In many cases, topics had both positive and negative responses that were opposed, e.g. some believe we are doing a great job in faith formation, while others believe it is being done poorly. Please take this into account and infer what the contra position may be, and where we might find the balance of virtue. We are very diverse in many ways. The challenge for us all is to truly practice synodality, and be willing to first listen to one another that we may journey together toward God faithfully.

*Where have I seen or experienced successes—and distresses—within the Church’s structure(s) / organization / leadership / life that encourage or hinder the mission?*

The global Church is most successful when our faith and mission is clear and can be articulated clearly and consistently at all levels of leadership. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a good example of clear articulation and consistency in teaching and using it brings about confidence among the faithful. In the age of the internet and rapid media, when different leaders speak and write with contrary opinions or teaching, it creates confusion and distress.

Articulation

The **greatest distress** that was expressed the most times is when the bishops disagree publicly with the Pope and one another, and when the Pope creates confusion among the faithful due to inconsistent messaging, e.g. blessing of same-sex couples (2023); the great majority of Catholic marriages are null and thus not

Majority of the Heart



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sacramental (June 2016). Poor communication forces the faithful to “fill in the blanks or develop their own version of the truth” (St. Andrew Parish). “We experience sadness due to the confusion with which the Vatican treats certain important issues that influence the formation of our children and youth” (St. Bridget Parish). Scandals of clergy misconduct, the Vatican’s mishandling of finances, and the cover-ups by bishops and the Church are still deep wounds that destabilize the confidence of the faithful in the leadership. Combining weak communication with leadership’s handling of scandal creates the greatest distress.

The **greatest success** that was expressed the most times is when leadership (clergy and lay) is active, collegial, engaged, welcoming, and there are many opportunities for faith formation at all levels, ministry and social activities, and the spirit of synodality is present. However, it is not only about leadership, but about the faithful exhibiting these same qualities. When the faithful are willing to take responsibility in leadership within the Church there is a flourishing. When a priest is not willing to listen and work with parishioners it becomes a distress. This is not to remove the shepherding, this is to remove a sentiment of “my way, or the highway.” Likewise, when some ministers (parish or diocesan) act in arrogance or rudeness, or as if they own the ministry or become territorial it takes away from the success.

The global Church is a shining beacon of promoting life. Clear articulation and priority in the *Social Teaching of the Catholic Church* helps leadership to unify the Church at all levels. The distress comes when local priests are not preaching on life issues effectively, and not being a visible witness to life in the secular community. The distress comes when bishops across the country do not take a stand on political policy contrary to the faith or scandal created with life issues, e.g. with prominent Catholic politicians promoting death, being unfaithful and then receiving Communion, or redefining, in the public forum, what it means to be a faithful Catholic. What starts as a shining beacon can become a flickering light that dimly illuminates the path for the faithful.

Life

The universality of the liturgy world-wide is an important success to mention. Leadership at all levels keeping the Eucharist and its celebration consistent is one of the most important realities to helping Catholics come together to worship and feel a better part of the Body of Christ. When one doesn’t know the language of the celebration, one can still know the structure and deeper meaning behind the actions and parts of the Mass. This is not to say that other forms of the celebration, i.e. Latin Mass, do not have value, but celebrating in the vernacular is very helpful to being drawn into what is faithful, holy, and reverent. The distress comes when the opposite is true should the Mass appear to be rushed or a reverence appears to be lost. Another distress is when some seem to think reverence can only be gained in their preferred way of celebrating Mass.

Worship



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Condescending and condemning attitudes can creep into being judgmental of others, and more importantly how we celebrate and worship.

The Eucharistic Rally and Mass was a visible and wonderful example of coming together as the Body of Christ. We are many parts with many languages, and in Utah we are predominantly speaking English and Spanish. Some view success when our leadership separates our worship by language, thus allowing worship in the language that is closest to heart, protecting and promoting the preservation of culture. Others view success when our leadership does the opposite and promotes more bilingual efforts, thus bringing us together and building us up into one Body of Christ, and leaving the promotion of culture to be more the responsibility of family and home environment. Perhaps a middle ground would be helpful, and not be an either/or, but a both/and. An appreciation of mixed cultures, languages, and opportunities can be a more visible witness of being many parts, and one Body of Christ. Leadership choices in language and worship matter.

Language

Bureaucracy hinders and causes distress. The requirement and process of annulments were the second most mentioned distress. The process is too burdensome and takes too long, and sometimes our clergy or lay volunteers preparing them struggle with a very complicated process. The Pope speaks of the Church being a field hospital of mercy and this might be the very place to make that happen in a greater way. To introduce the spirit of forgiveness for mistakes made, and not just demonstrating a marriage failed to exist properly, might be a step in the right direction. To no fault of the Tribunal, annulments have become a level of Church's bureaucracy that hinders those seeking to enter the faith through RCIA, and those wanting to live their faith better or become sponsors to others seeking the sacraments. This is not only a hinderance, but is also frequently very painful to the parties involved.

Annulments  
and  
Bureaucracy

Another area of bureaucracy revolves around the local parish and meeting all the activities and requirements of the diocese, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Vatican. Some are necessary and yet burdensome, e.g. safe environment. Others involve competing activities all vying for limited time and resources. To help with administration, hiring more lay people to do administration in a parish or school is a great idea, and yet most cannot afford to do so. Volunteers are wonderful, but not always available or consistent. The spirit of synodality is highly valued, but how it is lived will place a demand on a higher level of organization that pulls on the resource of limited time. The reality of the local parish and school becomes, at times, an impossible balancing act. The important decisions from the hierarchy on when and how to focus our efforts, how to accomplish the tasks at hand, are sometimes idealistic and not always realistic given the local realities.



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Leadership structures exclude women from leadership within the clerical roles. This is seen by some to be limiting and a hindrance. “If women were not active, the Church would fall” (Saint Thomas More Parish). One new suggestion is to permit women religious to preach at Mass. It is worth revisiting our responses from the listening sessions of 2022 as so much of it was restated. It is important to address this from the structure and leadership vantages as many women continue to feel unheard and undervalued in the contributions they want to make.

Women

*How can the structures and organization of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?*

Structures and organization of the Church must be clear in their faith formation and education of all the faithful. Whether in the parish or Catholic schools, evangelization is left wanting without solid education and formation. This is foundational. If the leadership communicates well, the faithful will have a better chance at communicating and modeling the faith well. To be a welcoming and inclusive community of faith is needed, and authenticity of living the faith will come from the formation provided by the family and Church, or sadly from society that is often dismissive of faith or trying to redefine it. To know God and have a relationship with God begets greater love of God.

Formation and Evangelization

The mission of evangelization and becoming better disciples of Christ in a world that needs hope can be lost when the mission is not communicated well. Every parish and school that has a mission statement may have a different focus. Often, once written, they are seldom brought up or used when planning. Is the local mission different from the mission of the Church, or is it seen as to be somehow gathered into a collective whole? One Catholic educator who is a leader commented, “it is sad to see among my colleagues and families how many false impressions of the mission of the Church are extant.” This points to the reality of a relativism that stems from ambiguity and leaves ample room for secular ideologies to creep into the void.

In almost every area of concern technology could play an important part in working for better solutions to the concerns, but also it would be a wonderful blessing to the aspirations of the faithful in proclaiming the Gospel and building up the Body of Christ. Why does the Church not do more to improve our communication, leadership efforts, mission of evangelization, and ministries by utilizing technology better? The faithful are thirsting for more media to help them in their spirituality and formation. Some examples of media that are well produced and help in these regards are the “Hallow” app, and Ascension

Technology



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Press' "Catechism in a Year" podcast. We need to do better with technology, especially if we want to reach and keep our youth and young adults involved. In our diocese, it would be a great blessing given the great distances we must travel to come together, and that we have missions, stations, and financially challenged parishes that could truly benefit.

Online resources provided by the dioceses, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Vatican could be so much more expansive. We could be doing our catechist training in a consistent way for free to all our parishes and schools. We could be doing better faith formation with components for the traditional religious education classrooms, Catholic school classrooms, and remote learning. This is not to replace traditional teaching methods, but to add to them and enhance them. We could make these materials available to registered parishioners and enrolled families in our Catholic schools. Rather, we leave these opportunities to entrepreneurs, private companies, and voluntary individual consumption. The leadership of the Church could be partnering with outside organizations to produce quality online media.

The call to proclaim the good news of the Gospel will be best realized when we as an organization are more welcoming and accepting of human limitations. That is to say, we are more a community of love and mercy in Christ, steeped in charity, faithfulness, and hope. If any of these elements are missing, we become a hindrance to ourselves and those seeking God. We have a great deal of confusion about how to be inclusive. Some want the Church teaching to change, others see societal relativism rampant, or a need to be defensive to the ongoing secularization and attacks on the Church and family. Inclusivity for some means give me what I want and if you do not, then you are judgmental. Theological or academic explanations give way when a person who is prejudice or poorly catechized excludes those who feel hurt or left out. Could it be beneficial to internally promote in every parish and school how we are to be inclusive as the Body of Christ? The lack of clear and consistent structure and organization on the topic of inclusion seems to hurt us as the faithful and the Church at large.

Inclusion

Administrative support efforts in parishes, schools, and with the diocese arose. A physical presence of leadership is desired the most, but help in the way of resources and support is needed too. It is not only what a category of entity takes from the other, but what it gives. An assessment of this sentiment might be a humbling one, especially if not a self-assessment. What does the school offer the parish and the diocese? What does the parish offer the school, or diocese? Would they all agree on the results of what each gains and offers to and from the others?

Administration

Administrative efforts with the bishop, priests, and diocesan officials to be physically available to our parishes, schools and other entities are important too. We want to see





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our bishop and priests more than at the celebration of sacraments. With our diocese being so large geographically, this is a serious challenge. We want to feel that our concerns and complaints are being heard and addressed. At times, it seems this is not happening.

## Conclusion

Many of our responses were practical in nature and aimed at accomplishing the ministry of Christ and our evangelical call to baptize all nations and peoples. Pope Francis does well to raise the awareness to extend mercy and this is mirrored across the diocese in wanting to receive mercy and extend mercy to others. A measure of how well we have solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, and take genuine care for those with disabilities is the practice of affording dignity to others so often overlooked. Another measure of dignity comes not with what we produce for the mission, but how we genuinely give of ourselves to God and neighbor. In essence, how we journey together toward God faithfully.

The notion of being authentic and genuine takes commitment and effort. Saint Pius X Parish (Moab) stated, "The structure is not the problem, but the commitment of the people within the structure that paves the way to success or distress." This is to say all people, leadership and the faithful being committed to the mission together. When we lack good communication, the structure and organization will falter as many efforts will work in differing directions, and even sometimes in opposition. It is not just the organization and structure, but the individual efforts too. Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish (Park City) pointed out, "the mission can sometimes be overshadowed by individual interests, emphasizing the importance of aligning personal goals with the mission [of the Church]." It is critical to clearly communicate the mission of the Church at all levels of ministry and to be collectively committed in an authentic and genuine manner.

The absence of good communication creates uncertainty among the people of God, and becomes a hinderance to those inquiring into our faith. Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish (Hyde Park) stated, "Modernity has transformed the foundations of morality and spiritual imagination, introducing a constant undercurrent of doubt." Certainly, society is in need of ongoing transformation, but it is difficult to evangelize well if we are struggling from within to communicate effectively and to build confidence among the faithful. In some sense, the transformation from within the Church first prepares us for the ministry of transforming society, and in God's grace bringing about the building up of the Body of Christ.



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## **PARTICIPATING**

Blessed Sacrament, Sandy  
Christ the King, Cedar City  
Good Shepherd, East Carbon  
Holy Family, Ogden  
Immaculate Conception, Copperton  
Notre Dame de Lourdes, Price  
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Salt Lake City  
Our Lady of Lourdes, Salt Lake City  
Sacred Heart, Salt Lake City  
Saint Ambrose, Salt Lake City  
Saint Andrew, Riverton  
Saint Ann, Salt Lake City  
Saint Anthony of Padua, Helper  
Saint Bridget, Milford  
Saint Catherine of Siena Parish, Salt Lake City  
Saint Christopher, Kanab  
Saint Elizabeth, Central Valley  
Saint Florence, Huntsville  
Saint Francis of Assisi, Orem  
Saint Francis Xavier, Kearns  
Saint George, Saint George  
Saint Helen, Roosevelt  
Saint Henry, Brigham City  
Saint James the Greater, Vernal  
Saint James the Just, Ogden  
Saint John the Baptist, Draper  
Saint Joseph Ogden  
Saint Marguerite, Tooele  
Saint Martin de Porres, Taylorsville  
Saint Mary of the Assumption, Park City  
Saint Mary, West Haven  
Saint Olaf, Bountiful  
Saint Peter, American Fork  
Saint Pius X, Moab  
Saint Rose of Lima, Layton  
Saint Thomas Aquinas, Hyde Park  
Saint Thomas More, Cottonwood Heights  
Saint Vincent de Paul, Holladay  
San Andres, Payson  
San Felipe, Wendover  
The Cathedral of the Madeleine, Salt Lake City

\* All Catholic School Leadership

## **NON-PARTICIPATING**

Holy Spirit, Duchesne  
Our Lady of Lourdes, Magna  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Kearns  
Saint Joseph the Worker, West Jordan  
Saint Joseph, Monticello  
Saint Patrick, Eureka  
Saint Patrick, Salt Lake City  
Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, Midvale  
Saints Peter and Paul, West Valley

All stations, missions, and other ministries within a parish territory are included in the parish listing above.