

# Diocese of Yakima

## Synod Synthesis Report – The Diocese of Yakima

The Diocese of Yakima consists of 39 Parishes in Central Washington State ranging in size from 20 Families to 500+ Families located in rural communities with urban concentrations in Kennewick/Richland, Yakima, and the Wenatchee Valley. Of the 176,000 Catholics in our Diocese, 13% regularly attend services. It is estimated that 66% are of Latin decent, and 55% of our weekend Masses are in English, and 45% in Spanish. Fifty-Eight percent of regular Mass attendees go to a Spanish Mass. *[Source – Public Religion Research Institute & June 2022 Diocesan Mass Counts]* Seven Catholic Schools are located throughout the Diocese along with a significant number of ministries.

The Synod was introduced to the Faithful in October 2021 with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Joseph Tyson. The majority of its marketing occurred after our Christmas celebrations. People participated by way of an Online Survey, Virtual Listening Sessions, and In-Person Meetings held in 14 of our Parishes. All mediums were in Spanish, English, or both languages, and were based on the Main Question of “journeying together” along with the 10 Discussion Questions proposed by the Vademecum. One School had their entire Student Body participate in a Synod-based Board Game developed in Latvia and translated to English by a volunteer in the Anchorage Archdiocese.

Eight-Hundred-Twenty Faithful participated in Parish-based Listening Sessions, and the online options. Of those, 63% were Female, and 52% were of Anglo heritage followed by 45% Latino. Youth participants were almost exclusively Latino and consisted of those going through Confirmation or a part of a Life Teen group. Latino participants were younger (Youth to 40) and connected to Formation, or a small group such as a Cursillo or Marian Theotokos. Anglo

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participants were generally over the age of 50 and 65% Female. The 430 School participants ranged from 5 years to 17 years old and were 77% Anglo. *[Source – NCEA Report]*

Fourteen Parishes have reported their observations. Twenty-One Parishes were represented, including four from a neighboring Diocese. We anticipate receiving more information after the June 30 Deadline which will be used for planning purposes at the Diocesan level. Six Small Groups were also represented.

All Surveys and Reports from the Listening Sessions were reviewed by the Diocesan Pastoral Council, two Diocesan Directors, and the Chancellor-Moderator of the Curia, who then scribed the following Synthesis. We presented it to the Presbyterate and Deaconate for consultation before delivering it to Bishop Tyson. His comments are included in this report.

## **Main Emergent Themes**

### **Youth Outreach**

The Youth of our church want to be heard. They often feel ignored while at Mass, but enjoy engaging in group activities with other youth. Adults in the Church realize that they are the future of our Church, but don't know how to engage them. Youth may fall away from the church because of other life distractions. Making "schedules" for them is difficult which results in a lack of long-term commitment. Creating a welcoming church community where they can feel safe about speaking their thoughts is a premium. This can be having adults involved in creating programs targeted toward our youth, or creating small service projects for them to be involved in together. A challenge created by the isolation from Covid led to a lack of volunteers who disassociated from regular Church attendance during that time.

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Consideration should be given to increasing Campus Ministries. This can occur both at the Diocesan and Parish level. Elevating Catholic Social Teaching will help youth understand and speak about their Faith since they struggle with understanding the uniqueness of Catholicism and what makes it special. They want to know the “Why” of Catholicism rather than simply being told to follow its teaching. Suggestions included using St. John Paul II as a role model, and meeting Youth where they are at in life through the use of activities. Two neighboring Deaneries are considering unifying Youth Ministry and Catechism to be more consistent across the parishes.

Many youth in our Diocese enjoy a strong relationship with their Pastor and want to see more of him. When the Liturgy is interesting to them (relatable Homilies, upbeat Music, welcoming environment), youth are more engaged in the Mass. Many of our Youth’s parents are not attending Mass on a regular basis.

## **Speaking Out & Being Heard**

Societally it has become increasingly difficult to have meaningful conversations with each other. The Pandemic’s impact on our ability to gather and celebrate has certainly contributed to this, though it existed prior to the Pandemic. It’s seen throughout our Catholic community and more pronounced in certain parishes than others. Causes are fear of rejection that hinders engagement, being overpowered by someone of a different viewpoint, and lack of knowledge and formation. Some parishioners have a “pre-bias” of a political viewpoint rather than a focus on Church teaching; which has made for difficult conversations. The Parish Priests bear the brunt of this.

The Synthesis Team suggests searching for ways to get participants to pause and reflect before speaking on a topic. The Synod Listening Process has helped somewhat in this regard.

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Communication is interconnected with Education and Formation, so the ability to converse with one another will impact other areas of Church life.

The need for improved Formation was mentioned by all sectors of participants as it will better prepare them for discussions involving our Faith. Formation programs are offered at the Parish and Diocesan levels, but attracting people to them is difficult due to life distractions. Several mentioned a more unified voice from Church leadership on key issues. Discernment is needed on how to improve this.

## **Creating Community**

This theme is prevalent throughout the comments – How do we welcome our co-parishioners, those returning to the church, and those new to our Parishes? The Students from the School that did the Board Game responded to the question of “How can you welcome other kids to church?” by uplifting saying “Hello” and “Thank you for coming”, as well as waving/smiling at them and showing an interest in them. Simple, yet so effective.

Earlier comments in this report indicate differences in Parishioner perspectives that aren't necessarily tied to Church Life. Respondents see the need for an effort to look for our commonalities rather than our differences, and to center ourselves on Christ rather than a secular group. It will be helpful to realize what our “barriers” to this are since they are more than our native language as a Church Community. Several session participants mentioned they were on the Autism Spectrum. Understanding this can aid greatly in how parishioners and clergy interact with them. The same can be said if we understand more about those we converse with. One of our Deacons suggested getting to the heart of a comment you might deem negative so as to understand where that person might be coming from. A metaphor of The Road to Emmaus.

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Several comments mention not knowing much about the church community outside of their regular mass attendance. This may indicate a need for standardizing communications coming from the Parish about other programs, and from the Diocese sharing about other parishes and their programs. Our Bishop provides a weekly newsletter, but it does not get widely dispersed. The same was said earlier about awareness of Formation opportunities. This is an important improvement area because of the interrelationship between Communication, Education and Formation.

There is a desire by engaged parishioners for more contact with their Pastor; which is most mentioned by our youth. The Priests say much of their time is taken dealing with parishioners who are not engaged in church life. Would the Pastor engaging the Engaged assist them in engaging the Disengaged? It is acknowledged that Secular Culture is invading Church Life, thus the need to have Parishioners engaged in their Faith.

Creating a safe space for fellowship, service and conversation was mentioned by many as needed to nurture Community. Multicultural Parishes also enjoy celebrations where they all come together to become a unified community of the faithful. They want to see more of these events with a deeper involvement. There is a strong desire to connect across Latino-Anglo lines, though language is still considered a barrier. Multicultural Parishes continue to look for effective ways to bring diverse communities together. The sense is that it is going in the right direction. Community is thriving in small Church Groups and Cursillos.

Respondents acknowledge needed improvement in reaching out to the marginalized communities such as those who have fallen away from the Church, Youth, Immigrants, Introverts, and those with physical, mental, economic and social limitations.

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## **Decision-Making & Governance**

It is evident that the Faithful do not know how decisions are made at the Parish and Diocesan level. Their assumption is that it is “top down” and is made by the Pastor/Bishop or a very small and anonymous group. The feeling is that the Parishioners’ opinion is not heard nor sought out. There is a need to inform the Faithful of how the Canonical Decision-Making Process must work, and how they are able to consult to assist the Pastor in his decision. While Policies and other informative documents are available on the yakimadiocese.org website, people do not know of their existence and how to access them. The Communication theme also mentioned in “Speaking Out & Being Heard” and “Creating Community” exists here as well.

We need to improve how we reflect the Faithful in our decisions, listen to each other, and discern the information we share. If the Faithful feel a part of this process, or understand it more completely, it improves their sense of Engagement. Elevating the transparency of Decision-Making can be helped by regular reporting of Parish activities and planning, and better promotion of who helps serve on Parish Consultative bodies.

As a side note, there were several comments thanking the Bishop for the Synodal Process; giving them an opportunity to speak that they felt did not exist before. This is encouraging, and we hope to continue this exchange at the Parish and Diocesan levels.

## **The Priests are Unified, but Tired**

During the Synod, Bishop Tyson met one-on-one with each Priest in the Diocese, and in Deanery groups. They shared that the separation experienced by Covid-19 and the injection of

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cultural opinions surrounding vaccination and mask mandates in our State has fallen on their doorstep. It has been a difficult two years for them. Synod comments suggest that the engaged Faithful want to see more of their Priest. Parishes, and particularly Laity may look at ways to support the Pastor and his Parish Plan; which in turn will help them feel more connected to the Community.

There are several parishes in rural communities where one Pastor shepherds multiple parishes with little or no assistance from paid staff. Clergy recommend giving concrete examples to the Parishioners of how they can assist the Pastor. Some will assist in building and grounds maintenance, but resources are often limited.

## **Mission & Community Outreach**

There are encouraging comments linked to wanting to serve others through the Church. This is elevated among our Youth since it will connect them to the Church and to each other. This also can provide an Ecumenical component which has been missing or non-existent based on Synod comments. Several parishes mentioned outreach programs they do with other Christian churches and organizations, but it is not prevalent in Parish life (according to comments).

A strong example of this is PREPARES (“Pregnancy & Parental Support”) which started in this Diocese and is now an initiative of the Washington State Conference of Catholic Bishops statewide. It is off to a very successful start supporting over 5,000 families from conception to the child’s 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. In a recent audit, Parish offices were called and asked about the PREPARES program, and its awareness was at a very low level (several parishes have recently done fundraisers and supply drives). This spotlights the improvements needed in Communicating to the Faithful the programs the Church and Parishes make available for those in need. Their sense of belonging

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to something that walks the Catholic Social Teaching rather than only lecturing about it leads to improved engagement with our Faith.

## **Next Steps**

Given that we now have important input from our Parishioners, Bishop Tyson and the Diocesan Pastoral Council will commence Directional Planning for his Ministry to the Diocese for the next 10 years. The Bishop will consult with the Presbyterate to do Strategic Planning as well. We have retained an outside Consultant to assist us in this Planning effort and we look forward to the process.

Additionally, we intend to inform the Faithful of what we heard from them at our annual Mission Congress to be held Saturday, October 15. We will seek additional action items at the Congress and implement a plan from there. At that time, an Executive Summary will be available to the public via our website and social media platforms.

Many of our Parishes are using this process as a springboard to do their own Parish Planning.

## **Summary**

The Faithful welcomed the opportunity to provide input to the Synod. While some comments were more of a Town Hall nature, people came around to reflecting on their relationship with the Holy Spirit and Church, and want to see it as a place of comfort.

Better understanding of decision-making must be balanced with better communication and consultation of representative bodies. This is particularly important with our Youth so that they feel more a part of our Community.

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Support for the Priest is an elevated need due to people's attitudes towards secular issues – this has been quite apparent during the Pandemic. All sense a need for civility in our conversations with each other and other denominations. Focusing on the continued engagement of Youth is seen as a top priority, with their attendance (along with their parents) at Sunday Mass being a key measurement.

The Clergy suggests we begin sharing findings sooner than later so that those who participated have evidence their experiences were heard. The Pastoral Council will look at ways to effectively do this that will culminate in a successful strategy planning session at the Diocesan Mission Congress on October 15, 2022.

We are invigorated from this experience and look forward to using it as a catalyst for renewed growth in our parishes and our Faith Journey. We learn from each other through these conversations and pray that we emerge as a more connected Church.