

# Synod Synthesis for Region XII

## *Dioceses of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana*

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### INTRODUCTION

#### **Snapshot of Region XII**

Region XII covers more than one million square miles and includes the ten dioceses of the states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. This region is richly varied, with vast stretches of wilderness and farm country as well as major urban centers. We share an extraordinary history of missionary bishops, priests, religious, and laity who tirelessly spread the Gospel and built up the Church here with vision and dedication. The Catholic experience in this region encompasses inner-city parishes, growing suburban communities, and remote missions that can only be reached by boat or plane. Our local Churches are enriched by the presence and participation of people of many ethnic backgrounds, including indigenous communities. Our dioceses reflect the cultural, ethnic, economic, ecclesial, and political diversity of our region and our nation.

#### **The Experience of the Synod**

All ten of the dioceses of Region XII took part in the synod. We approached the synodal process in a variety of ways. Several dioceses incorporated the synod discussions into ongoing strategic planning efforts. Synodal listening took place in groups small and large, both online and in person, in parishes and missions, schools, universities, chanceries, homes, shelters, prisons, camps for migrant workers, and outreach centers. Each diocese made efforts to reach out to marginalized communities. This was challenging at times, as not everyone we hoped to hear from felt safe to participate in this effort, but the synod offers a pathway to begin to build or rebuild relationships.

People shared their experiences, their dreams for the Church, and their concerns with openness and courage. Participants appreciated the opportunity to share their stories – including painful stories – without interruption, contradiction, or apologetics. Many expressed that the process and the experience were healing and hopeful, and desperately needed in the Church today.

- *“It was a holy opportunity as leaders to listen to people’s pain and stories. It felt very sacramental. Each session was an encounter with Jesus.”*
- *“Our stories helped us to see the inherent dignity and grace in every one of us. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we were moved from disagreement and distrust to candor and community.... It was in listening that I felt the Holy Spirit’s presence more powerfully than I ever have before.”*
- *“The synodal process gives us a road map to move forward... to go beyond our lethargy.”*
- *“The only authentic journey is the one which takes us deeper into the Paschal Mystery.”*
- *“We thank dear Pope Francis for this gift of synodal listening, inviting us all to take part.”*
- *“The worldwide synodal process is a huge blast of oxygen in our Church.”*

- *“The process was very liberating.”*

In addition to hope, there was also confusion about the synod. People did not always understand what a synod was, why it was needed, or how their voices would contribute. In one of our dioceses, headlines about the “synodal way” in Germany put a damper on local efforts, and caused some to enter into the process with suspicion and concern. There was also skepticism, and even cynicism, that the synod would lead to any real action.

- *“Will the hierarchy listen to us? Will the notes from the listening sessions become diluted before they reach the Pope?”*
- *“I am leery that those who will receive our comments will not receive them and learn. ... This time, too much is at stake.”*

As we listened to the voices of thousands of participants, a number of common hopes and concerns emerged, which are highlighted in this regional synthesis. We have grouped the most prevalent themes under the headings of *Communion, Participation,* and *Mission* – the three pillars of the synodal process. Included, in the bulleted lists, are the direct words of some of the thousands who participated in the synod in Region XII.

## COMMUNION

### A Beloved Communion

People love their Church, with its universal reach, stretching across the globe and through the centuries. They deeply value their parish communities and they yearn to be seen and known. They crave personal connection, with each other and with their priests. They desire to live their faith in their families and in their distinctive cultural traditions. They want to serve others in the name of Christ. Above all, they treasure the sacraments and the Mass.

People treasure their priests and the witness of the priesthood. They want priests who are accessible and who ‘smell like the flock.’ They expressed concern about the shortage of priests, but also emphasized that quality is more important than quantity and urged that good seminary formation is essential. Some suggested ordaining married men as a way of addressing the shortage of priests.

- *The sacraments are “a beacon of joy.”*
- *“Attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist are always a source of joy and peace.”*
- *“There is a sense of unity and comradery within the Church that is unlike anywhere else.”*
- *“I can’t imagine where I would be without the Church.”*
- *“The Church has supported me and my family through the most challenging times.”*
- *“What keeps me here is the liturgy, the saints, and the wonderful people who have gold in their hearts.”*
- *“Church is home, family, community, friendship, peace. People want to go home, we are a Church and we are home to one another.”*

- *“Many want to reach out to the priest but feel like he is so busy they don't want to overburden him knowing he is the only one in the parish ... so often they just deal with things on their own.”*

The synod conversations highlighted a number of obstacles to communion, from outside the Church as well as from within.

### **Obstacles to Communion: The Impact of COVID-19**

The pandemic has had a major impact on Church life in the United States. It has reawakened people’s awareness of the importance of the Eucharist, and of the eucharistic community, in their lives. It has also led to the fraying of our communities in some ways, accelerating a trend towards disengagement and intensifying the isolation and loneliness of many, youth and the elderly in particular. A large number of the faithful have not yet returned to worship.

The pandemic has also sharpened our political divisions. Some felt that suspending public Masses, mandating masks, and other pandemic-related adaptations were an inappropriate encroachment of the state on personal and religious freedom. Others were happy for these safety measures, grateful for the efforts parishes made to provide liturgies and formation programs through online formats, and surprised at the Church’s ability to pivot and adapt. People see this post-pandemic moment as an opportunity for a fresh start.

- *“We are not meant to live in isolation, but in community, and we have the opportunity to be community.”*
- *This post-COVID time offers “a new start, [an opportunity] to make the parish the center of our community and become more vibrant.”*

### **Obstacles to Communion: The Legacy of Abuse**

The faithful continue to be scandalized and discouraged by the clergy sexual abuse crisis and cover-up. While much has been done to address this issue, trust has been badly damaged. As new revelations of past abuse continue to emerge, and new accusations arise, wounds reopen. People do not have confidence that there is full transparency, and they do not feel adequate atonement has been made for these crimes.

The erosion of trust brought about by the abuse crisis has been compounded by the historic involvement of the Church in the boarding school system for indigenous children, where the extent of neglect, abuse, and cultural erasure may never be fully known. Financial scandals, and the Church’s complicity in the history of slavery and racism in the United States, have further shaken the trust of the faithful.

The scandal caused by these catastrophic failures is incalculable and continues to get in the way of mission, making it hard for the faithful to trust their leaders and to share their faith. This has made it more difficult for people to receive the Church’s teaching on moral issues; it also makes it hard for priests and bishops to lead.

Priests shared the tension, fear, and anxiety they continue to experience. They spoke of how difficult it is to earn trust, and the pain of being assumed guilty until proven innocent. They spoke of feeling abandoned by the institutional Church.

While the Synod is seen as a step in the right direction, much healing and work must be done for the institutional Church to regain trust and confidence. People want to feel proud to be Catholic, but in the shadow of the past, they find it difficult.

- *“To learn of the hypocritical and evil behaviors of certain clergy over the years and the intentional coverup by the hierarchy has caused the greatest harm imaginable. Our dioceses finally took action, but it was too little, too late for many young people who now reject the Church. The actions of Pope Francis in meeting with victims and asking for forgiveness gives hope and will set an example for the future of all in the Church.”*
- *“I love the Church, but I am still grieving and heartbroken about the priest pedophile issue.... To me, the people in charge who moved the priests around make me angrier than the pedophiles themselves. As a Catholic school teacher, I know we have done things to prevent abuse from happening, but I’m not sure we have ever truly grasped it. It’s heartbreaking when I love the Church so much. I’m still processing it: I don’t know if I ever will truly process it. I’m not sure it’s something you can ever put behind you.”*
- *“The Church is quick to judge except when they protect their own.”*
- *“My kids are Alaska Natives. I know the Pope apologized to the native peoples, but I have to wonder how I could put my kids in a place where there is that legacy of harm.”*
- *“The Church needs to face up to its history of white supremacy and institutional racism. Our credibility to speak about God’s love for the world depends on it.”*

## **Obstacles to Communion: Polarization and Disunity**

One of the most prevalent themes in our synodal discussions was the polarization and disunity, even the politicization, that is evident in the Church in the United States. Individuals—both lay and ordained—try to use the Church to advance political agendas, instead of being united in the truth of faith. People at both ends of the political spectrum have set up camp opposing the “others,” forgetting that they are one in the Body of Christ. Partisan politics is infiltrating homilies and ministry, and this trend has created division and intimidation among believers. Even when we look to the college of bishops in the United States, we see the all-too-familiar divisions and polarization which have become the norm of secular society. In addition to the divisions among the bishops, some bishops are publicly at odds with the Holy Father.

The faithful are aware of and deeply concerned by these divisions. They want a clear, unified voice from their bishops and the Holy Father. They do not want the Church to be swayed by any political agenda or party.

People want to see the Church address the evils present in the world today, including abortion, poverty, racism, and climate change. Catholic Social Teaching is a treasure of the Church, but its tenets are dismissed or laughed at in some settings, or even seen as part of some “progressive agenda.” Faith in action is different from political activism. Every statement and action of the Church should reflect the love of God, and come from its teaching about the dignity of the human person. People want to

find a refuge in the Church, a place where bitter political divisions can be overcome and real dialogue, real communion, can happen.

- *“If we can’t talk to each other, respect each other and love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, there is no hope for the world.”*
- *“Politics over faith is our main challenge.”*
- *“I was shocked at how much conflict and strife were in the various churches and schools I participated in.”*
- *“It feels like the only thing they see as evil is abortion – they’ll strike a deal with any devil if they say they will end abortion.”*
- *One young adult “shared how nervous she is for the future of the world with climate change, but no one in the Church seems to be taking her or it seriously.”*
- *“No one wants to follow [the bishops] anymore ... no one likes where they are going. It doesn’t seem to follow the path of Jesus.”*
- *“For me, the closer I come to Jesus the further I feel from the institutional Church. I would like to have that gap lessened for me.”*

## PARTICIPATION

Who participates in the life of the Church? Who is excluded from full participation? As we reflected on how we journey together, people shared experiences of joyful participation as well as exclusion and marginalization. People lamented the lack of engagement in parish life, even among Catholics who attend Mass regularly; others spoke of feeling invisible or ignored in their parish communities, and of the difficulty of getting involved when long-established groups do not welcome new members.

Many groups—including people with special needs, adherents of the pre-Vatican II liturgy, and members of different ethnic communities—feel marginalized, dismissed, and overlooked. We will highlight several groups whose exclusion from full participation came up frequently: youth, divorced and remarried Catholics, members of multicultural communities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and women. Also included in this section is the issue of participation in the Eucharist, which also emerged in many gatherings.

### Youth

One of the most prevalent topics that emerged in the synodal conversations was the participation of youth. People expressed concern about the survival of the Church if we fail to reach the next generation. Parents with young children want to know how to hand on the faith in a way that will help their children place the practice of the faith at the center of their lives, and they want the help of the Church in doing this. Parents of adult children express great anxiety for their children who no longer practice their faith. People grieve that their family members seem to have lost this part of their heritage and the spiritual lifeline of the faith.

Young people spoke of how they often feel ignored. They value real relationships and want more of them. They want their priest to know their names. For the young,

inclusion, community, and service are high values. They want to encounter Christ. They want to find beauty, transcendence, and energy at Mass and parish events. They want a living, active faith that requires more of them than attendance at Mass. Many young people want to share their faith and Church teachings with their peers, but do not feel equipped to do so.

Young people want to be part of the Church and spoke of the importance of personal invitation. They often feel there is no room for them: they reported feeling judged, rejected, stifled, or not needed in parishes run by older people. Young people also want the Church to speak out about issues that matter to them, especially justice, race, and climate change. Many are troubled by Catholic voices that are hostile to LGBTQ+ people.

- *"I feel like a failure because I was not able to hand down my faith to my children who are now adults."*
- *"It breaks our hearts to see our children that we brought to Mass and sent to Catholic schools and colleges reject the Church."*
- *"I love that my faith comes from 2,000 years of one generation handing the faith to the next generation. I am concerned that it won't be handed to the next generation now."*
- *"I asked my daughter what the ideal church would look like. 'The Catholic Church isn't a happy place,' she told me. 'There's nothing for me there.'"*
- *"A lot of young people are missing out on what the Church has to offer – that peace. I teach confirmation and I encounter an increasing number of kids with a spiritual malaise – it's challenging to help these young people find the peace, the community that comes with participation in the Mass."*
- *"Every young person knows gay people and the Church's stance on gay people is unfathomable to them."*
- *"One teenager said they want a more welcoming Church and don't like that people assume they are anti-LGBTQ because they are Catholic."*
- *A teacher summarized: "I think students are genuinely challenging the Church to see them in their struggle, and comfort, encourage, and affirm the goodness of each person. Not try to change them – but affirm the innate goodness of their humanity. Many of these students did not feel affirmed, but rejected or judged. This is a powerful challenge to the Church."*

### **Divorced and Remarried Catholics**

A number of participants registered frustration with the annulment process, which they found to be needlessly long, painful, and intrusive. Some people felt ostracized and rejected by people in their parish communities when their marriages ended.

- *"I was told divorced people shouldn't be eucharistic ministers, should not be allowed."*
- *We need to "remove procedural barriers that keep people feeling like outsiders and discourage them from active participation in the Church."*
- *"I'm becoming more and more disillusioned with the tribunal's process and lack of communication... I LOVE the Catholic Church teaching and faith. However, it is becoming more difficult to 'stay the course' when attempting to separate the church teaching from its administrative function/operation. I often wonder if the members/leaders of the tribunal realize the sense of abandonment their fellow Catholic petitioners feel when they receive little or no communication regarding their case."*

- *Catholic school teachers shared that “they are frustrated by the Church's definition of family: the school has many types of families and teachers would like to have alternative family structures recognized and respected so children feel accepted and not ashamed.”*

### **Hispanic and Multicultural Communities**

People in multicultural communities often experience tensions, especially when parish groups and activities are divided along linguistic or cultural lines. They want to bridge those divides and they want their parishes to be a safe space for fellowship, service, and conversation. Tensions and divisions within the Anglophone community make it more difficult to build these bridges.

Catholic people of color spoke of routine encounters with racism, both inside and outside the Church. Indigenous Catholics spoke of the generational trauma caused by racism and abuse in boarding schools.

- *A member of the Hispanic community said, “it is visible that we tend to separate or cling to our own ethnicity, as well as socio-economic background, that the lesser or smaller groups are marginalized and left behind due to the lack of integration or association with those bigger groups. We cannot walk, journey, or grow together until we acknowledge, bridge, and face this reality by having an open mind and respect for individual rights.”*
- *“It only takes one racist person or interaction to have a problem with racism in a community.”*
- *“It’s tough to deal with racism in the Church. It’s difficult to talk about racism because not everyone sees it, experiences it, or recognizes it. The synod, though, is the time to bring it up, difficult as it is.”*
- *“One woman shared that during the sign of peace, white people would shake each other’s hands around her, but not hers, even when she had her hand out. ‘To be honest, I like that with the pandemic we do a touch-free sign of peace.’”*
- *“Where was the Church in summer 2020, when the whole world was talking about racial justice and Black Lives Matter? Jesus was always with the marginalized.”*
- *“We are strands on the same rope, shredding apart instead of twisting together for unification.”*

### **Members of the LGBTQ+ Community**

Many expressed concerns about the marginalization of LGBTQ+ people in the Catholic community. Some asked for clarity on Church teaching on homosexuality and for that teaching to be expressed in a more constructive, merciful, and loving way. Many asked for a greater inclusion of gay people in the life of the Church. LGBTQ+ Catholics shared their experiences of rejection and hateful speech from priests and fellow parishioners, and the sense of being rejected simply for being who they are. LGBTQ+ Catholics, their family members, and their friends want to be understood by the institutional Church. Many experienced synodal listening as a step towards respect and acceptance.

- *“Churches talk about inclusivity but they are really not unless you fit into their own boxes.”*
- *“LGBTQ people are created in God’s image as surely as everyone is. It is past time to stop persecuting them and start trying to understand and love them.”*
- *“My daughter is gay. I have no idea where that came from, but I realized: God loves everybody. I don’t see the Church being open to embrace gay people. That hurts.”*

- *“When the priest says that being gay is an ideology that must not be allowed to spread, it hurts because being gay is not something you can change. It turns a lot of people away from the church, not just gay people, because this is very hateful.”*
- *“God doesn’t create junk.”*
- *A middle school student said, “If God says he loves everyone and he doesn’t lie, doesn’t he also love trans people?”*
- *“People have been gay or transgender forever and ignoring it is not working, saying you are welcome, but you really aren’t, is not working.”*

## **Women**

The role of women came up at almost all synodal gatherings. People shared the powerful impact of women religious, who have been at the forefront of mission in our region, especially health care and education. They desire a stronger presence of women religious and female exemplars of faith in their communities. People mentioned a variety of ways in which women could exercise leadership, including preaching and ordination as deacon or priest. Ordination for women emerged not primarily as a solution to the problem of the priest shortage, but as a matter of justice. Beyond the contested question of holy orders, a constant was the desire for women to take on more leadership roles in the Church.

- *“We want women in leadership roles because we can already see women with enormous capability. We want our girls and young women to see a place in the Church for themselves.”*
- *“We don’t have to wait for female ordination to allow women visible/prominent roles as leaders, including homilists.”*
- *“One mother, who was in great pain as she shared this, said that she was on the brink of leaving the Church, concerned about the effect of the Church’s messages toward women on her daughters: ‘I feel like women are second-class citizens. We are discriminated against because we can’t be deacons or priests. How is that equitable?’”*
- *“If there had been a woman/mom higher up, a sexually abusive priest would never have been moved from one parish to another.”*
- *“If Mary could bring Christ bodily into the world through saying ‘Yes’ to him and carrying him and giving birth to him, that is the most priestly thing one could do.”*

## **Eucharistic Participation**

People treasure the Eucharist and the sacraments. The question of who is able to participate in the Eucharist came up frequently, in a variety of contexts. People married to non-Catholics mentioned the pain this causes, and ask why Eucharist cannot be open to all who believe in the Real Presence. Many were troubled by the very public denial of communion to some elected officials, and noted the lack of unity among our bishops on this question. All of this creates confusion in people’s understanding around the Eucharist.

- *“Why don’t headlines read, ‘Jesus is Really Present in the Eucharist!’ instead of ‘Politician denied Communion’? In the Gospel we read that Jesus welcomed sinners and dined with them, but too many are denied access to the Eucharistic table.”*
- *“Who is worthy, who is denied, who decides?”*



## MISSION

“The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deeply missionary dimension to it” (*Vademecum*).

Where do we go from here? Where is the Holy Spirit calling us through these synodal gatherings? What is the Church called to be and to do? In this section, we highlight several potential areas of mission and focus.

### Learning to Be Missionary Disciples

One constant across all our dioceses was a desire among the people for formation in faith. People want to go deeper. They share a profound desire for connection with Jesus Christ and with a community of faith. They want to know the Scriptures and they long for a deeper prayer life. The faithful also yearn for clarity on what the Church teaches, and why. They want to be better equipped to engage in dialogue about their faith, answer questions about what the Church teaches, and participate in the work of evangelization. There is a true missionary impulse in the people of God, but many do not know how to share the faith they treasure. People want to be equipped and empowered to be the Church in the world.

Parents are eager to share their faith with their children, but they need the help of the whole Church to do this. Many adult Catholics feel they do not know how to pray, let alone lead their families in prayer. The domestic church should be an area of special concern for the whole Church.

People also recognize the difficulty of being people of faith in the culture we live in. Some of the values of our culture – relativism and humanism, among other ideologies – are incompatible with our faith. As Christian believers, we know we need to be in the world, but not of the world. We also know that condemnations of false understandings of the human person and of society are not enough. The Church must reaffirm Church teaching and convey it in a way that is accessible, comprehensible, joyful, and attractive.

At the same time, people do not want simple answers to complex questions. They want to understand the nuances of Church teaching on moral issues like the death penalty, marriage equality, racism, birth control, abortion, domestic violence, wealth disparity, incarceration, immigration, refugees, end of life issues, and climate change. Catholics seek the wisdom of the Church as they navigate the challenges of living an ethical life based on Gospel values in a pluralistic society.

There is a shared sense that the Church needs to commit more time, energy, and resources to reaching youth, young adults, and young families. We need to provide dynamic and relevant prayer opportunities and formation in faith for people of all ages.

- “They would prefer to know the ‘why’ of the faith, not just the ‘what.’”
- “It’s hard to evangelize if you don’t know your faith well.”
- “People leave because they don’t understand.”

- *“We need a stronger sense of belonging so we can receive help and encouragement to make us all better disciples of Christ as the culture around us disintegrates.”*

### **A Need for Ongoing Healing**

In the synodal conversations, many wounds were exposed. As Church, we must acknowledge and address our role in permitting abuse, and in marginalizing vulnerable groups. Institutional self-protection, cultural insensitivity, racism, homophobia, and clericalism do great harm. These realities need to be acknowledged and addressed so that change can occur. Those who have suffered as a result of these sins need to be recognized and listened to. In particular, the historical trauma of indigenous people who live with the legacy of abuse in residential schools needs to be an area of focus.

Healing does not happen all at once; it takes time and must be an ongoing effort. Church leaders need to listen and acknowledge harm with authenticity and without defensiveness.

Transparency is key to this process of healing and rebuilding trust. The decision-making process should be transparent and consultative. People do not know how decisions are made at the parish and diocesan level. When people understand and feel part of the process, they are more engaged. One participant defined transparency as “a willing truthfulness of the Catholic church towards the people both inside and outside the institution.” Authentic, respectful listening and dialogue, accompaniment, and discernment need to be built into how the Church operates at every level.

### **A Home for the Wounded**

People noted that the Church seems to prioritize doctrine over people, rules and regulations over lived reality. People want the Church to be a home for the wounded and broken, not an institution for the perfect. They want the Church to meet people where they are, wherever they are, and walk with them rather than judging them; to build real relationships through care and authenticity, not superiority. In this way, the Church will create an environment of belonging and become more welcoming, inclusive, and diverse. People want the church to be a sanctuary and a refuge, a place where they feel safe and welcome; a community that builds bridges and fosters dialogue between people of different languages, ethnic groups, and political persuasions. We need to make a concerted effort to overcome our divisions and build greater unity, understanding, and trust in our local Churches.

- *“The participants reported that the Church teaches the doctrine before the encounter with Jesus and questioned if it should be the other way around.”*
- *The Church comes across as “too institutionalized, sometimes putting the needs of the institution over the needs of God’s people. Sometimes too rigid on rules and regulations, sometimes like the pharisees.”*
- *“The Church often prioritizes the doctrine and teaching over loving the person in front of us.”*
- *“I long for an inclusive, loving, merciful, servant Church.”*
- *“I dream that the church can be a safe haven for people struggling in the world, where they can go to get away from it all and be equally loved.”*
- *“The Church needs to be a home, not an institution.”*

## **A Church That Goes Out**

People desire a Church that actively invites individuals, especially young people, into deeper participation in the faith and in the Church's mission. People spoke of building a culture of invitation, welcome, and empathy, reaching out beyond the comfort of the pews and meeting people where they are, including those who may be unfamiliar with, uncomfortable with, or antagonistic towards the Church. Catholics want to evangelize and to engage in direct service and outreach alongside other believers. People spoke of the treasure of Catholic Social Teaching, and how outreach can be a way to connect with young people and with people of other faiths.

- *"The Church is turning inward on itself and has become a filling station waiting for customers rather than a field hospital."*
- *"We are indifferent to the outsiders, yet we exist as believers to bring them in."*
- *"We need to evangelize even to our own parishioners, not just to the greater community."*
- *"We need to know people's names so we can reach out when they're missing. Groups need to invite others to join."*
- *"A woman felt drawn to join the Catholic Church as an adult after witnessing acts of service and a strong sense of faithfulness from Catholics she knew."*
- *"As members of Christ's body, we have a role to play; we have to receive God's love and share it with others, especially those on the margins."*
- *"In caring for the least among us, I feel most connected to God and most in tune with what Jesus taught."*
- *"Talk with the needy, just like you would with anyone else. Let them know they are valued. Listen to them."*

## **A Joyful Church**

People want a more joyful Church. As participants noted, there is a difference between being solemn or reverent, and being gloomy "prophets of doom." The former is rooted in deep joy and respect; the latter is founded on fear. The People of God want to experience the fire of joy that comes with being part of the Church established by Jesus Christ – the joy of being Catholic. People want preachers and artists who are willing to shout that joy. People worry that the Church has become a place of suppression. Some Catholics today mistake fear for reverence. Shame, fear, and judgment lead people to see the Church as a joyless institution. Catholics want to wear their Catholic identity with pride, since the truth of the faith points to a joy that cannot be compared to any other joy in the world.

- *"Our kids are not coming back to church; one big reason is there is no joy."*
- *"Each person can smile more at Mass to show the joy we have ... Each person needs to know their faith more, and share their daily miracles with others around them .... We have to be willing to share our faith."*

## CONCLUSION

Those who led the synodal process and those who participated have been invigorated by this experience. Many of our dioceses are already using the findings of our diocesan synodal discussions – and the synodal process itself – as a catalyst for renewal in our local Churches. We look forward to what happens next at the national and international levels. May the Holy Spirit guide our leaders and all of us as we seek to journey together in the footsteps of Christ.