



JOURNEYING TOGETHER

Archdiocese of Miami

2021-2022



Journeying Together: The Next Three Years

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Journeying Together: The Next Three Years

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ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI *Office of the Archbishop*

Dear members of Christ's faithful,

I am happy to share with you the summary of what was heard throughout this past "Journeying Together" Synod listening sessions. This input was not only important for the Synod on Synodality but has helped us here in the Archdiocese to evaluate and revise our pastoral priorities. As we journey together as a people of faith we are not on automatic pilot: we continue to encourage many "joys" and to address many "concerns" as you will see in the initiatives we are pursuing in this local Church.

Our diversity – of languages and cultures – here in the Archdiocese of Miami is our strength and witnesses to the universality of our Catholic Church. While some may fear diversity thinking that it leads to polarization, we have learned that our diversity is a gift that enriches all of us.

For example, 96 of our parishes had representatives who actively participated in the Synod. Over 300 Synod listening sessions were held at parishes in multiple languages. 80 Parish reports were officially submitted. 6 Catholic High Schools held sessions and submitted reports. Over 1,400 young people answered the online survey and 65 high school youth participated in an online session with me. There were special sessions for Priests, Women Religious Communities, Young Adults, Seminarians, Permanent Deacons, as well as for College, Inter-Faith, Social Justice and other groups.

I hope you see throughout this summary that our ministries also need to be as diverse as the people we serve so we can reach out to others more effectively, not only to people of different languages and cultures, but also to people in different phases of their faith journey both inside and outside our parishes.

Many practicing Catholics are still in the early stages of discipleship. There is a great request for ongoing adult faith formation and for management and leadership training in ministry. Others have fallen away from the habit of practicing the Faith. We need to create outreach opportunities and a welcoming community for them. Other people need us Catholics back in the public square to provide a witness to them through our commitment for the common good. There is still time for us to grow in our own faith and to welcome and share our faith with others as friends and disciples of Jesus Christ. There are still opportunities to welcome some people to Church and other people back to Church before our culture becomes more secularized.

Let us not waste this time or lose these opportunities. There is still much work to be done. I pray you also find report this hopeful and motivating.

Thank you and God bless you.

Most Rev. Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop Of Miami



SUMMARY

What about the Church brings you joy?

- The Eucharist and celebration of the Sacraments
- The Universality of the Church and its Tradition
- The Virgin Mary and the saints
- Sense of Belonging
- Participation in ministry
- Dedication to serving those in need/charitable activities
- Priests who are dedicated to their mission

What about the Church concerns you?

- Poor catechesis/understanding of faith (their own and that of leaders)
- The clergy abuse and other scandals
- The abandonment of the faith by large numbers
- Politicization/Division
- Disengagement of the youth and young adults.
- The lack of interest in participating in Church activities
- Support for priests

How can the Church support people on their faith journeys?

- Faith Formation
- Spiritual Direction
- Ministry and support groups
- Retreats
- Activities for youth
- Increased use of media to tell our story
- Increased interaction with priests
- Clear and consistent guidance/teaching

Feeling heard

- At the parish level responses differed, with some expressing concerns about their pastor or clergy, but most expressing very positive comments regarding their particular priests.
- The most common sentiment with regard to feeling heard by the Church has to do with the communication between the laity and the Archdiocese and the Church hierarchy.



ARCHDIOCESE of MIAMI

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"Our people express above all the joy of being and feeling community, family, each other, of mutual support, and sharing the Eucharist. The centrality of the Eucharist in the faith of the Church and the sense of belonging, being part of a Body, were very repeated themes. The beauty of the ritual and the universality of the Church expressed in the liturgy were also important themes."

— From Our Lady of Divine Providence

Reconnect and Respond to Needs

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting temporary closures of our churches and schools has had a profound impact on the local Catholic community, with many Synod participants reporting that the faithful have not returned to their parishes in the same numbers as were there before the pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, there was a clear realization that many of our parishes were experiencing a downward trend in Mass attendance and participation in activities; most notably disappearing are the youth and young adults. This is troubling for many reasons, one of the most pressing being the fact that young people are currently facing an unprecedented mental health crisis.

The Office of Evangelization has already adopted a model of using the thresholds of evangelization as the most effective approach to evangelization; this model recognizes that evangelization is not a "one size fits all" endeavor, but rather, must be customized based on where each individual finds themselves on their faith journey. This approach requires a shift in the evangelization efforts at many parishes.

Another one of the most-often mentioned sources of joy was participation in parish and other ministries and movements. However, there was also a much-mentioned concern with regard to the selection, training, formation and oversight of the leaders of ministries and movements.

An ongoing theme since the last synod, there is a need to continue to build a culture of welcome in our parishes, by establishing and growing hospitality ministries and equipping parishioners to engage in true outreach ministry.



INITIATIVES FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Ministry Leadership

- ADOM to promulgate norms for the creation and running of ministries and movements, at both the parish and archdiocesan levels. These norms will cover both the administrative component as well as the qualifications for leaders, including formation and leadership training.
- ADOM to require a ministry audit at the change of a pastor.

Outreach Ministry

- The ADOM will launch a training program for parishes to introduce Alpha for Catholics.

Inreach Ministry/Disciple Activation

- The ADOM will relaunch the Parish Missionary Disciple ("PMD") initiative, which equips parishioners in their personal faith journey towards missionary discipleship.

Ministry to Youth and Young Adults

- The ADOM to engage with the parishes in an intentional process of understanding the reality of youth ministry in the 21st century and the commitment required by the parish in order to provide meaningful ministry to young people.
- The ADOM to explore the opportunities for clustered youth ministry with external funding opportunities.
- The ADOM to explore opportunities for supporting young people in their daily lives, in particular with regard to their mental, physical, and spiritual health.

Ministry for Specific Needs

- The ADOM will work with parishes to offer ministries directed towards particular stages and conditions of life, including for those individuals dealing with divorce and individuals and family members dealing with sexuality and gender issues.



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"Many do not understand the basics of the Catholic Faith which then negatively influences their ability to integrate the Faith and transmit it to others. Those who do not understand the Faith are unable to appreciate it and that stands as a core stumbling block to growing in love for the Eucharist, the Holy Mass, and the Christian life."

— From St. Coleman

Catholic Faith and Life

Without a doubt, the greatest source of joy for the participants of synod sessions are the Eucharist, the Mass and sacraments, and the traditions of the Catholic Church. Additionally, the experience of community that we experience at the parish level is highly valued.

As much as the faithful treasure their experience as Catholics, there is an overwhelming sense that they don't truly understand the faith, and a recognition that this lack of formation leaves them vulnerable to the cultural attack on religion and faith, and inept at supporting others in their own faith journey.

This seems particularly applicable to sacramental preparation, which is for many the only exposure to true faith formation, and which can vary from parish to parish.

People desire increased support and deeper formation to grow as disciples; a key component of this growth is ongoing and increasingly deep faith formation.

A vast majority of parish synod reports called for a great desire by the people for engagement in spiritual direction, whether it be with clergy or trained lay people, and both one-to-one and in group settings.



INITIATIVES FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

A Focus on the Eucharist

- In conjunction with the USCCB's upcoming Eucharistic Revival, the ADOM will embark on a three-year course of activities regarding the Eucharist, beginning with a year-long formation campaign for ministry leaders.

Renewed Sacramental Preparation

- The ADOM will create a comprehensive system for sacramental preparation for all sacraments, including training and formation for leaders and a clear path of communication and accountability between the parishes and the ADOM.

Discipleship Formation

- The ADOM will create a cross-departmental institute that will be responsible for creating and delivering faith formation opportunities, both online and in-person.
- This institute will also create and maintain a website with access to online, on-demand faith formation opportunities, including courses through the Catechetical Institute and other approved entities.

Spiritual Direction

- The ADOM will evaluate the current opportunities for spiritual direction and explore the models and approaches that can supplement what is already available.
- Clergy will be encouraged to devote a certain number of hours weekly to personal spiritual direction.
- The ADOM will create a resource for the laity that provides information regarding spiritual direction.



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“There is an urgent need in the Church for evangelization and empowerment of all people, through formation at all levels and stages of life, meeting people where they are and, in the language, style, and manner that appeals to each group throughout their faith journey. Making useful tools and resources readily available and accessible is essential. The Church leadership and laity need to partner together so that the laity can multiply in serving the Church as the Church, including as well-formed catechists, to be effective and inspiring teachers, witnesses, and evangelizers of the faith in the world today.”

— From Blessed Trinity

Priestly Life

Another one of the primary sources of joy identified by participants at the synod sessions are our clergy. The people have a great appreciation for these men and are concerned that the pressures and demands of their roles are placing an unhealthy burden upon them.

As with other areas written about here, there is a converse concern with regard to the clergy. There is a strong desire by the people for increased interaction with their priests and a perception (whether accurate or not) that many priests are simply not as available to the faithful as they should be.

The feedback from the priests themselves aligns with much of the public commentary. There is a general feeling of being overwhelmed and a sense that they cannot satisfy the ongoing needs of the parishioners.

The priests’ feedback also signaled a need for increased support by the ADOM, including mentoring for newer priests and help in forming true community and a sense of fraternity.

Both the faithful and the clergy indicated a recognition of the importance of dynamic preaching and a desire for greater training and support in that area.



INITIATIVES FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Support our Priests

- Strengthen and reaffirm our continued commitment to the life-long ministry of our bishops, priests and deacons.
- Create resources for clergy support and ongoing formation.
- Continue to expand areas to our priests to exercise ministry effectively and serenely by encouraging their continued growth in dealing with difficult pastoral challenges as well as personal issues such as aging, health, and cultural differences, that can affect their collaboration with their brother priests and parishioners.

Clergy Communications

- Continue to solicit feedback from the clergy.
- Create intentional and open feedback loops between the people and the clergy and the archdiocese.
- “Generally speaking, people want structures for speaking to the leadership, and they want to have answers and solutions to their concerns.” – Immaculate Conception.

Culture of Vocations

- Invest in the development of a culture of vocations to deepen a greater understanding and appreciation of all vocations throughout the entire Archdiocese.



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"It all starts and ends with LOVE. We have to love and be willing to love more openly. The more that we do this the greater support we can be to others in their coming closer to Jesus and the Church."

— From Holy Redeemer

Increased Clarity

One of the most-mentioned subjects when asked to share their concerns about the Church was that of Church scandal—both sexual and financial. It is clear that there are still-open wounds in the Archdiocese of Miami that must be healed in order to re-establish the people's trust.

Synod participants spoke often of a desire for increased clarity and transparency in the workings of both their parishes and the archdiocese. One vehicle of transparency that was mentioned many times by the participants was the Parish Council. Those from parishes with a Council spoke to its positive influence in the parish, and those without one spoke of their desire for one. Parish councils are seen as a tool for opening channels of communication between clergy and parishioners. Parish Councils are also seen as a method to increase the role of the laity in supporting parish functions.

Another area in which the participants spoke of confusion is that of Church teaching, particularly on "hot-button" topics of the day, where there is a perception (correct or not) that there is disagreement among the bishops and between the bishops and the Holy Father. The people articulated that they have a great amount of respect for Archbishop Wenski and have a desire to receive more direct teaching from him and the Archdiocese.

Finally, 100% of parish reports spoke of a desire for ongoing gatherings such as the synod consultative sessions and for increased opportunities for dialogue at the parish and archdiocesan levels. Nearly 100% of the parishes also reported that the use of a question box or other type of method of asking questions at the parish would be welcome.



INITIATIVES FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Protection of the Faithful

- To be provided by the Office of Communication and Safe Environment.
- Launch an ADOM-wide series for processing of the abuse crisis.

Clarity on Church teaching, particularly of hot-topic issues

- Create a series of video teachings by Archbishop Wenski and others (priests, sisters, lay leaders) and flood the digital airwaves with them plus keep them available in an online library.
- Offer training and resources on Christian anthropology at the school, parish and archdiocesan levels

Parish Councils

- Assist the parishes in the establishment and proper functioning of a parish Pastoral Council, providing ongoing training and support.
- Establish an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council

Desire for continued parish conversations and dialogue

- ADOM to create a year-long curriculum of "Journeying Together Parish Guided Conversations" that can be held at the parish or ministry level, and to provide training and ongoing support for parish leaders charged with their execution.
- In conjunction with the "Journeying Together Parish Guided Conversations" series, quarterly online gatherings via Zoom for parish leaders.
- The ADOM will provide a guide for parishes with a variety of suggestions for implementation of a system of ongoing Q&A with parishioners.





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"We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but "to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands."

- Pope Francis, Address at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People (3 October 2018)

