

# SYNOPSIS OF THE DIOCESEAN PHASE OF THE SYNOD

DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER



## The Synodal Process in our Diocese

In September 2021, the Diocese of Fall River began planning for the Diocesan phase of the Synod after receiving information from the Holy See. Bishop Edgar da Cunha, SDV appointed Rev. David Frederici, Vicar General, as our Synod contact person, along with an ad hoc planning committee.

Bishop da Cunha commenced the diocesan phase of the Synod with a Mass of the Holy Spirit at the Cathedral of St Mary of the Assumption on October 17, 2021, with each priest in the diocese asked to do likewise on the same weekend in their own parishes.

To ensure that every parish was heard, each parish was instructed to select two individuals to serve as Parish Ambassadors and organize the synodal process locally with the pastor's approval, receiving formation and materials on November 6, 2021.

Local synod consultations and surveys took place between January and April 2022, a diocesan gathering on April 23, 2022, and final local reports submitted to Rev. Frederici, by April 30, 2022. The final diocesan report was submitted to the USCCB on June 30, 2022.

## Overview of Demographics from the Diocesan Phase of the Synod

An estimated nearly 5,000 individuals participated in our diocesan phase of the Synod. Of the 72 parishes in the diocese, 69 parishes (96%) designated ambassadors for this synodal process, and 54 parishes (75%) submitted final reports to the diocese. The breakdown of local synod consultations, as reported to the diocese, is as follows:

- 149 in-person and virtual sessions were held at churches, local halls, or private homes.
  - Large groups (~25-70 people) and small groups (~5-15 people)
  - Sessions were held throughout the diocese in English, Portuguese, and Spanish.
  - Parishes and groups utilized both one-time and recurring sessions with an average duration of between 1 and 3 hours.
  - 33 parishes held at least two or more sessions
- Surveys (electronic and printed)
  - 566 participants completed a Diocesan survey, representing the broad community in our diocese, including 49% non-Catholics.
  - Some individual parish surveys received between 100-280 responses each.
- Participant demographics included:
  - Middle school students through retirement age (most were between 40 and 80 years old with the diocesan survey skewing much younger.) Younger participants responded well to session invitations geared explicitly to them.
  - A balance of male and female participants.
- Synod information regarding was shared through: the diocesan website and social media accounts, *The Anchor*, Bishop da Cunha's blog, clergy emails and zoom meeting, ambassador emails and zoom meetings, and by use of the Mass of the Holy Spirit in parishes to open the Synod's diocesan phase. Materials for announcements, petitions for Sunday Mass, talking points, the Synod prayer, and a guidebook were shared with leaders and made public on the diocesan website in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

## Key Takeaways from Reports

There were various joys, challenges, and needs shared by parishes and Catholic communities. What follows is a synthesis of the topics and themes shared in local reports. The takeaways are based solely on input from our faithful and are not intended to represent an official diocesan position on any specific topic.

Despite the overarching challenges presented by the pandemic, it was evident that there are various ways in which churches and communities within the Diocese of Fall River are already proclaiming the Gospel together. Three main topics emerged:

- The celebration of the Mass
- Existing Ministries, Small Groups, and Communal Gatherings, such as retreats, missions, parish festivals, and dinners
- Service and Outreach Efforts

After sharing ways their communities already journey together, reports noted various challenges, observations, and needs for the Church - both locally and at large - to best move forward in proclaiming the Gospel. In particular, the following topics emerged:

- Engagement with young people should be the highest priority
- There is importance in prioritizing a relationship with God and first focusing on Jesus
- Significantly better communication is essential
- Connection with and visibility within our larger communities are desired
- There is a need and desire for more in-person connections, especially after COVID-19
- Developing a more welcoming atmosphere in our churches
- How the Mass can be a missed opportunity
- Our laity wants to be more involved; most just waiting to be asked
- Our Pastors should be prioritized as spiritual leaders
- There is a desire to grow formation efforts and rethink previous models and methods
- Our Church continues to struggle with transparency
- Clergy sex abuse has not been sufficiently addressed
- Multilingual communities desire more support
- The synodal process was received with mixed emotions
- Despite initial skepticism, reports noted participants' appreciation for the opportunity to come together and be heard

## Recommendations

It is suggested that the Vatican more effectively communicate the next steps for and outcomes from the Synod, both from this phase as well as through the subsequent phases. Additionally, it is recommended that our diocese, parishes, and other communities who shared in this diocesan synodal process:

- Share copies of the diocesan and local-level reports publicly and in their entirety to their respective communities.
- Prayerfully discern what was heard and the ideas shared to determine what should or can be addressed locally in the short term while prudently awaiting the final results and exhortations stemming from the 2023 Synod in Rome.
- Create or continue efforts for individuals to be heard and share feedback. Leverage parish ambassadors as leaders in the community to help facilitate regular checkpoints, ensuring feedback and ideas are shared with the pastor.
- Ensure that parishes have active parish councils representative of the entire parish and in keeping with the guidelines promulgated by Bishop da Cunha in December 2021.