



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO

SUMMARY REPORT – Synod Gatherings - Diocese of Kalamazoo – March 2024

Following the request of the General Secretariat of the Synod, the Diocese of Kalamazoo hosted five listening sessions during March 2024. Two groups in English and two groups in Spanish were open to the general public and were hosted in three cities across the diocese. The fifth group was in English solely for women religious. Four groups averaged 23 participants each, and one English session had only one participant.

While the process used the two questions proposed by the General Secretariat, only two groups reported their results in that fashion. The rest simply provided lists of statements. Even then, their lists often repeated many of the same comments, which have been interpreted for this summary as lists which describe the participants' concerns and desires.

It is also quite noticeable that the lists from the two language groups are distinctive. The Spanish groups are much more focused on faith development, which the English groups tend toward transformation of ecclesial structures and behavior. There is little overlap in the primary themes between the two language groups, and so this summary will treat each of them distinctly.

Spanish (33 comments from two gatherings)

"Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love." (Ephesians 4: 15-16)

Primary areas of attention

- a. Strengthen faith formation of adults, and then participate as leaders and participants in parish life – (14 comments!)
- b. Priests offer greater attention, listening, proximity, and participation; need more Spanish-speaking priests, and continuity of their assignments (5 comments)
- c. Expand programs and empowerment for youth (5 comments)
- d. Extend evangelization of all ages (4 comments)
- e. Need to increase priestly vocations among Hispanics, and all vocations (3 comments)
- f. Support for marriage and family (2 comments)
- g. Gratitude that new bishop is involved in the Hispanic community, and is concerned about formation of priests to serve them (2 comments)

Some additional clear and pertinent comments:

- g. That there be a pastoral plan in all parishes (diocese) in case there is a change of priest so that the work that has been done can continue
- h. Be more tolerant so that there is no discord in the community and leaders
- i. Promote interculturality so that there is more unity between the cultures that share the same church
- j. Create spaces where you can have an encounter with Christ from the reality of a person where they feel welcomed, accepted and involved to be sent
- k. By sharing our experiences as lay people in our parishes, we discover the importance of being a good witness to others, that is, more with concrete actions than what we preach with our lips. This includes discovering and exploring the gifts, charisms, and talents that the Holy Spirit has given to each of us in order to experience [our] position in parish service.

English (99 comments from 2 gatherings)

"For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3: 26-28)

-- Transparency (understood to signify open communication) was the most common theme. This includes active and respectful listening, feeling heard, sharing information freely, explaining decisions, acknowledging complexity. In our hierarchical model, transparency must be lived out in both directions.

-- A second strong theme was inclusion – accepting everyone into the People of God, without distinction or judgment (LGBTQ, divorced, down-trodden were mentioned specifically); and the need to overcome clericalism.

-- A third strong theme was empowerment of more laity to participate in leadership and decision-making, and especially women and youth/young adults, and strengthen collaboration; an expansion of people's exercise of their charisms, ministries, and addressing the real needs of our times. Concomitant is a faith stance that seeks to follow Christ in all things; be more Christ-like to and for one another; invite others to follow Christ and embrace his mission; discernment, spiritual direction, and synodality are means to decide what to do.

-- There is a warm perception of Pope Francis and his efforts to lead transformation in the Church. His example of reaching out to the marginalized; respectful willingness to listen; his ability to communicate effectively; his focus on synodality for the Church (and concern at the lack of participation therein); and an ongoing call for unity.

-- There is a desire expressed for enhanced faith formation, especially in the arena of Catholic Social Teaching; meeting the needs of all people by community service; being a force for good; giving attention to issues such as racism, that require systemic change; and overcoming a tendency to preserve the status quo (perhaps because of a fear of change). Parishes can be good places for these to happen.

-- There is a concern about some clergy with mentions of needs to improve homilies; improve leadership in parishes; a desire for improved priestly formation; and concern about an approach that seems to pre-date rather than embrace Vatican II. Some participants manifested an anti-rule/anti-law stance. There also is a frustration about inconsistencies among bishops and priests.

--Some concern is expressed for the future of the Church in light of continued decrease of membership, and number of people not returning to Mass and sacraments after Covid, maybe even a growing belief that they do not need the Church in order to have a relationship with God.

-- Hope is also expressed with a reminder that God's love dwells in us, and that recalling our own experience and wisdom makes us more likely to treat others with mercy and justice. We should all pray for one another!

