

Faith Part
Priests Being
One Group Parish Laity
Leadership Between
Need Time
Listening Children Each

SYNOD REPORT

INTERIM PHASE **2024**

— THE ROMAN CATHOLIC —
ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA



PREFACE

Themes surfaced during listening sessions of the interim phase of the Synod on Synodality mirrored the themes the bishops in the Archdiocese of Atlanta heard during the first phase of sessions, but with a sharper focus thanks to the new questions as well as the apostolic listening format.

This report will, for the most part, be direct or paraphrased quotes from the people who participated in seven listening sessions. The quotes will be organized by theme and the session participants.

The bishops of Atlanta invited people to five regional sessions. Two ministries also hosted sessions:

DATE	TYPE	LOCATION	#	NOTE
Feb 25	Regional	St. Michael, Gainesville	52	Spanish
Feb 27	Regional	St. Philip Benizi, Jonesboro	34	Open to All
Mar 6	Regional	The Chancery, Smyrna	44	Bilingual <i>English and Spanish</i>
Mar 7	Regional	St. Thomas More, Decatur	29	Young Adults
Mar 11	Ministry	Federal Penitentiary, Atlanta	18	Bilingual <i>English and Spanish</i>
Mar 18	Regional	Virtual	73	Open to All
Apr 7	Ministry	Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Atlanta	21	LGBTQ+

All sessions followed the conversation in the Spirit model.

Each participant received a preparation document in advance and was encouraged to reflect on Romans 12:1-8 and to then prayerfully consider the following questions:

- 1 Where have I seen or experienced successes—and distresses—within the Church's structure(s)/organization/leadership/life that encourage or hinder the mission?
- 2 How can the structures and organization of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?



REFLECTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS ON SYNODALITY

People expressed a range of reactions to the synodal process from anxiety about speaking up to distrust to deep gratitude. One of the main subthemes of this major theme was a repeated desire for more conversation in hopes of finding common ground between those with opposing views.

St. Philip Benizi:

Speaking about how not everyone at the table agreed, but they were able to still have good discussion: We were never angry or mad (tonight, during discussion), we are sad tonight. We are missing that people used to talk—to communicate.

Leadership is key! The challenge is getting consistency. (We get) different styles with each different priest. The Synod is an opportunity to unite.

Listening is the Holy Spirit at work!

Chancery:

This synodal era offers another opportunity to renew the Church. It is up to us to vocally request follow-up.

The group felt that disagreement was valuable—that you can still make a path forward. But we live in a pluralistic time, not just top-down. We must use resources wisely to help serve all, especially those on the margins.

There is an undercurrent of the Holy Spirit present. We see it in subsidiarity—the gifts of the laity are guided by the Holy Spirit. Outreach—showing of love comes from synodal moments, cultural observations. If we wish to be perfect, we require constant change. But our change is gradual—over time. We need to be attentive to the Holy Spirit who speaks to us through others in small ways.

“This evening was what the Pope had in mind about the Church that is synodal and listening. We must believe in the Holy Spirit and be willing to come along on the journey.”

- Bishop Joel M. Konzen, S.M.

MAJOR THEMES

Based on the general sharing at the end of each session, the major themes are:

Reflections and discussions on synodality; the need for community; the need for more and better formation for both clergy and lay people; and a perception or concerns about division in the Church.

Discussions of the role of lay people, but especially women in the Church, a need to better serve those with disabilities, a desire to serve the poor and a desire to move away from fear towards love were noted at many of the sessions.

St. Thomas More:

“By your presence here, it gives all of us hope—you are saying you love your Church and want to help the Church to do better, to continue the work of Christ. The purpose of this Synod is to come together with the Holy Spirit, to grow together, and move forward.”

- Bishop John N. Tran

United States Penitentiary:

Prophetic voice: This is growing. We have been heard and now we have Mass and the Liturgy of the Word. We were heard and now we are part of the Church—that is good!

We are included and loved as humans.

We have a true commitment with ourselves. We trust in God [that] this project will truly work.

We need to have more conversations!

To have an input in this process is a true miracle.

Virtual:

(Some people are) anxious about the synodal process; not everyone feels equally comfortable coming into a listening session, and as a Church we need to understand that. It is important to listen to and respect each person regardless of point of view; listen to each perspective.

(We need to be) more tuned in to the work of the Holy Spirit; we need to listen rather than thinking we have all the right answers.

“After Easter, we will hear (in the Acts of the Apostles) what attracted people to the Church. It was the life of the members ... Acts of the Apostles naturally reminds one of a synodal Church.”

- Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.

THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY

This theme was central during the first round of listening sessions when those who attended often spoke of a need or desire for a welcoming, cohesive community. People would like to see the Church support families, young adults and people with disabilities. Concerns about meaningful cultural inclusion also surfaced.

St. Philip Benizi:

(We) saw a need for strengthening the family, not just the family who shares a mailing address, but family in our neighbors, in our cultures, in our Church. (We) need to be forceful in love and commitment to love. (we need to recognize the) role of the family as a foundational block—setting the tone. (In reference to the room of people from many cultures/language groups) We are looking (tonight in the room) at communities now when we look at who is in the Church. It's not a monolith. We observe that people have different expectations when they come to Mass because of their culture ... We need to get our families back in Church ... We make sure we know God is in our lives. Sunday isn't meant to be the only day we form a connection to God.

“Among the gifts you bring your parish is your spirituality, how you pray. For many of you, you pray in your own language. When you share your language, food, dance, music—it's beautiful. It's all good ... Family is the basis of society. We have to work intentionally to preserve the family.”

- Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.

St. Thomas More:

The Church needs to be a safe space.

Families as well as communities at Mass get caught up with traditions and lose sight of building community ...

Finally, this group stated that there is a need to bring our faith to the center of family to share with the community at large.

Virtual:

Community seemed to be stressed. (The quality of the community) seemed to depend on the parish you are in. Some seem to be welcoming—others seem alienated. Some mentioned unengaged clergy.

Shrine of the Immaculate Conception:

Silence, or the inability to discuss openly (the issue of people who identify as LGBTQ in the Church) ... the silence is not producing good fruit ... Our Church is failing families by not being able to discuss these (LGBTQ issues) in an honest and open way.

As parents, there is not really a place for families (of LGBTQ persons) in the Church. People smile at us, but we do not really feel accepted.

The way we are treating LGBTQ community is that they are a mistake. When are we going back to the love of Jesus Christ?

Found (my parish) as an “Ah Ha” moment—not just for LGBT but for the homeless, poor, refugees, this Church is real. (The) strength of the Church is to support all.

The most heartbreaking thing—to have someone walk away from the Church. Where else can we go for the words of eternal life?

THE NEED FOR MORE AND BETTER FORMATION FOR BOTH CLERGY AND LAY PEOPLE

Participants addressed this need in all stages of life and vocation. They talked about the need for good children’s catechesis, seminarian formation, family catechesis and support, ongoing formation for young adults and those in their later years. The idea of including all members of the community, especially women and those usually marginalized in society, came up at almost every session. Formation was not just a faith issue. People want their leaders to be prepared to build up their communities, handle inevitable crises and be able to discern good ways forward for all members of the community.

St. Michael:

(We need) better faith formation for all ages (children, youth and adults) provided by people with adequate training and preparation. Many times, we evangelize according to what we think, and we can modify the Gospel according to our needs.

We need people who are prepared to form us to be able to maintain the authenticity of the Gospel and evangelize others.

Family evangelization is not consistent enough to foster a commitment of service within the Church and continue deepening the faith.

St. Philip Benizi:

We need to educate people on their level. If you tried to teach me something and then tried to teach my son the same way, it would not work.

Chancery:

The Church does a bad job for people with disabilities. Preparation for sacraments is too hard—pulls people away. The focus should be not on why but who we are as Catholics.



Virtual:

(Expressed) importance of being faithful and strong to the Gospel. Watered-down faith is not good for the individual or the Church. It does not echo the mystery of discipleship ...

Clergy don't seem to be well enough equipped for people to respond to people's hunger for the faith.

(There is a) temptation toward clericalism on the part of both clerics and the laity (in terms of waiting for priests or deacons to always take the lead).

(There is a) need for better communication and more consistency in explaining the 'why' behind Church teaching; explaining that why whether it's a question of discernment for the entire Church or individually.

(We need) better inclusivity of people with disabilities, particularly with regard to religious education.

(We) need to meet individuals where they are; we're all on different levels so we all have to reach each other where we are.

Shrine of the Immaculate Conception:

The Catholic School system inadequately deals with not only LGBTQ people, but also with other people on the margins.

A PERCEPTION OF DIVISION IN THE CHURCH

This theme seemed to cause great concern among those who offered comments on it. People saw division between Catholics with different ideologies, cultural groups who share a parish, age groups and people who hold opposing political ideologies. Many felt the synodal process is a good way to address these divisions, but others remain skeptical.

St. Michael:

There is a notable division between the different ministries. They do not plan activities together. Even at parish events, each ministry operates independently in its own space. The lack of communication between ministries is evident and, as a result, numerous misunderstandings arise. This situation discourages newcomers to the Church, causing people to walk away when observing the lack of unity among people who should be role models, a testimony for others.

People and division greatly influence participation in the Church.

Likewise, there are numerous misunderstandings between the Hispanic community and the Anglo community. Once again, the lack of unity comes to light. There are three communities, each one lives in its own world, without an effective connection between them.

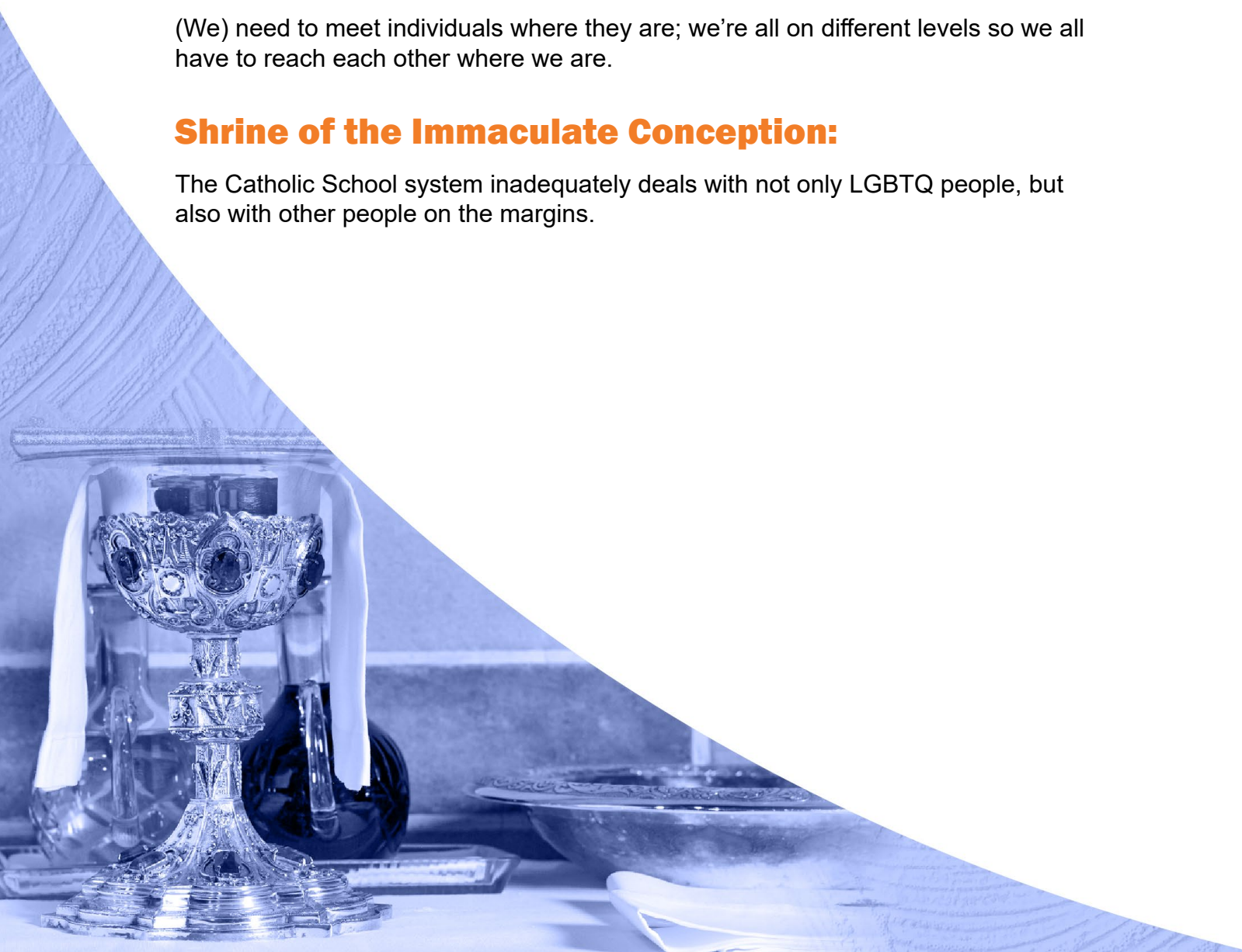
My table has mentioned that our parish is fragmented into different groups, ministries and communities. We need more unity and support between each other.

One attendee commented that people were upset when priests did not attend parish events. The attendee believes the people want to see their priests as active members of the community.

St. Philip Benizi:

COVID has disturbed our attention. We are fragmented.

The role of 'supporting actress' (is) placed on women, which is a best-case scenario. At worst, women are treated as the workers/laborers of the kingdom, while rarely, if ever being 'in the room where it happens.' Women are rarely in decision making roles.



Chancery:

The invitation is to follow Christ. Sometimes we spend time preparing the table but we say we cannot sit there—family is the foundation of the Church. Children are the NOW not the future. Laity has the potential to empower the Church, but it is limited by laity and priests. Diversity could blossom but when we stick with the old ways it gets stunted. Priests need to open up to serve all. We need our priests to grow more in knowledge of other communities. They seem to not want to cross the bridge to get to know each other. We need to appreciate each other, open our doors to the outside continually.

It was suggested that more conservative voices could help find common ground by listening to and tolerating each other to go forward together, not apart.

Lay people (women) leadership is not included as it should be.

We need female voices in leadership.

St. Thomas More:

We need to find a middle ground between traditionalism and modernization, remembering that we are all one body.

It is important to remember the reading from Romans: We are one body. But this group asked, what does unity look like? Can we honor diversity? By answering these two questions, we will be able to become deeply involved and move outward to those on the margins.

Virtual:

(We) cannot act out of fear as a Church—afraid of losing something, afraid of including someone—it's God, how can we be afraid if we trust God and the Holy Spirit?

(There is power in the) inclusivity of love—can't have too much, and hopefully there's no one we can't love.

We need to find space for young people.

People felt that there is lack of inclusivity, particularly in regard to the role of women. What can we do as a Church for the poor? Is there a way we can listen to them? We talked about inclusivity of children. It's hard to get all the kids up and dressed and to Church on time. What are we doing to support those parents who may not be getting anything out of that Mass (because the kids need attention). We talked about inclusivity in making teaching accessible to everyone, allowing people with special needs access to the sacraments.

What as a Church do we do for the poor? How could we have reached out to do something like this with those society considers are poor? How do we help them, see, them, support them?

CONCLUSION

The overall tone of the sessions reflected a great love for the Church and a great desire to be part of making the Church stronger and more vibrant through participating in the Synod and in the daily communal life of their parish communities.

As one participant put it,

“We are the Body of Christ and we reverence Christ in each other.”



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Involved Christ Know More Ministries
Community Out
Good Life Heard Important Others Bring
Spirit Church Holy
Body Different Mass
Love People Help
Family Synodal Young
Better

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