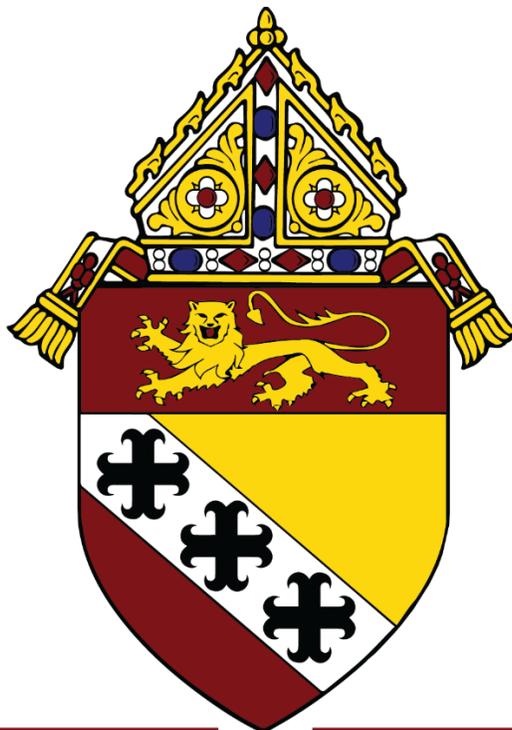


Synod on Synodality — Diocesan Synthesis



ROMAN CATHOLIC **DIOCESE** OF CHARLESTON

Most Rev. Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS, DD
Bishop of Charleston

Most Rev. Robert E. Guglielmone, DD
2021-2022 Synod Ordinary

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BACKGROUND

When it was founded in 1820, the Diocese of Charleston comprised three states — North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. For short periods of its early history, it also included Haiti (where Bishop John England reportedly ordained the first cleric of color) and the Bahamas. Today, it encompasses all of South Carolina.

Catholics have been a significant minority in this state. In Colonial days, they were proscribed from many privileges of ordinary citizenship. Religious freedom has, thus, been an important value to the people of this state and, to their credit, they have managed ecumenical and interreligious cooperation despite occasional local waves of prejudice. At present, Catholics are estimated to make up 5 to 10% of the state's population. Many denominations, free churches, and non-Christian groups are represented, as are the unchurched or inactive.

The Diocese of Charleston has seen tremendous growth in its Catholic membership. This has been partially occasioned by significant conversions to the faith, including among clergy from Episcopalian and Lutheran traditions. Several priests and permanent deacons have also converted. Aside from conversion, much of the growth in the Catholic population can be attributed to two sources: 1) an influx of retirees from the U.S. Northeast and upper Midwest; 2) immigration from Central and South America. Therefore, the diocese has created an office of Hispanic ministry, celebrated many intercultural events, and begun printing the monthly diocesan magazine in two languages.

There are also pockets of Filipino, Vietnamese, Nigerian, Polish, and Portuguese-speaking Catholics, and thus, one can find parishes in various locations where Masses are occasionally celebrated in languages of these peoples. Most Rev. Robert E. Guglielmo, bishop of the diocese since 2009, led efforts to create and expand Catholic parishes, missions, schools, and services to an increasingly multicultural population. The appointment of Haitian-born Most Rev. Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS, as bishop of Charleston (installation May 13, 2022) marks the Vatican's recognition of the diversity of the diocese. The new bishop has had extensive experience with migrants and refugees and has served mission parishes.

The diocese has and continues to confront a legacy of slavery and of racism, and instituted new initiatives after the infamous murders of nine church members, including the pastor, of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston in 2015. These initiatives at parishes, schools, and ecumenical and interfaith groups have championed interracial understanding, inclusion, and such keystones of Catholic social teaching as solidarity, options for the poor, and promotion of the common good.

PROCESS OF THE CONSULTATION

Upon receiving notice of Pope Francis' initiative, to culminate in the Synod on Synodality, Bishop Guglielmo charged Sister Kathleen Adamski, OSF, Associate Director of the Office of Spirituality and Formation for Ministry, with designing and leading the process of consultation in the diocese.

In August 2021, an executive committee was formed and with their collective insights, a survey — which could be taken online or in person — was devised and additional questions reserved for in-person listening sessions. The materials for the consultation were released on September 7, 2021, and published on the diocesan website, www.charlestondiocese.org. Deans of the seven deaneries were invited to host presentations, and several parishes, religious communities, youth, campus, young adult organizations, and ministerial offices and groups were invited to participate.

The bishop officially opened the Synod with Mass on Sunday, October 17, 2021, at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Charleston. He filmed an encouraging explanatory video, and diocesan media promoted participation. Some parishes offered explanations and invitations in their bulletins or included the intentions of the Synod in the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.

The committee realized at the start of this work that COVID-19 and its impact might influence or alter the participation of Catholics throughout the state. The restrictions of the virus and its variants, the fear of attending large gatherings and other factors, influenced the overall response to the Listening Sessions. It also has been clear that “synod” and “synodality” were terms unfamiliar to Catholics in the pews. While explanations were offered across diocesan media and in some parish presentations, the purpose and importance of the exercises (Listening Sessions and Surveys) often eluded the faithful.

However, by the conclusion of the process, nearly 4,000 people responded to the surveys, counting those taken in person or mailed in, those completed online, and those returned in English and Spanish. There have been nearly 85 Listening Sessions with over 1,000 participants. For perspective, it is important to note that the diocese includes 94 parishes, 21 mission churches, 33 Catholic schools, two Catholic hospitals, one Catholic-associated hospital, seven Catholic Charities offices, five Immigration Legal Services offices, a Catholic maternity home, and active campus ministries at secular and religious-affiliated colleges and universities. Parishes and missions reported a total of 199,543 Catholics registered in the diocese as of the 2020-2021 fiscal year report. There is anecdotal evidence that several Spanish-speaking Catholics, plus those who spend parts of the year elsewhere, participate regularly without officially belonging to a local parish.

Women and men religious were among the most responsive to the invitation to participate in the synodal process, and significant numbers of them participated in Surveys and Listening Sessions. Certain parishes had impressive turnouts and responses, while others had little or no participation. What came through strongly was that participation came most based on pastors and faith leaders who actively promoted this initiative. For example, one parish in the Rock Hill Deanery hosted five listening sessions. A bicultural parish in the Myrtle Beach Deanery had 15 sessions. The Office of Ethnic Ministries held repeated sessions for African Americans and Asian-Pacific Islanders. The Office of Hispanic Ministries either hosted or promoted 11 Listening Sessions in which Hispanic communities, including those speaking the Mayan languages of Q’anjob’al and Chuj, participated. Two Spanish-language meetings in Greenville drew a combined total of 400 participants. Other parishes and groups had minimal participation. The response from parishes, ministerial offices and lay associations was proportional to the amount of emphasis and effort given by its leadership.

EXPERIENCE OF THE CONSULTATION

The experience of the consultation was mixed in its level of involvement. By mid-April 2022, responses were based on participation of 2.4% of registered Catholics in South Carolina. Some responses suggested that the process breathed new life into the Catholic community with the potential of new evangelization, while others suggested the process would not leading to meaningful, actionable work.

With the mixed views and the consistent and inconsistent profiles of the diocese, survey responses still garnered common themes. (*See Appendix A*)

English-speaking (80.1%) and Spanish-speaking (80.6%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their parishes or mission churches welcomed and involved their parishioners and had many activities and groups into which they could enter.

A similarly high percentage found their parish liturgies vibrant and the offerings for faith formation and devotional activities numerous (82% English-speaking, 83.4% Spanish-speaking). A significant number responded that they felt that people were aware of the baptismal call to evangelize in everyday life (74.8% English-speaking, 78.5% Spanish-speaking). Understanding stewardship as a way of life was noted by many as something they had internalized (75% English-speaking, 81% Spanish-speaking).

It seems appropriate to note that those who responded to the surveys seem, anecdotally, to have been typically active parishioners. Somewhat fewer responded that they felt there were parish efforts to attract youth, young adults, widowed, divorced, and/or minorities (59.9% English-speaking, 65.7% Spanish-speaking). Fewer still, among English-speakers (33%), stated that their parish had ways to reach the less active or inactive. Nearly double that number of Spanish-speakers, however (63.5%), said there were specific ways their communities extended invitations to the community.

There were discrepancies in responses of language groups. For example, responses varied when it came to Catholic engagement with the larger community. On the matter of Catholic social teaching, 72.5% of English-speaking respondents answered that they were aware and 78.2% of Spanish-speaking respondents indicated the same. However, on questions about dialogue with others on matters of race, immigration, human rights, and the environment, only 51.2% of English-speakers responding said that they were encouraged to be actively engaged, while 75.3% of Spanish-speakers said they received encouragement from their parishes or the diocese. Spanish-speaking Catholics were not asked about ecumenical and interreligious engagement (due to an oversight), but only 49.4% of English-speakers indicated that they were encouraged to be involved.

Other gaps in perception of parish actions and consultations were evident. While 71.7% of Spanish-speakers responded that they had input on parish decisions about projects and activities, only 48.3% of English-speakers did. A little more than half of English-speakers (52.7%) stated that fellow parishioners were open to change and were likely to feel that their involvement made a difference. Only 42.9% of them observed that their fellow parishioners knew the meaning of discernment, and 54.1% responded that parish leaders and clergy were open to the Holy Spirit and willing to engage others in discernment. The response on these questions from Spanish speakers was distinctly different — 73.3% answered that parishioners were open to formation and change and said they make a difference. When asked about discernment and openness to the Holy Spirit, 64.8% responded that their members are attuned, and 72% stated that their pastors were similarly attuned and willing to engage others in the discernment processes.

A noteworthy cause for concern is the finding that African American respondents (all of them English-speaking) were most positive in their responses to questions about the vibrancy of parish liturgies (76.7% strongly agreeing or agreeing), awareness of their baptismal call to evangelize (73.8% strongly agreeing or agreeing) and confidence that their fellow parishioners understood stewardship as a way of life (75.2% strongly agreeing or agreeing). They were less likely to feel that their parishes attempted to reach youth and the marginalized (only 40% with some degree of agreement) or those who have become less active or inactive (only 25.6% strongly agreeing or agreeing). While a number answered they were aware of Catholic social teaching (68.5% strongly agreeing or agreeing), fewer than half responded that their parishes and the diocese encouraged involvement in social justice activities or interfaith civic projects (44.6% agreeing on the former, 41.5% on the latter). Slightly more than half (52.7%) agreed that clergy and parish leaders engaged with others in discernment, but far fewer agreed that they were consulted in decision making and pastoral planning (only 31.8% agreeing). They also responded that there was a gap between the clergy's openness to discernment and their fellow parishioners' understanding of what constitutes discernment (38.8%). The findings suggests that perceptions of being outsiders or "other" persists among a significant number of Black Catholics in the diocese.

Finally, it should be noted that there was a wide variation among those responding "Not Sure" to questions on the survey. The greatest level of assurance was evident in statements regarding liturgy, parish activities, and stewardship, where "Not Sure" was in 3-7% of responses. The statements to which respondents were most

likely to respond “Not Sure” pertained to care for the marginalized, outreach, ecumenical involvement, discernment, and general openness to the Holy Spirit (in some cases, 20-30% indicated they were not sure).

The responses to Listening Sessions were shared among the committee. Four major themes resulted from the sessions, though not all comments could be placed in a category or included in this synthesis. (*See Appendix B*)

MAJOR THEMES

1. Communication

Media

Over the past two years, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, respondents shared that social media was most effective in keeping parishioners connected to their parish. Responses included that Mass being livestreamed was appreciated. Other tools mentioned as beneficial included: Flocknote, FORMED, Scripture reflections, videos, on-line retreats, webinars, online meetings which included chat rooms, and e-mails sent from the diocese and its ministries. Parish bulletins, in print form, continue to be seen as a vital way to connect, particularly with those who are not adept at electronic media.

Some respondents shared that mailing surveys to parishioners or using flyers or bulletin board announcements would help keep people up to date with parish activities. Respondents noted they valued parish leadership communication, formally and informally, by having social events and person-to-person contact to build relationships. There was recurring emphasis on personal contact — particularly to connect with elderly and homebound but also to encourage youth and young adult participation in parish life. Respondents also suggested having town hall meetings periodically to communicate in person concerning parish events.

There seems to be a sincere desire to have more opportunities and occasions for Spanish- and English-speaking populations to connect so that parishes are seen as united communities of faith, even though there are language and cultural differences. Working with the Office of Hispanic Ministry is seen as an asset for parishes with large Spanish- and English-speaking communities.

The Pulpit/ Ambo

Respondents throughout the process emphasized how important it is to have pastors, parish administrators, and deacons calling attention to opportunities for participation and faith formation. Respondents answered that activities will be prioritized when promoted from the pulpit, including internal (inter- and intra-parish) and external (civic, ecumenical) events.

The Diocese

Participants stated a need to have more collaboration and understanding between key councils of the parish — financial and pastoral — along with persons who have special expertise and diocesan leadership. Some commented that policies are made and distributed when, at times, members of various parishes could be involved or consulted in setting policy.

2. Governance

Parish Councils

The role of Parish Councils came up continually in Listening Sessions. In some parishes, members are invited to recommend names for the council. Some respondents said there had been a custom of having those recommended for council make presentations as to why they wish to serve and what gifts they might bring.

While there have been cases in which parishioners voted for parish council members, changes in pastors often means changes in procedures. Some respondents said they would like to have their voices heard rather than wait to see who is appointed by a pastor. Participants also said that various ethnic and age groups could be better represented on their parish councils. This observation was especially noted in Listening Sessions with Hispanic communities.

Other matters noted:

- parish councils having annual retreats and formation on Church issues
- succession planning and how it's done
- parish councils reflecting the notion of synodality
- making parishioners aware of these councils and their memberships
- reinstating or reestablishing councils as very beneficial to the community
- parish councils presenting the needs and desires of the parish as an effective way to establish relationships between parish leadership and parishioners.

Clergy

A second issue in parish governance concerned how the spiritual leader of the parish relates to the finance council, parish (pastoral) council and the members of the parish in leadership style. For example, a pastor choosing the members of a pastoral council and not including parishioners in the process can be seen as not wanting collaboration with the members.

Participants said they appreciate when a pastor's homilies give the meaning of the Scriptures and demonstrate applying it to daily life and events in the world. Members stated they want to hear more about papal encyclicals, social justice, and issues of equality. Respondents said they want to be challenged by the pastor on how to apply what they receive at Mass, how they can help in the life of the parish and bring their faith into the larger community. One suggestion was that pastors present a spiritual gifts inventory to parishioners and recommend ways to act on the findings.

The presence of the priest at parish social events and his interest in the lives of the parishioners was mentioned by many participants. They said where his interest is evident, it is vastly appreciated, but some reported remoteness or disinterest on the part of their pastor. In some instances, people said there is not a viable option for them to voice concerns to parish leadership. Parishioners desire a collaborative relationship with their pastor, and, even where the terms are not familiar, they indicated they would welcome applying collegiality, subsidiarity, and conflict resolution in the parish setting.

Respondents stated that pastors need to develop more effective ways to get to know their flock, especially in a large parish. When a pastor or administrator is serving a parish with multiple mission churches, parishioners said they appreciate when the priest finds ways to bring these groups together.

Also worthy of note: though the Diocese of Charleston was among the first in the United States to ordain permanent deacons, many Catholics do not realize that deacons have received the sacrament of Holy Orders and are ordained members of the clergy.

3. Evangelization

Formation

While evangelization has received much emphasis from our most recent popes and bishops, many respondents restricted their notions of evangelization to parish catechetical programs, Catholic schools, and youth and young adult ministry. However, there is a clear trend in responses that Catholics want to be more effective evangelizers. Thus, many participants have expressed a desire to learn tools of evangelization. For

some, evangelization is an underused term. Respondents suggested that workshops on evangelization and training for interested parishioners would be welcome.

Providing avenues for people to hear direct testimony of faith journeys and development from others in ministry has been suggested. Taking five minutes either before or after Mass might facilitate this sharing. Talking about RCIA, Engaged Encounter, women's or men's Bible study, Alpha, Christ Renews His Parish, and other programs can help parishioners get concrete understanding of missionary discipleship. Also, parish town-hall meetings (repeatedly mentioned), and regular faith-sharing were cited as opportunities to promote an evangelical spirit.

Welcoming and Outreach

Participants acknowledged a need for better ways to welcome new members, young adults, and families into the life of the parish. One suggestion is volunteer system can be set up to reach out to those who leave the parish or becomes inactive or in need of special support. In this way, evangelization becomes personalized, a need frequently mentioned in surveys and listening sessions.

Hispanic Catholic respondents emphasized the importance of encounter and invitation — in terms of sustaining active members — for drawing in Spanish-speaking Catholics with little churchgoing experience and inviting Spanish-speakers belonging to other Christian denominations. Along with all other responding groups, the Hispanic community noted the leadership of pastors and those ministering as priests and deacons as vital to faith development, and the diocesan School of Faith (*Escuela de la fe*) has offered beneficial faith formation. Also expressed was great concern for ongoing formation and involvement of youth and young adults.

The African American participants expressed the desire to continue to be involved in activities such as camp meetings, projects devoted to saving souls, serving as street-corner disciples, and conducting missions. Evangelization in this community is a special focus of Black History Month (February), Juneteenth (June), Soul Fest (August), and Black Catholic History Month (November). Respondents noted that it is important to continue and honor the few (now integrated) historically African American parishes.

On another matter, the diocese has formed some policies and pastoral practices for youth who experience same-sex attraction or deem themselves transgender. It also has had an active Courage ministry, for adults with same-sex attraction, plus EnCourage, for Catholic families of members with same-sex attraction. However, there seems to be little awareness of these programs. Some respondents noted a need to reach out more deliberately to the LGBTQ+ community.

One of the troubling findings from the surveys and listening sessions is that a notable number — including the most active Catholics — do not perceive their parishes as prioritizing outreach to people and populations on the margins. Participants said they seek leadership and guidance to be more hospitable and welcoming.

4. Women in the Church

In several listening sessions, participants said that women ought to have more leadership roles at the Vatican, in the diocese and in parishes.

Women Religious

Women religious number over 90 statewide. In listening sessions, many expressed a need to have an avenue to gather for support and discuss key issues in the Church. Since several women are ministering in rural areas, they noted the lack of opportunity for spiritual and intellectual formation. There is no Catholic university or seminary in South Carolina, thus women religious rely on their efforts and collaboration for enrichment and challenge. Some consecrated women suggested the diocese could sponsor a weekend for sharing of

ministries, education, and mutual support, especially to those in remote areas or whose first language is not English.

Altar Servers and Others

Pope Francis moved to recognize and officially install adults, male and female, as catechists and acolytes, modifying Canon 230 of the Code of Canon Law. Women are leaders of several diocesan departments, parish offices, Catholic schools, and outreach centers. Parishes and mission churches have women and girls who participate in liturgical and ministerial roles as lectors, altar servers, directors of religious education and more. It should be noted that some parishes reserve serving at the altar to males, and the reasons vary. Some respondents said females should be welcomed to serve in every parish.

Another note from listening sessions is that the talents of women in the diocese have been underutilized, specifically the talents of women with professional training, experience in education, administration, business, various service industries, plus advanced degrees in theology, spirituality, and ministry. Respondents appreciated the leadership which women and women's groups have provided in many initiatives and indicated that this practice should continue and expand.

CURRENT REALITY: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

There is much enthusiasm expressed for the life of the Church and for active participation in its liturgies and mission. Among the “lights” evident from listening sessions and surveys is the leadership which laity have shown historically and still show in the Diocese of Charleston. Participants said their parish liturgical life is reverent and inspiring, and several noted the variety of activities to found in many churches. Respondents stated considerable respect for clergy, especially for priests, along with an expectation that their leadership provides the impetus to serve and to grow in the faith. There is a clear trend for personal connection and closer collaboration with priests.

Among the “shadows” is the response from laity that they have little influence on the larger parish and the local church (diocese). While some are empowered in their circles of influence, many are disconnected from decisions in the rectory and chancery. There was consistent expression of concern for more effective and deliberate outreach to youth and those on the margins. Some commented about the lack of encouragement parishioners receive to engage with the civic community, ecumenical outreach, and social concerns such as racial justice, immigration reform, and care for the environment. Especially noted has been a dearth of formation in Catholic social teaching.

Some expressed concern that the clergy sex abuse scandal has not been sufficiently confronted, with its residue among the explanations suggested for attrition in parish attendance.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Holy Father's vision for the Church of the 21st century is one of synodality so that Church leaders and members “walk together.” New methods of collaboration of laity and clergy will invigorate the present and help shape the future, where each member's specific vocation and purpose is valued. This radical equality in the “common priesthood of the faithful,” received at baptism, needs to be revitalized in every aspect of the Church or it will miss the giftedness and gifts of all, especially of the laity and those groups that experience exclusion or marginalization from Church life. Survey respondents and listening session participants stated that the process of synodality can continue and find new forms if the Church discerns the movement of the Holy Spirit locally, nationally, and globally.

Key points that emerged at listening sessions and in surveys may serve as a guide or directional avenue. The following recommendations are hereby given to Bishops Fabre and Guglielmo and to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:

- Parish leaders are called to intensify efforts to communicate with parishioners, specifically via more personal contact. This can be done through various means: social events after Mass, where the parish team gets to know members; regular town hall meetings so parishioners may share in advancing the parish mission and vision, and how they are implemented; more frequent formal and informal gatherings whereby parishioners feel ownership and inclusion in the life of the church. Collegiality among pastor, parish leadership and the people in the pews in appropriate decision-making is valued.
- Though parish or pastoral councils are not canonically required by each parish, parishioners have a sincere desire to have finance and pastoral councils who can report to them. Participants expressed the desire to have some input regarding who is chosen for these councils (parish councils in particular), citing the value of regular retreats and training for those leadership positions.
- Parishioners prize and seek clergy who will share their spirituality through homilies that explain the Scriptures well and how to apply these readings to daily life and contemporary situations.
- To meet the needs of the future Church, many respondents do not question the need for spreading the Good News or evangelization, but believe they need training regarding best practices and methods to do so. While some may not be comfortable giving witness to how a personal relationship with God transforms, the establishment of a diocesan evangelization initiative could work with and train parishes on formation and action. This would require allocation of funds and personnel on the part of the diocese.
- In response to the recommendations and example Pope Francis, leadership positions for women in the Church and for members of minority groups need to be strengthened. The Diocese of Charleston has worked diligently in training over 200 deacons, opened master's level courses to women in lay ministry, and trained hundreds for ministry in the Office of Hispanic Ministry program *Escuela de la fe* (school of faith), but more can be done to equip lay ecclesial ministers. This, too, would require allocation of funds from the diocese. The diocese could place more emphasis on utilizing the theological, administrative, educational, and social service experience of women religious in providing leadership in such programs and other diocesan efforts.
- Additional initiatives need to be made to inform Catholics of the Church's history of social teaching, plus education on Sacred Scripture and Tradition, to form intentional disciples. Such formation can shape participation in the civic community and engagement in projects to advance the common good of society and creation.

These findings are presented in hopes that the local Church and the universal Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and Our Blessed Mother, will face the present with courage, confident in a future full of hope in the Savior, Jesus Christ.

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The Diocese of Charleston was recognized by the *Leadership Roundtable* for its early work on the Synod, along with select dioceses across the United States, thus executive committee members received calls from Africa plus around the country seeking assistance and guidance in the process for the Synod on Synodality.

Thank you

A special thank you to all members of the team who spent countless hours meeting or leading Listening Sessions, to support staff and those individuals who wrote special programs for various religious education programs and high-school students. A special thank you to the Office of Multimedia for their grace in accepting the many Synod requests in addition to their regular workload. This Synod would not have been possible without the cooperation and collaboration of so many faithful lay Catholics, religious women and men, and clergy who accepted this task with grace and gave the endeavor a future full of hope.