

SOUTHERN DEANERY REPORT FOR THE DIOCECSAN PHASE OF THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG *Journeying Together*

INTRODUCTION

The Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle held two Synod Sessions for the Southern Deanery. The first event took place on December 17 and focused on catechesis and prayer. Father Victor Amorose, pastor of St. John Vianney, led the catechesis and introduction of the synod questions, and Deacon John Carter of the Cathedral and Jenny Nolasco, a parishioner of the Cathedral, led the guided meditation in both English and Spanish. The event took place in the context of Eucharistic exposition and benediction and was followed by a reception in the parish hall. There were about 50 people in attendance from several local parishes.

The second event took place on February 4 and provided an opportunity for small group discussion and large group sharing. It began with a guided meditation lead by Father Arthur Proulx, the rector of the Cathedral, and was moderated by Father Ralph D’Elia, the parochial vicar of the Cathedral. There were about 75 people in attendance from several local parishes. The following is a summary of what was discussed, relying heavily on what was shared in the large group assembly. Supporting information has been taken from what was recorded in the small group discussions. The two questions that were proposed to the group and which will provide the structure of this report are: *What consensus or common thread emerged in regards to what we are doing well? What consensus or common thread emerged in regards to what the Holy Spirit is leading the Church to do better?*

WHAT CONSENSUS OR COMMON THREAD EMERGED IN REGARDS TO WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

As could be expected, there were a variety of different answers to this question depending on the particular circumstances of the individual’s parish. Certain themes were common, however, especially with regards to the answers to the small group questions. The three themes that were most consistent were: small groups, catechesis, and hospitality.

Small Groups

Many people spoke of a desire to connect with others and to live their faith in a more intentional way. Small groups have been the place where many have found this. Whether it be a small faith sharing group, a Bible study, or the Knights of Columbus or Women’s Guild, many of those present have found a sense of community in some of these smaller, more manageable groups. Some spoke about how it can be easy to get lost in the crowd, just coming to Mass on Sunday to “fill the tank” for the week ahead. But without a connection with others, many found this approach to be lacking. There was consensus around the enthusiasm for these new opportunities for living out the faith with others, sharing the various ups and downs of daily life in a way that helps make

more evident the connection between faith and life. For many, small groups have become the place where their relationship with Christ begins to permeate all other aspects of their lives.

Catechesis

Discussion around catechesis touched not only the parish but spoke to the variety of resources available to help Catholics grow in their faith. In some cases, there were concerns about the level of catechesis in the parish while in others, parishioners were generally satisfied. Of those who were satisfied there were references to the bulletin, the church website, and social media as effective means of catechesis beyond the confines of religious education. But even those who felt that catechesis was lacking in their parish were grateful for the resources that have been made easily accessible. Among those are Dynamic Catholic, Formed, Word on Fire, The Bible in a Year Podcast, among others. The desire for greater catechesis appeared to stem from a thirst for deeper knowledge of the faith and need to grow in the faith so as to be able to confront the complexity of life. Even those who felt they lacked accompaniment by their parish community took solace in these resources and recognized the help they could provide.

Hospitality

Hospitality and the need to be a welcoming community capable of embracing everyone were the most common points of discussion regarding what the Church is doing well. The general consensus was that the Church has been doing this relatively well, both on a parish level and beyond. Some highlighted the ushers or hospitality ministers at their parishes and spoke of how important it is to be greeted upon entering the church. Others brought up the need to meet people wherever they may be in their faith journey and lauded the words and gestures of Pope Francis in this regard. While some felt that this open attitude could be at the expense of the Church's teachings or traditions, most agreed that we have been able to find a good balance.

WHAT CONSENSUS OR COMMON THREAD EMERGED IN REGARDS TO WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS LEADING THE CHURCH TO DO BETTER?

There were two main points of concern that were raised in regards to what the Church could do better. The first had to do with ways of relating to authority and the second touched on the Church's evangelizing mission.

Authority

Some consensus emerged on the theme of authority and the relatability of certain priests. In reflecting on what hinders some from speaking up or sharing their thoughts in the Church, a number of people commented that they felt as if there were not sufficient avenues for expressing themselves to those in authority, or if the opportunity existed, they were not listened to. Some lamented that their priest is either not approachable or seems to be too busy to have a discussion with them, while others felt that it is not worth sharing their thoughts because it would likely fall on deaf ears. While this was not a universal sentiment, it was common enough that it is worth noting.

Evangelization

The challenges facing the Church in living out its mission to evangelize was by far the most prominent theme. While some were grateful for the efforts their parishes have been making, most recognized that there is still a long way to go. Reaching the youth was mentioned in several small groups and was an issue of great concern. In a world in which young people have so many options, communicating the faith in a way that is attractive to them has been difficult. In that vein, there were some concerns about the difficulty in evangelizing in our current cultural climate. Political and ideological division were identified as some of the most serious roadblocks in helping people grow in their relationship with Christ. This division has also crept into the Church, leading to more infighting than evangelizing. This was evident in some of the small group discussions that took place regarding the availability of the Latin Mass. Overall, there was a recognition that the Church could do better in reaching not only those in the pews, but also those on the peripheries of faith.

CONCLUSION

The discussion and large group sharing proved helpful in bringing people together from a variety of different backgrounds and perspectives. While nothing was resolved, a dialogue began. Following the Holy Father's appeal for the Church to embrace her synodal nature, those who attended both events expressed their desire to continue to face these tough questions together. In the end, the specifics of the conversation were not the most important aspect of our events, but the recognition of our need for one another in confronting whatever may come and the desire to continue to live our experience in the Church in a more synodal way.

Prepared by Father Ralph D'Elia
Parochial Vicar of the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle

Approved by Father Arthur Proulx, V.F.
Dean of the Southern Deanery and Rector of the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle
