

APPENDIX I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE REPORT FOR THE DIOCECSAN PHASE OF THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

INTRODUCTION

In response to the announcement in May 2021 by the Vatican that the Synodal Process, culminating in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023, would begin with the Diocesan Phase in each particular Church and in response to the Synodal Preparatory Document released on September 9, 2021, Most Reverend Gregory L. Parkes appointed a team to oversee the Diocesan Phase of the Process. The Synod Team asked that the parishes in each of the Diocese's nine deaneries cooperate to ensure that at least two Synod sessions be held in each deanery one focused on prayer and catechesis on synodality, and one focused on prayer and discernment, with small and large group discussion. From the very beginning, the insistence was on prayer and receptivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Individual parishes and other Diocesan ministries were encouraged to hold Synod sessions of their own, especially sessions targeted for groups who are marginal in the life of the Church and society or who do not typically engage through the structures of the parish. Deaneries, parishes, and other ministries hosted 156 Synod sessions with approximately 6,480 participants, in multiple languages.

The Diocese received over a dozen letters from individual Catholics and 207 responses to the online survey. Several sessions were held specifically for youth and young adults. Other sessions ensured the participation of specific groups: migrant workers, prisoners, the homeless, the sick and homebound, university students, young adult leaders, healthcare workers, African Catholics, African American Catholics, Native American Catholics, Hispanic Catholics, and Portuguese-speaking Catholics, as well as young children and their parents.

The discussions usually occurred in two phases: first in small groups, and then all together. In small groups, participants discussed a list of questions developed from the ten themes proposed in the Synodal Preparatory Document. Near the end of the time allotted for discussion in small groups, each group was asked to choose one representative to report before all present what consensus had emerged in their discussion. For this, participants discussed in their small groups two questions developed from the "fundamental question" in the Synodal Preparatory Document. These two questions form the structure of this summary.

WHAT CONSENSUS OR COMMON THREAD EMERGED IN REGARD 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, and two themes emerged as especially prominent: First the Church offers an abundance of opportunities to the faithful for prayer and for service. Second, many of the faithful believe that the clergy listen to them and their concerns with attention and care. Other successes mentioned across sessions include: the generosity of the Church's charitable works, beautiful liturgy and music, good homilies, excellent Catholic schools, a wide array of opportunities offered for formation, especially

for adults and through engaging Scripture, successful ministries of outreach, especially to the homebound, the sense of community, hospitality, and diversity that pervades parish life, the success of small groups in supporting participants to live out their faith, and the inspiring leadership of Pope Francis.

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

Answers to the second question “What consensus emerged regarding what the Holy Spirit calls the Church to do better?” were extensive and diverse. Yet, these answers also fell into five sets of themes grouped together based on the frequency which they appeared in the reports. The first, most prominent, and nearly universal set of themes related to the Church’s need to do more in the way of outreach and evangelization, and the demographic most noted was youth and young adults. Formation in the faith was also mentioned both generally and specifically with regard to youth, adults, and families.

The second set of themes related to communication and a desire for those in authority in the Church to listen to diverse voices. The third set of themes was related and included a lack of sense of community and of sense of unity in the community, a lack of opportunity for discussion, fear of speaking up, and judgmentalism. Although several submissions expressed gratitude for the synodal process, others requested more frequent opportunities for dialogue. Topics of liturgical music, styles of worship, and traditional piety likewise surfaced frequently but with little consensus. Some voiced difficulty with the Holy Father’s recent *motu proprio* regulating the celebration of the Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal. However, gratitude was expressed for Bishop Parkes’ pastoral application of the regulations.

The fourth most prominent set of themes included a lack of engagement with Scripture, a lack of engagement in ecumenism, the need for vocations, the role of and leadership opportunities for women, and greater pastoral sensitivity for and outreach to Catholics who experience same-sex attraction. The fifth and final set of themes included the need for more opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and more opportunities for engaging through small groups. The need for greater clarity in Catholic moral and social teaching beyond the pre-eminent issue of abortion, the need for pastoral sensitivity with Catholics who are divorced or divorced and civilly remarried, the problem of clericalism, and the threat of polarization in the Church.

CONCLUSION

The many opportunities for sharing and listening proved helpful in bringing people together from a variety of different backgrounds and perspectives. While nothing was “resolved,” a dialogue was initiated. If any consensus could be identified, it is the gratitude many expressed for the opportunity to come together to discern how the Holy Spirit is working in their lives and in the life of our local Church. As a result, many of those who participated expressed a desire to continue along this path. Bishop Parkes prays that this report may serve to illuminate what the Holy Spirit speaks to the faithful of our Diocese, for our benefit as well as for the benefit of the Universal Church. Through this Synodal Process and all the synodal practices of the Church, may the Holy Spirit guide us ever more deeply into life in accord with the will of Jesus Christ.