

Quotes from the National Synthesis of the USCCB

Trust in the hierarchy of the Church is weak and needs to be strengthened. The sex abuse scandals and the way the Church leadership handled the situation are seen as one of the strongest causes of a lack of trust and credibility on the part of the faithful.

People at both ends of the political spectrum have set up camp opposing the ‘others,’ forgetting that they are one in the Body of Christ. Partisan politics is infiltrating homilies and ministry, and this trend has created divisions and intimidation among believers.

Those who experience marginalization, and thus a lack of representation in the Church, fall into two broad groups.¹⁶ The first includes those marginalized who are made vulnerable by their lack of social and/ or economic power, such as immigrant communities; ethnic minorities; those who are undocumented; the unborn and their mothers; people who are experiencing poverty, homelessness, or incarceration; those people who have disabilities or mental health issues; and people suffering from various addictions. Included also in this group are women, whose voices are frequently marginalized in the decision-making processes of the Church....The second group includes those who are marginalized because circumstances in their own lives are experienced as impediments to full participation in the life of the Church. Among these are members of the LGBTQ+ community, persons who have been divorced or those who have remarried without a declaration of nullity, as well as individuals who have civilly married but who never married in the Church. Concerns about how to respond to the needs of these diverse groups surfaced in every synthesis.

The Eucharist in the lives of Catholics was a significant starting point for many of the synodal consultations. While divisions exist, many saw the Eucharist as the source of hope for greater unity as the Body of Christ.

People noted that the Church seems to prioritize doctrine over people, rules, and regulations over lived reality. People want the Church to be a home for the wounded and broken, not an institution for the perfect.

Ordination for women emerged not primarily as a solution to the problem of the priest shortage, but as a matter of justice.”

“Young people also want the Church to speak out about issues that matter to them, especially justice, race, and climate change.” Young people themselves voiced a feeling of exclusion and desired to participate more fully as members of the parish community....Youth who participated in synodal sessions, however, stressed that they should not be seen and spoken of mostly as the future of the Church, but should be recognized for their importance now and given a significant voice in the present. They want to be both seen and heard and included more in Church life, especially by participating meaningfully in parish and diocesan councils and ministries.”

Especially as “the concept of the ‘traditional family’ continues to undergo significant change, it is important to acknowledge the presence of many types of families within the parishes of our dioceses, each of them with their own challenges, each seeking a welcoming community and ministerial outreach.”

greater “formation for seminarians and those already ordained to better understand human and pastoral needs, cultural sensitivity and awareness, greater emphasis on social justice, sharing resources with the needy, balancing the adherence to the dogmatic teachings of the faith with care for the emotional needs of their parishioners, how to include the laity in decision-making and learning to speak the truth with empathy, creativity, and compassion.”

“The general category of transparency was mentioned over and over again: Transparency in the sex abuse crisis, transparency in making difficult decisions, transparency in financial matters, transparency in admitting when something goes wrong, transparency in planning, transparency in leadership. Transparency brings accountability which many people feel is lacking in the Church. To be a trustworthy Church, transparency is going to need to be an essential component in every level and aspect.

Many want to see Church leadership take more seriously the talents and knowledge of the laity. Some expressed the need to use more effective Parish Councils and Diocesan Pastoral Councils. Others want their pastors and bishops to explore more deeply with the laity how best to participate in understanding the mission of the Church and its efforts to evangelize its members and the world.

A great deal of what must be done in a parish does not require ordination and many lay people have administrative and organizational skills. They could relieve pastors of some of the burden, freeing priests to be present and to develop relationships with people of the parish – something both priests and lay people desire. Some priests would need help with letting lay people take over parish tasks for which they seem convinced they have final responsibility and must therefore have the final word in all things.”

The next step for the U.S. Church is to give special attention to its parishes and dioceses, even as we continue participation in the continental and universal phases of the Synod, for that is where the People of God most concretely encounter the Spirit at work and where the first fruits of this discernment will be realized.

People must be able to speak honestly on even the most controversial topics without fear of rejection. We must be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. That will require an understanding of what is central to the identity of church, diocese, and parish; and what changes can help us grow rather than feel threatened.

“It was frequently reported that the participants would welcome more opportunities to be listened to and to hear the expressions of others’ views on the faith and the life of the Church. It was thought that this might contribute in a significant way to overcoming the polarization that is felt everywhere. Some noted how few opportunities are offered for true listening in a culture where we routinely speak past each other.