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To the USCCB Synod Committee:

The Pentecost Vigil Project is pleased to participate, along with other extra-ecclesial organizations, in the Synod 2023 Listening Phase.

The Pentecost Vigil Project is a new organization that was created to help promote Pope Francis' call for Church renewal through Synodality. From January to June 2022, we hosted a Synod survey on our website and conducted informal listening sessions on social media. Our hope was to provide a listening platform for "Free-range Catholics" and others, who would be less likely to participate in the more formal, parish listening sessions.

Our summary report is in the format of the Vatican's Official Synod 2023 Questions. Half of these questions include statistical data from our online survey. All the questions include sample comments that emerged during the process.

A summary of the demographics of those who participated in the online survey are included at the end of this report.

We have also attached 3 significant stories.

May the Holy Spirit guide you and Pope Francis as you continue this journey of discernment!

- Dr. Patricia E. Clement, D.Min.
Vice President, Pentecost Vigil Project

The Official Questions of Synod 2023

THE MAIN SYNOD QUESTION:

**A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together:"
What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?**

42% Open more leadership roles to women.

18% Have open communion for "lapsed Catholics" and members of other denominations.

7% Return to the Latin Mass.

33% Other (see comments below)

Comments:

- Why is this the first time that I've ever witnessed Church Leadership ask this question?

- I find it hopeful, seeing purposeful listening/discerning conversations and open sharing on thoughts/needs heard in those conversations...a “different” kind of communicating!
- Jesus-like leadership that both consoles and challenges, heals and helps, and provides pathways for those trying to follow Jesus to “get on the journey” in concrete measurable ways.
- I'd like to see more focused attention on what Vatican II had to say and emphasize how that council was led by the Holy Spirit.
- Actually listen and involve laity in the decisions at the parish and diocesan levels! There are meetings where it seems like the laity is being heard, but then the clergy does what they want to do anyway. So incredibly frustrating for newly emerging disciples!
- I am a male, but firmly believe the church needs to re-evaluate its view on the role of women in leadership. Relevancy of the church in the future is at stake. Refusal of the church to break with traditions that are thousands of years old and no longer meaningful in society will condemn it to continuous, long-term decline.
- I am involved in our parish Christian Initiation team, and I have lost count of the number of potential candidates who have left before they started when they were confronted by our broken annulment process. Why can't these cases be handled in the sacrament of reconciliation?
- Be inclusive of LGBTQ openly
- My parish is not open to any change. We've been doing it the same way for 50 years.

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road.

In your local Church, who are the ones “journeying together”?

What persons or groups are left on the margins, expressly or in fact?

68% I am deeply involved in my parish community and have many companions on my spiritual journey.

18% I do not feel welcome in my parish or in the Church at large.

14% I attend Mass regularly to gain its graces but am not involved in the parish as a community.

Comments:

- My parish is my family. I truly feel at home here.
- We are a campus ministry worship community so lots of participation
- It is not because of the particular people but because of the offensive way the church systemically rejects me as a woman.
- I do believe that to be relevant in 2022 women need to be included in the leadership of the Church. Also being more inclusive and welcoming to all.
- Ultimately this sense of an unwelcoming atmosphere was the tipping point for me.
- As a woman, with a child who is transgender, and an ex-husband who was abused by a priest, I find the Catholic church as an institution damaging.
- Conservative [Catholics] aligning with Republicans and most especially their embracing of Donald Trump only served to solidify my sense that the Church isn't a place that feeds my spirit anymore.

- We should ordain women and allow [clergy] marriage. If you have a charism for celibacy, join a religious order. We need to accept LGBTQ , etc.
- I think the Catholic church needs to focus on our young adults and minorities such as African Americans in the Catholic faith.
- Representation in the church should not only say we support diversity but also show it. If I am looking at a website or a brochure of a church, I want to see people that look like me. What is the church doing to integrate different cultures or even support towards the LGBTQ community as well as people with challenges such as Down syndrome? If all are truly welcome, show me.
- Clericalism! A vision of leadership that fails to follow the precepts of Vatican II and recognize the right and responsibility by baptism of all.

II. LISTENING

**Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices. To whom does our particular Church “need to listen to”?
How are the Laity, especially young people, and women, listened to?**

Comments:

- Grateful, as I “listen” to these voices!
- I believe listening, not just hearing, is key from all sides. We live in a culture where, as the song says, “Everybody’s talkin’ at me” but nobody is actually listening. It is an essential first step.
- A focus on truth and reconciliation -- there are so many abuses the Church has perpetrated that have been swept under the rug. We need transparency and healing, deep down.
- I want to hear about social justice issues from the pulpit without tiptoeing around the issues
- As a child I had no female leadership models in the church. The church at the time seemed rigid. An institution that is not able to questions its views in context of current culture fails. The church has never been able to do this.
- I am a Roman Catholic, born with developmental disabilities of mild cerebral palsy and learning disabilities. I am very disappointing there were no classes or resource in the roman catholic church when I was growing up.
- Place more emphasis on our suffering brothers and sisters in prison!
- Clericalism and not listening to All members, especially women

III. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity.

**How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication within the community?
Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?**

Comments:

- I used to go [to Mass] all the time, but I'm having issues with the clergy and the way priests are assigned to a parish
- I attend [Mass] regularly but I am extremely disturbed by the church's treatment of women and LGBT persons

- Homilies are more than 20 minutes, which means the Eucharistic portion of mass are rushed. Very upsetting
- The pushback on ordination of women as Deacons because of centuries of tradition is ridiculous. It is time to stop treating them as second-class citizens
- There is no room for questions or doubt.
- My biggest frustration is how things change with the arrival of a new pastor and the lack of “power” of the people in the pews. If the priest wants it, it happens

IV. CELEBRATING

How do prayer and liturgical celebration inspire and direct our “journeying together”?

62% I am often inspired and guided by the Eucharistic liturgies in my parish.

23% I regularly participate in celebrations of the Eucharist at my parish, but rarely feel inspired.

15% I never/rarely participate in Eucharist at our parish.

Comments:

- I especially like the homilies at Mass. Our pastor regularly challenges us to live the gospel in our lives.
- Very good music & homilies add to this Holy experience
- Love, love, love perpetual adoration!!
- Homilies and music rarely inspire. I go to Mass for the Eucharist.
- It is rare that a Eucharistic celebration inspires me because the language is so poor, exclusionary for women and for God.
- I found myself getting angry going to Mass at my Catholic church. I hated the liturgical language changes, the foreign priests and deacons gave homilies like it was the 50's.
- My biggest frustration is priests who cannot speak English so it can be understood.
- I would love to see us eliminate a homily once a month and ask each person to turn to another and answer this question, “In our scripture today, what are you saying to us Lord and what’s it going to cost us?”, You have 6 minutes. I can hear the screams already

V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the Church’s mission, in which all her members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is each Baptized person called to be a protagonist in the mission?

How is discernment about mission-related choices made, and who participates in it?

36% I feel challenged and am invited to become active not only in parish evangelization efforts, but also in outreach to those in need in our society.

35% I rarely feel challenged to be part of the mission of the Church. I don’t even know what the mission of the Church is.

29% Our parish has mission-oriented committees which offer programs for parishioners to join.

Comments:

- I feel the Church’s original mission has been lost. A true Jesus experience of Spirit has been lost in our attempt to hold fast to outdated dogma that no longer serves that Spirit.

- There is a need for all the faithful to recognize that they are the Church and recognize their rights and responsibilities by their baptism.
- Prison ministry - the most overlooked and underserved ministry in the Church in my opinion. These children of God are starving for the faith and the sacraments, but there is no one willing to go to them.
- I don't think "mission" is clear or consistent. We have a parish mission, but it is not clear to what degree that represents the Church's mission. The vast majority of members remain uninvolved in parish activities.
- I am called by God's Spirit within and have found others with a common call to work and celebrate with which is independent of the parish structure.
- As a woman, my opportunities are limited in the Catholic church. This is one of my main reasons for transitioning to a church that embraces the holy mysteries without regard to gender.
- I do know the mission of the church as it has evolved over the last 22 years - it is to pray, pay and obey. Sorry you can have it. NOT FOR ME!!!
- My frustration is with both the Church but also with Catholics themselves. How arrogant are we to be asking God to make it easier for us.
- I get frustrated with those in the pews with little or no catechetical formation who complain but won't step forward to educate themselves

VI. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

What are the places and modes of dialogue within our particular Church?

How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed?

What experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers?

Comments:

- I feel welcome in the Church and profoundly disagree with some Church dogma
- I worked for the Catholic church for 32 years including 6 years as a Franciscan. But in the last 22 years I have watched in horror as the church I knew and loved took a turn for the worse.
- I tried to get involved in my parish before I left. The last thing I tried was visiting parishioners in my locality. I was trained, given a list of names to visit with along with discussion starters and no one would meet with us. It was demoralizing.
- More openness to those on the fringe of society and those in the LBGTQ community
- Open Communion! It only makes sense because of Jesus' life, because of how God lives, because grace is how the world actually goes 'round.

VII. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations?

Comments:

- I desperately believe that the greatest means of attaining unity of all Christians is by welcoming all believers to participate in receiving communion. No one can possibly

understand the mystery of the Eucharist. Most Catholics have no better understanding of its reality than my Methodist friends.

- I am involved in some ministries, but I have more companionship on my journey - which is very important to me, - [with others] who are not Catholic.
- I wish for open communion and a welcoming community for all God's children.
- Be more respectful of the variety of Christians who compose the character of our community and seek to better feed the various focus of spiritual, social, and doctrinal understanding represented in our people
- [I am] In the process of switching to the Episcopal church
- I now go to an Episcopal church that offers a Celtic service. IT is meditative, it is very inclusive of the laity, everyone is invited to communion, we have women priests and gays are not second-class members. I feel like I belong to a church that Jesus would be proud of.

VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken?

How is authority exercised within our particular Church?

What are the practices of teamwork and co-responsibility?

Comments:

- As a baptized Catholic, I take very seriously my commission as a disciple, as priest, prophet, and king. I am committed to spreading the Gospel regardless of what a particular parish asks of me.
- The Catholic church focuses too much on rules and not building spirituality. The church is spiritually dead.
- A return to pure Gospel values and norms. We should be personally transformed and bring that transformation to all.
- When I attended a Catholic parish the only person I got to know was the priest. Catholic community is theoretical.
- As a woman, who is not allowed to go to Seminary or have job security in the Church, I do not have civil rights in the Church.
- I get the tightrope the Church faces in striking a balance between traditional and dogmatic ideology that must be protected and being open to new ways of embracing Humanity's natural and God-given lure of Spirit.
- My biggest frustration is getting to the top of the hierarchical ladder as a lay woman and hitting the glass ceiling...hard

IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit.

By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions?

How can they be improved?

How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?

29% I feel that my parish leadership values my opinion and provides many ways for me to participate in parish decisions.

- 27%** The only decisions that I get contacted about are requests for more money or to volunteer for something
- 24%** My parish leadership offers some opportunities for my comments through surveys, town hall gatherings, etc.
- 20%** I can't remember the last time my parish asked for my input before making important decisions

Comments:

- I'm the pastor in our community. There's been this double challenge of me trusting people enough to let them go do their thing, but also a frustration that more folks don't take those opportunities. I think pastoral leadership in the Catholic Church has really infantilized many people. The choices of my elder clergy frustrate me, but I question if I'm still part of the problem too.
- My current parish is growing by leaps and bounds with 'refugees' from other parishes which have been taken over by young diocesan priests trained in a pre-Vatican II style. The pastor has made sure that the transition has been very respectful of the original members and the integration of many new parishioners from previous communities!
- I think as a community we need more opportunities to be heard
- Usually top-down preaching...Pray for Clergy our success guide you...too ONE WAY
- I am in a liturgy working group seeking alternatives with the blessing of our bishop. In this little space, there is valued participation and decision making however this is not in a parish.
- There is a real culture of listening in our parish.
- At the level of Bishop or Cardinal, I have read of those who disagree with the Pope and don't mind the publicity around that. When it comes to what the Pope asks of us regarding Latin and the "old school" ways, I wonder at the hubris that makes those clergy do what they want.

X. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of "journeying together," listening to one another and engaging in dialogue?

Comments:

- A pastor who cares about the community, listens to them and does not try to divide the community and force his own agenda
- I attend [Mass] regularly, but clericalism would drive you out...GOD alone keeps me
- I still attend church because of the community. We have been there for over 30 years, but am most unhappy with our African pastor who is passive-aggressive
- It has been a while since I have felt truly inspired by parish Eucharistic liturgies. It just seems mechanical at this point, where emphasis is on the rote ceremony and significance becomes routine.
- Our Pastor has a fundamental focus on devotionism and makes that the focus of his homilies which leave me empty
- The church's main sickness is the clerical bachelor male priesthood. It's a poison.

- There needs to be an end to Patriarchy. Full inclusion and diversity of gender and sexual orientation in leadership.
- At the parish level, I become frustrated by the lack of compassion on the part of the ordained toward people who have been serving the Church and are either “aging out” or having other problems. It seems that the folks in charge need training in Human relations and/or courage.
- A bizarre focus by our bishops on issues that don’t matter to most Catholics in the pews and lack of attention on those that truly matter. It seems bishops long for a return to the 1950s era of pay, pray and obey with a rigid focus on sexual purity...
- We need to find ways to increase trust in the Roman Catholic Church. And have real consequences for clergy violators of that trust, not just “well move them to another parish.”
- I would think that trust requires mutual respect. I don’t think trust (or respect for that matter), existing in only one direction is very healthy. There are relationships between clergy, institution and us (laity) but don’t forget relationships between laity to laity. How are WE doing? It starts with intent. Then listening. Then speaking. Then placing ourselves at the center of the cross.

Demographics of our Surveys and Interviews: Total interviewed: Approximately 150

Lay Catholics: **87%**
Ordained Catholics: **5%**
Vowed Religious: **1%**
Ex-Catholic: **5%**
Other Religion: **1%**
No Active Faith: **1%**

Age: **48%** over 65
40% age 41-65
12% age 18-40

Location: **75%** live in Mid-Atlantic / Southeast: USCCB regions 4 & 14
and Military Archdiocese
8% live in the Northeast: USCCB regions 1, 2, & 3
5% live in Northcentral: USCCB regions 6, 7, & 8
4% live in Southcentral: USCCB regions 5 & 10
3% live in the West: USCCB regions 9, 11, 12 & 13
5% live in Canada and other countries

How often do you go to Church?

87% Attend regularly
9% Seldom attend
4% Don’t attend at all

If you don’t go to Church, why did you leave?

31% I still attend but have considered leaving for many reasons
7% The Church is not welcoming to its members and has lost the sacredness in its worship
6% The church’s treatment of LGBTQ, immigrants, women, or other groups.
4% Sexual abuse by clergy and cover-up by bishops
52% No Comment or Other