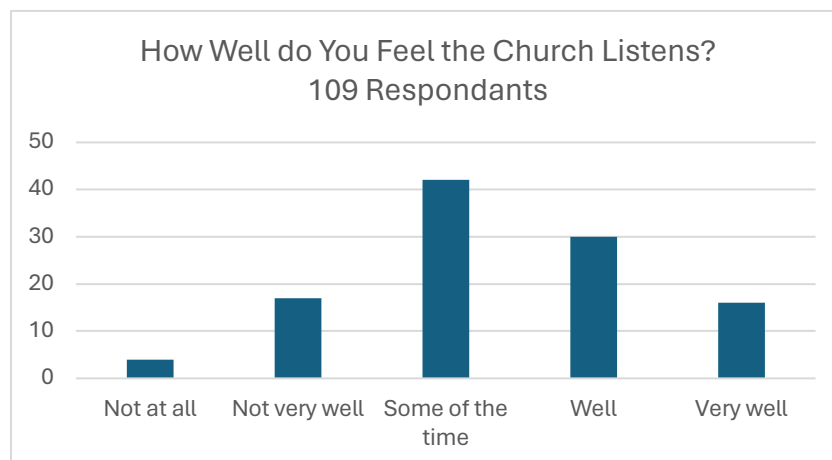
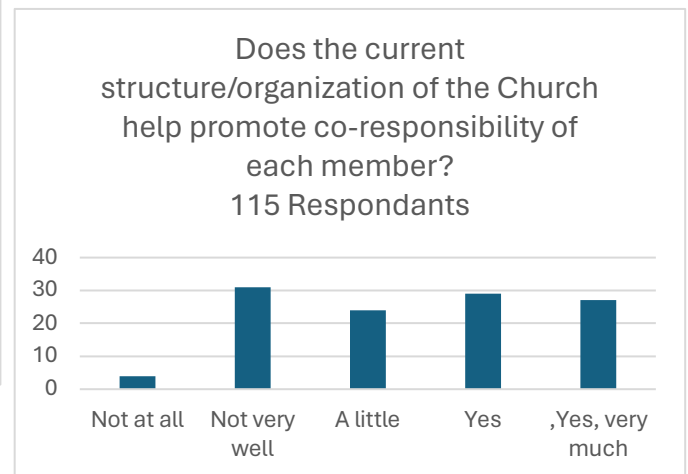
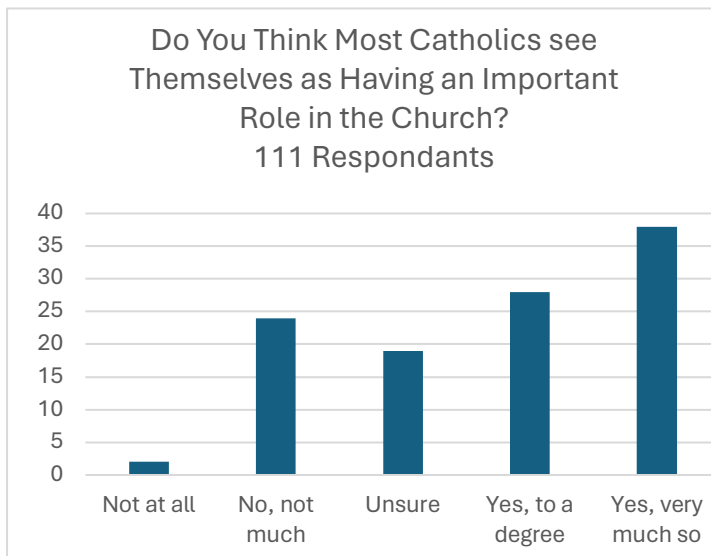


## Diocese of Saint Cloud, MN - Synod Listening Session Report April 2024

The Diocese of Saint Cloud, Minnesota held 6 listening sessions with about 200 people total participating that consisted of mainly small group discussion. We used the following questions:

- Where have I seen or experienced successes/distresses in Church life that reflects Jesus and his mission?
- Where have I seen or experienced leadership that reflects Jesus and his mission? Or not?
- Where have I seen or experienced Church structure/organization that reflects Jesus and his mission? Or not?
- In what significant ways are all the baptized responding to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?
- What current structures in the Church afford all the baptized to have a say/act co-responsibly?
- How can the structures and organization within the Church provide greater support to all the baptized in doing these things?
- What would be the best pathways for more synodality? Co-responsibility? (think creatively/ new ways)

Themes from the answers to these questions follow in this summary. In addition, we polled people before we had small group discussions. These charts share the results of three of these questions.



**Priests: Key stakeholders in the organization**

Overwhelmingly, participants shared that one of the key leaders in the church's organization are the priests. The leadership style of pastors leads to more or less co-responsibility in a parish. When the priests are full of zeal, humble, and servant leaders people tend to feel more engaged in community life of the parish. The priests are key in creating a community that empowers others. Parishioners want to feel more connected to their parish priest (s). There is a general concern that we don't have enough priests to maintain the current workload, which is affecting their ability to focus on sacramental duties. It is difficult for them to carry out their mission. Pastors could encourage and support more lay members to take more responsibility/leadership roles and in turn the lay leaders to reach out and invite others. Deacons can help take the pressure off the priests.

When the priest is in touch with the community it makes you want to follow this person who is leading by example. When clergy take a personal interest in people it shows Jesus' love. It's the small things. This spiritual father needs to be there for us by teaching through example. Be humble. Pastors need to encourage progressives and conservatives to be more unified. Church leadership – priests, bishops, pope needs to be servant led. That is what is inspiring and hopeful.

Being in clergy leadership does not mean that person is holy or is an example of a servant leader. There is some concern that some priest's leadership styles are showing and wanting more authority. This "do it myself" approach lends to less co-responsibility. For some, there is no real good way to have a good conversation and not feel judged by the priest. Some priests "rule the parish" in an authoritarian culture. Laity need to challenge Church leadership when it is not being Christ-like.

There is concern about the seminary training for a parish priest. Priests need to be pastoral. Seminary training that focuses on understanding people, less on law would help engage more people in the pews, servant leadership and learning about leading a community, spiritual leadership, and the ability to call forth gifts and responsibility in others that is empowering. Does seminary training include working side by side with laity in active parishes?

I have seen many priests treating their vocation of priesthood as a job that they clock in and out of.

**Engage Laity: A Community of Practice**

Participants deeply desire the spirit and practice of co-responsibility, rooted in processes of accompaniment, between laity, vowed religious, deacons, and clergy.

They want their capacity for discipleship -- to proclaim, in actions and words, the God of love manifest in the mission of Jesus -- be recognized, valued, and supported -- through formation/training and in the ways in which structures are designed and operate.

Laity have expertise in areas that most of the clergy do not. There are many things the laity can do. that you don't have to be ordained to do. Seeking a model where everyone's gifts and talents are nurtured and used and it's not just about filling a spot.

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Laity want a sense of belonging, a feeling of I'm part of this family. Use the talents of all people. Some people find that sense of belonging elsewhere.

When one gets involved and offers oneself in parish life s/he grows in the faith and builds a stronger relationship with God, growing as a disciple. When one is with a supportive community it makes all the difference. It appears that the elderly are doing most of the work. There are ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Some are very worried about how the Church responds to LGBTQ and other marginalized people. Many are alienated and will not return to the Catholic Church. Others want to stand firm on the Church's teaching and not shy away from the truth. The "softness" of approaches seems to lead to confusion for people.

There is a general sense that a greater role in decision making is essential. Some want to have a say in sharing concerns and how the Church is run. The role of the laity in this way needs to be improved.

Lack of Mass attendance, participation and commitment to the community is another overwhelming concern. There appears to be a lack of interest and people are not showing up. The sense of sacrifice is being lost – a lot of people don't want to put an effort into things. We need more individual responsibility. The responsibility lies with each person.

Spiritual nourishment for some comes from retreats and other activities outside the Church structure. Having more opportunities for sharing faith would help evangelize others. Connecting the Scriptures to life situations touches people's lives.

Invite, invite, invite the next generation to take leadership. Building relationships is key. People could invite new families/parishioners to enjoy a meal together. Finding a community to support your faith is important for proclaiming the Gospel in your life. People need to learn a comfort level in sharing faith and then it gets easier the more you share.

### Keep the youth engaged

There is a deep concern for the youth. They are leaving the Church. How do we help awaken the young people, so they want to be engaged and to make a difference? We need to have more opportunities for them.

We should have listening sessions with our youth and young adults. They rarely show up to these sessions. How would this look different if we engaged youth and young adults?

### Synod

We need to do this more often. We need more things like this on a regular basis. We need to hear people's concerns and ideas. We need to learn from each other. We need to listen to each other on the way to serve others. Mutual listening is key. There is a need for more synodality and responsibility within the Church. Listening is the best way to connect with people. Building up listening is building up the community. We need to increase our invitation to listen – it is an experience of respect and having a voice. Synodality is inclusive. It builds trust and confidence in others. Listen deeply and more often. Synod listening is important and should continue.

Ecumenism should be part of this process.

The synod process has been a great movement to put into place Christ's mission in our churches. Recognizing baptismal dignity and letting people know that we are all called to carry out Christ's mission. This is not readily proclaimed.

Difference between listening to others. When someone disagrees, how to handle that? Learn why people do what they do, not just what they think.

Have more built-in ways to consult the faithful (all people) and then be attentive to the Spirit's movement.

What is our responsibility to understand what the Pope is saying?

### Welcoming and Outreach

Participants desire the qualities of "welcoming" and "accompaniment", both in the atmosphere of a parish community and the process of evangelization. Welcoming people at the doors of the church is important and we need to go out to people and evangelize.

We need to reach out to those who left or have disconnected from their parish. We cannot scare people into coming back. Radical hospitality is needed. Some people feel uncomfortable in the Catholic Church for various reasons (divorce, sexual orientation) they go find another denomination and to feel fulfilled. We are not responding to the needs of the community. We need to be aware of the greater good.

We need significant ways to reach out to others. Catholic radio can reach lots of people. Get leaders out of the parish and into marginalized settings. Relationships are built in these settings, and it transforms faith. We see the world with a new perspective and people get to know each other and the community.

### **Structure of the Church: The Design of Co-responsibility?**

Participants mentioned the need for support for the family structure. Parents need to be good examples of faith for their kids. Go to church and events – show up. How do we incorporate the synod process in our own families? We need to listen to each other better in our own family.

The Church structure can be many different things: Architecture, hierarchy, people. Explaining different styles of Church architecture. Participants shared concerns that even though church structures are not meant to divide us, they often do. It is very difficult when there are changes in leadership and the style is totally different. What might help is to spread authority broadly. Lack of consistency can be confusing. It is this structure that gives us guidance and value, so we don't go off and do our own thing.

Co-responsibility in the structure of a parish/Church can look different than in the past. In parishes where "the people" are doing everything in the absence of the priest – give them affirmation and authority to do that job well. Expand the concept of parish leadership. Lay administrators can oversee administration and ordained can serve as sacramental and spiritual guides. In addition, there are other spiritual leaders other than the priests. They need to be affirmed and valued. Leaders of the Church need to lead and still be with the people.

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There is room for many to use their gifts and take leadership in the parish. Parish councils and committees, especially in ones that assess needs and plan ways to meet those needs can be commonplace and can function well especially when they listen to all people, are afforded real leadership and are well formed. We need/want healthy committees for ministries in parish, i.e. faith formation, festival - fundraisers, worship/liturgy, youth and young adults, social justice, mental health, finance, sacramental prep, etc. can provide much needed input and direction from laity as well as executing activities and ministries. Trustees who take their job seriously can provide needed feedback and support to the pastor. When someone's vision is not our own – let it flower – it's not a personal preference. All levels need to model receptivity.

There is confusion in the Church when different dioceses function differently. Different structures within different diocesan organizations add to the confusion.

All parish meetings should have people spend time together and share ideas. Be receptive to creative and “way out there” ideas. For some, it does not seem to give opportunities to be community. Collaborating with neighboring parishes with different ministries gives people more options.

There are some who voice structure in this way: Why does everyone need a say? There is a hierarchy in the Church for a reason. Just like in a family: Mom and Dad are the decision makers and the children the rule followers even when they don't understand or agree. Church leaders are trying to please the people and forgetting what life on earth is all about – worshipping God and getting to heaven. I question how much lay people should have to say in many Church matters/teachings. There are things meant to be decided on by the authority of the Church.

We need checks and balances in the Church.

Pope Francis – appoint bishops who are courageous.

### Women

Women should be authorized to do more.

### Transparency

There is so much secrecy from leadership, parish, diocese, so we don't feel a part of it. We need more transparency.

### Liturgy

We need to celebrate good liturgy. The Mass has a beautiful structure – one that increases participation. There is a joy in knowing that we are praying, sacrificing, journeying together.

Some are deeply concerned that a lack of reverence is leading to a casualness that is in other churches. We need people see how full of love God is. We need to help people fall in love with Jesus – so they understand and grow in their faith. Not just an obligation but a relationship.

To be more reverent – Corpus Christi canopy, that structure made me feel more comfortable.

In the Traditional Latin Mass, they show extreme reverence, and the messages are hard truths.

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When we can come together in worship and have fellowship, that's what's important. More focus on what it means to be "Church," less on structure.

Lack of push for confession. It is our way to heaven.

As a Church, I feel we have lost the idea that Mass is a sacrifice, and we are there to worship God.

### Following God's will

In the end, we want to follow the will of God. We need to build bridges with each by being sisters and brothers to each other. In everything, we ought to be using a discernment process similar to that of the women religious when discerning a leader. Discernment as a way of life includes listening. Love should lead/be the focus.

We need a common language which is LOVE instituted by Jesus. We have a variety of languages for Mass but are ONE Church with a common language of love. We have the same Mass/liturgy all over the world.

Jesus' apostles – 3 then the 12, then they had disciples. The church still echoes that.

Jesus' mission is our salvation and getting us to heaven for eternity with Him. Our Church has become too much about us and less about God. We have lost the importance of sacrifice and offering our pain and suffering up to God.

Is the Church doing the will of God? How do we know?