

SYNOD REPORT FROM REGION I: JOURNEYING TOGETHER

INTRODUCTION

Among the people of the New England region, there are various joys, challenges, and needs shared by parishes and communities, in addition to many different understandings and ideals of what it means to “journey together.” Fortunately, as part of this process, the Holy Spirit invited the local Church to grow in synodality thanks to the shared aspirations, ideas, and contributions of participants. Examining the idea of “journeying together” through the lenses of the themes of this synod – communion, participation, and mission – we identified ten areas of most frequent concern: Liturgy, Marriage and Family Life, Youth, Catholic Education, Evangelization and Communications, Parish Life and Viability, Clergy, Vocations, A Church that Embraces All Races and Welcomes Immigrants, and Fostering an Inclusive Church Community.

In the absence at the submission time of diocesan syntheses from the Archdiocese of Boston and the Diocese of Manchester, these findings represent a broad synthesis of the input received from the (Arch)Dioceses of Hartford, Bridgeport, Burlington, Fall River, Norwich, Portland, Providence, Springfield, and Worcester.

I. LITURGY

Liturgical prayer in its various rites and celebrations provides the primary context for encountering Christ in a deeply personal and communal way. There is a direct and vital relationship between this faith encounter and liturgy. The Holy Mass is cherished by many of our people as the source and summit of our faith, with its celebration seen as an irreplaceable moment in journeying together and a major source of healing and joy in their lives. Many view the Mass as an essential liturgical moment in which the people of God are united together in a participatory expression. The joy that is the Good News is meant not only to be proclaimed but also to be shared together.

Though these perceptions are present, there is also a recognition that many Catholics are not fully engaged in the liturgical or Eucharistic experience. Continued catechesis and re-teaching are fundamental in order to remind parishioners about the depth and truth found in our teachings surrounding the Eucharist, transubstantiation, and the Real Presence. Without this understanding intact, a serious lacking is present in our communities, and any participation in the Eucharistic experience is undervalued by too many. It is critical, then, that at all levels a new focus be placed on re-teaching these aspects of our faith.

It is recognized that the reality of COVID-19 also played a substantial role in removing the habit of Eucharistic and liturgical participation from peoples’ lives, shrinking Mass attendance. As parishioners are welcomed back into safe church spaces, it is key to provide a valuable liturgical experience that provides for quality in several noted categories: a sense of community, beautiful music, excellent homilies that connect both to the Sacred Scriptures and the lives of the congregation, and both cultural and intergenerational sensitivity and hospitality. The Catechism teaches that liturgy is “service in the name of and on behalf of the people” (CCC 1069), a participation of the people in the work of God. To be sure, there are many experiences of liturgy in our churches that are engaging celebrations of our faith both individually and communally. At

the same time, however, there is a predominant need, as well as a sincere desire, for a recommitment on the part of both clergy and laity alike to upgrade and transform the quality of the liturgical experience in a comprehensive and consistent way.

This is true of the Mass and also of other liturgical and devotional opportunities, which many have noted as being an important aspect of their faith lives. A need is seen for a stronger incorporation of Eucharistic Adoration, recitation of the Rosary, and other traditional devotions into parish life. Some indicated the helpfulness of days of prayer and retreat, as well as speakers focusing on faith-related topics and programs addressing liturgical and sacramental practices. Furthermore, many of these opportunities could be crucial venues in which those of varied groups, generations, languages, and cultures of the parish could come together in sharing their unique expressions of faith, especially highlighting particular cultural devotions and traditions. It was noted that even virtual or digital prayer opportunities can be helpful in spiritually bringing together members of the community who are unable to be physically present in the same location.

It is our hope that through the regular experience of well-prepared and appropriately inclusive liturgy, an encounter with God through the intrinsic beauty belonging to the nature of the liturgy itself would lead to a renewed energy for clergy and laity alike and will become an integral component in the revitalization of parish life.

Among those who prefer the Extraordinary Form of the Mass, there exists a resentment over what they see as suppression of this Form, with participants at one diocese noting “the non-synodal manner” in which *Traditionis Custodes* impacted those Catholics who cherish the Extraordinary Form. Additionally, there are calls for greater access and availability of this Form throughout the region, with one young adult “finding joy by worshipping God in the Extraordinary Form of the Mass” and being pained by the perceived chastisement for this preference. It is also noted that the majority of young adult participants at one diocese express value for the orthodoxy of the Extraordinary Form. Despite the expressions of value for the Extraordinary Form, further adoption of it is also met with skepticism, with some participants noting that they feel this Form is not attractive and less likely to draw youth to Church.

II. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

A strong consensus of Region I was that there needs to be a family focus. The way this focus manifests is an area of many different viewpoints, involving children’s Masses, affirming pro-life stances, advocating for marriage in an era when it is seen as less essential, and also promoting corporal works of mercy and worshipping together to allow for deeper formation for families.

For the majority of our Catholic population, the beauty of marriage and family life provides an excellent opportunity for deepening one’s relationship with Christ. However, many elements of contemporary society challenge the very values that couples hold most sacred and which they seek to transmit to their children and to future generations. Viewed from a faith perspective, the family represents the “domestic Church” and it is there that the daily living out of the encounter with Christ largely occurs. To best foster a strong, foundational “domestic Church,” it has been suggested that we must teach and encourage families to pray together, and also embolden our parishes’ welcoming committees to genuinely and enthusiastically receive families before and after Mass.

The Church today is challenged by significant shifts in mainstream understanding and acceptance of Her teachings on sexuality and marriage. Expressions of misconception and bewilderment as to the Church's restrictions on sexual activity before marriage appear to many as cause for the lack of engaged young people and their interest in the Catholic faith. Similarly, the nature of commitment is understood differently today than in generations past, as the Church's teaching on the indissolubility and permanence of marriage is not readily shared by many throughout this region. The Church today is also challenged by a civil redefinition of the very reality of marriage between one man and one woman and by the need to provide pastoral care to persons who self-identify sexually in ways that do not correspond to what the Church believes and teaches about the human person created as male or female. This presents an enormous challenge not only for persons in this situation, but also for society and the church, which has no desire to spurn any of them but rather to provide pastoral care and spiritual support even as she challenges them with her teaching.

Also noted are the challenges of unwed parents bringing children to parish religious education or Catholic schools while inviting them to encounter Jesus Christ. It was recommended that we focus on the faith formation of parents, so that they could then better hand on the Faith to their children. Moreover, 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. Adoptive families, blended families, families with members challenged by mental or physical disabilities, foster families, and multi-racial families are all realities that call for our attention and pastoral outreach. The parish communities in urban centers of our dioceses serve immigrant families in search of a new life who naturally find themselves caught between two cultures and, in many situations, two languages; these brothers and sisters are in need of assistance in adjusting to a new place and a new way of life. The ever-growing number of our children being raised in single-parent homes or a household where grandparents are the primary caregivers also begs an outreach of support and service.

III. YOUTH

Many of our Catholics believe that a re-envisioning of youth ministry and outreach to young people is needed, providing a more distinct invitation to the young men and women of our Church to encounter Christ and to become missionary disciples. A consistent theme that arose was the loss of youth and young families in parishes and the recognition that finding ways to attract and activate these groups is viewed as critical in order to not only maintain but also grow our communities.

As Pope Francis pinpoints the direction for youth in our Church: "Youth ministry has to be synodal; it should involve a 'journeying together' that values 'the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the Church's members, through a process of co-responsibility...Motivated by this spirit, we can move towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, one capable of appreciating its own rich variety, gratefully accepting the contributions of the lay faithful, including young people...No one should be excluded or exclude themselves'" (*Christus vivit*, n. 206).

This notion was expressed in a desire for a greater and more significant welcome to young people from parish leadership, including the clergy, and the opportunity for them to have a

meaningful voice in giving input on parish matters. Service opportunities were highlighted as a vital link that joins faith to the world in meaningful ways for young Catholics who have a desire to reach out to the less fortunate. Encouraging our youth to understand and accept that they share the pastoral role of the Church was seen by many as a priority. The particular gifts and creative energies that characterize youth must be tapped and given the space and freedom to bear fruit in their own lives and in the lives of others. Along with their passion for service, youth participation in faith-sharing groups with peers emerged as a necessary outflow of faith formation. Admittedly, in many places a better job in engaging young Catholics after Confirmation or upon graduation from a Catholic high school or university is needed. To this end, the placement of clergy as Catholic chaplains on campuses is seen as an aid in bridging that gap. Outreach and programs for Catholics in their 20s and 30s, individually, as couples, or in a group, was also identified as an immediate priority.

It was noted that while youth participation has lessened in many places, there are pockets of young people and young adults in our high schools, colleges, and young adult ministries that show a strong devotion and dedication to their faith. This is seen as truly hopeful, and looking at places where these groups have been successful might be able to provide a blueprint for how others could better engage youth in their particular situations.

Another interesting feature that arose was how the opinions of our young people vary at times. There are those who actively wrestle with discerning the meaning of the Church's teachings that often conflict with societal perspectives and norms, while others express a desire to be more strongly engaged in traditional orthodoxy, practice, devotion, and liturgy. It appears important, therefore, to know and understand the experience and viewpoint of the particular young men and women being ministered to in order to most effectively connect with them.

One additional suggestion made was to better incorporate technology and social media outlets, leveraging platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube to connect with younger parishioners and provide outreach and evangelization to a younger demographic.

IV. CATHOLIC EDUCATION

An increase in support for Catholic schools, fundamentally and financially, is an ever-present desire across our region. It was noted, however, that such support should not fall entirely to priests, but all Catholics in a given area, as a source of shared concern. While the participants in our region felt that support from the dioceses needs to increase, it was noted that the dioceses should be open to change, and that we cannot expect new results if we continue to do things the same way. Catholic schools in our dioceses have a great product but must do more to be proactive to make that known through public relations as they face substantial challenges on both the elementary and secondary school levels. Despite bold and creative initiatives by diocesan leaders, the model of "parochial school" that many still have in mind is showing to be less and less viable, as economics and enrollment support that claim. However, Catholic schools remaining open is a major concern across the region, with some participants calling for tuition-free education.

Calls for authentically Catholic education to come from our schools was also a present theme, with our schools being described as growth centers and graces. There is genuine desire from our region for religious education to teach our children that they have been called by God to be not only disciples of Jesus themselves, but to help form other disciples of Christ. In addition,

some expressed a desire for support from the diocese to those parents who would choose to homeschool their children.

Well-funded or newly-renovated public schools and charter schools present formidable competition for Catholic schools. In the context of the parish school, the level of financial stress upon the parish challenges the call to responsible stewardship. In Catholic private schools, rising tuition costs and lower enrollments are realities that threaten the existence of some of these more traditionally modeled schools. Due to local and national economics, many families experience real difficulty in meeting tuition costs. It is logical to conclude that if Mass attendance is low, parish collections will be adversely affected and this, in turn, severely hampers the parish's ability to continue to subsidize its parochial school. Also, the trend toward fewer Catholic marriages and a decline in the birthrate reduces the number of children for whom Catholic school may be an option. The efforts of leadership to explore and implement new models is recognized. Just as with parishes, so too the attempt to merge schools that are facing real struggles toward the creation of a stronger, regional model is only one of the creative approaches already being taken to address the issue. There is confidence in the value of the Catholic school and hope that there will still be viable and vital options moving forward but this will occur only if parish communities are willing to honestly face all the factors already mentioned.

V. EVANGELIZATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

A desire for clear and consistent communication at both the parish and diocesan levels was expressed throughout our region, with respondents stating that communication encompasses listening, and not just speaking, and that the former is an area where improvement is needed. Some have noted that letters of concern to their diocese usually go unanswered, and others noted a similar lack of communication internally at their parish. Specific topics mentioned where greater communication is needed include parish mergers, corrective/protective actions that the Church is taking regarding the abuse scandal, and self-promotion of the good works of the Church. Beyond the parishes and dioceses, some in our region also expressed desire for clearer communication from the Vatican, noting that the Pope needs to be better heard and understood.

While there was a variance in our region regarding what level of communication about which topics should be expected from the dioceses and the parishes, there is total agreement that utilizing digital platforms should be an integral part of any communications plan moving forward. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and TikTok were consistently raised as effective avenues for promotion and information and should be utilized regularly by the dioceses and parishes to communicate. We are urged by Pope Francis to discover ways in which technology, in general, and communications, in particular, can assist in supporting a "culture of encounter" and assist in spreading the Good News. It is certainly true that the world of virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact. It is also a fact that technology cannot substitute for the sacramental and liturgical experience of the People of God. Yet, it is equally verifiable that the Internet and others forms of social media provide complementary means toward creating connection and communicating our identity and mission to all who utilize digital media. The younger members of our parish communities challenge us to learn how to present our message in ways that they both seek and understand.

A specific suggestion that came up in multiple dioceses in our region is the importance of in-person events, and that of having a centralized calendar of social, spiritual, family, and

community events that would allow us to invite newcomers and even those that are fallen away to continuous opportunities for engagement.

VI. PARISH LIFE AND VIABILITY

A wide spectrum of topics pertaining to parish life and viability presents itself with varying degrees of agreement depending on a given topic. There is a consensus that parishes and campuses engaged in service outreach are well regarded by their communities and a successful means of engaging the community at large. Dioceses cited food pantries, outreach centers, bereavement ministry, social concerns groups, food drives or collections, and service trips as positive aspects of church life.

The perception of parish councils is decidedly mixed. Councils are seen positively in that they are working diligently to expand participation in their parish; and negatively in that they are seen as having too much power and not communicating enough with others at the parish. There also exists a sense of rigidity with parish councils or other ministries where members have been in leadership for too long allowing to permeate an unhelpful “that’s the way we’ve always done it” attitude.

Parishes today face myriad challenges which are a shared concern of its clergy and lay members. Demographic and cultural changes create worry on the part of many parishioners for the future viability of the parish as they know it. The diversity of geographical location of parishes, their individual circumstances, the shortage of priests, the lack of religious sisters, the disengagement of younger Catholics post-Confirmation, property and facility needs, aging parish population, language and cultural issues, lack of staff and a paucity of resources for outreach are duly noted.

As it relates to pastoral planning and the merging or closing of parishes, there exists a sense of frustration over such processes among the laity throughout the region. One challenge identified was the presence of a large number of national parishes erected to accommodate several generations of immigrants that settled in a particular area. Now, many of these same regions are depleted of parishioners who have since moved away. Many of these areas are now largely inhabited by non-Catholics. To ensure a viable future for parish life in our local churches, restructuring will continue to be a necessity, not merely so that a parish will survive, but that each remaining parish will thrive. In summary, what does emerge in this area is the need to continue to educate and to invite each member of the local Church to be more “catholic” and less “parochial.” However, for these mergers to be successful, there is consensus that two-way communication from the (arch)diocese will prove critical, as there is a perception that dioceses make decisions about mergers and closures without considering any input from the impacted parishioners.

VII. CLERGY

Many of our people express both a love for and appreciation of their priests. In addition, a real concern for the well-being of those priests is present. The fact of the diminished number of priests coupled with the rising number of pastoral responsibilities facing the clergy today have caused them to become overburdened and has made it difficult for them to fulfill their various roles. This reality was readily acknowledged. The pressing societal and cultural challenges spread existing clergy too thin and this compromises both the effectiveness of their pastoral work and

their preparation for liturgy and sacramental involvement. This situation is all compounded by the increasing reality of priests having administrative responsibility for multiple churches or parishes.

Consequently, there is an overarching acknowledgement and concern that our priests are not able to fulfill their primary role, that of guiding and leading the community and meeting the sacramental and pastoral needs of the people. Clergy should be prioritized as spiritual leaders. It was noted that, while autonomous, parishes ought not to exist in isolation. No parish priest can fulfill his role in an isolated way. This underscores the necessity of building up a sense of fraternity among priests which will provide them with a source of mutual support, ongoing priestly formation, and vehicles for renewal and rejuvenation. A collaborative effort that grows out of mutual respect can yield better results for the priest, the parish, and for the priestly vocation itself.

The fact that recently ordained priests are regularly being asked to assume the responsibility of a parish highlights the value of strong relationships, mutual understanding, and assistance among those of the presbyterate. This is often especially true between older priests and younger ones, between senior priests and those actively engaged in pastoral ministry. It is hoped that a genuine rapport among the clergy will be a source of great encouragement, joy, and hope among the faithful who will seek to respond, in turn, in mutual support of their clergy.

Living out the fullness of his priestly vocation does not mean that the priest is meant to do everything in the parish. Delegation of responsibilities, different staffing structures at parishes, administrative or business managers, and other suggestions were proposed to help support pastors and share workloads, as appropriate, while not diminishing the essential role priests must and do play. While it is truly the pastor who ultimately bears responsibility to ensure that parish life is faithful to Church teaching and carried out according to the norms of universal and particular law, the close collaboration of parishioners, religious, and other qualified laity must be tapped.

Furthermore, a reimagining of parish life is necessary to allow for parishes with multiple worship sites but a single pastor. Inspiring and encouraging new relationships and partnerships among churches in a parish, or among different parishes, can provide assistance to the evangelizing work of the clergy. This can help fortify the stability of a parish, as the clergy and laity for all groups or churches take active roles, moved by the Spirit to serve the life of the parish according to their talents.

Finally, it must be noted that the clergy abuse crisis remains on the minds of Catholics. The scandal has turned away or inhibited some from engaging fully in parish life. Some of the lay faithful continue to ask for information on what the Church is doing to address the past and protect the Church of the future. Continued sharing and clear communication via many channels is essential to ensure that actions the Church has taken or will take are known to the faithful.

VIII. VOCATIONS

The lack of vocations to ordained ministry and forms of consecrated life continues to be a serious concern with real consequences for the life of the Church. Equally true is the reticence of many couples to get married and raise a family. There appears to be a strong need to restore an understanding of “vocation” in our people, emphasizing the belief that in his love God has gifted each person with a particular plan and personal “mission” of faith and conviction for their lives.

It is often understood that when one speaks of “vocations” the context is the priesthood, and to this end, appeals are made for an even greater attention to the proper formation of

seminarians. This is especially important in reflecting upon the caliber and preparation of those entering priestly formation. The recruitment, selection, and acceptance of those called to the priesthood, and to service in our local Church, demands diligence and scrutiny. Some noted the importance of recognizing potentially adverse qualities and perspectives in candidates, such as harshness, inhospitality, immaturity, heterodoxy, sexual confusion, rigidity, and judgmentalism. While discernment and formation are recognized as important steps in assisting with every candidate's ministerial skills, a high standard is desired in all those being accepted into formation programs.

It was understood as well, however, that "vocations" also goes beyond simply considering the priesthood. If "vocation" is to be understood in its fullness, it must include married life, ordained ministry, religious life, and all forms of consecrated life. A reinvigoration of each of these vocational possibilities is necessary to build up the future of all aspects of the Church.

Especially in the context of priesthood and consecrated religious life, reference has often been made to there being a direct correlation between the breakdown of Catholic family life and a lack of vocations to service in the Church as a priest, deacon, brother, or religious sister. Pope Saint John Paul the Great affirmed that "the family is the seedbed of vocations." It is easy then to understand the imperative need to provide a "vocation-friendly environment" that assists families in encouraging, never discouraging, a vocational call, especially to priesthood or religious life.

Clergy and parishioners alike must take responsibility to foster a "culture of vocations" so that men and women of all ages may be assisted with the necessary resources and accompanied by a supportive and prayerful parish community as they discern and respond to God's call. This work should be done at every level, from the family to the parish to the diocese, in order to provide a system of support and collaboration that best offers the opportunity to reach potential candidates.

While large diocesan programs can be helpful, committees and prayer groups in our churches have also been effective means of keeping a vocational focus constantly present in the minds of our people. Individual parishioners, too, can play an important role: praying, sacrificing for vocations, and asking "the harvest master to send laborers into his harvest" (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2). On a personal level, anyone in the parish can reach out in affirmation and support for those who are or who could be considering a vocation of service to the Church. Prayers for families and especially for parents are also encouraged so that they too can respond with generosity in support of a family member who is seriously discerning his or her vocation. Uniting all of these initiatives can assist greatly in promoting a vocational understanding that fosters a strong future of new clergy, religious, and young men and women happily living out holy Catholic married life.

IX. A CHURCH THAT EMBRACES ALL RACES AND WELCOMES IMMIGRANTS

Research and experience have shown that the Catholic Church in the United States is one of the most culturally diverse institutions in our country. Even so, or maybe precisely because of this diversity, there was a recognition by many that in a number of ways we need to be more welcoming, allowing all the lay faithful to use their God-given gifts and talents to build the kingdom of God. We are called to a heightened awareness of our varied members and the need to incorporate and celebrate this diversity as we move to the future.

Authentic Catholic social teaching calls all people of faith to stand with and speak for those without a voice in society, for those who have no home to call their own. Our brothers and sisters

who have left their native countries and have settled among us deserve our attention and welcome, for they reveal to us the face of Christ in a particularly profound way (Matthew 25:35). These same parishioners can additionally be of great use and help to the community, offering insight and expertise. There is increased strength to be found in councils, committees, groups, and activities within the Church that are diverse in age, race, and life experience, as a variety of perspective and understanding can allow for more effective ideas and actions to arise.

As part of our own formation into missionary discipleship, we are called to accompany our immigrant brothers and sisters, standing with them especially in moments of hardship and suffering. Likewise, we are also called to learn from them about the richness of their devotional spirituality and Catholic faith heritage. In order to assure this type of action, a need is seen in raising awareness among our people of the depth and wealth of Catholic social teaching in this area. There is hope that in doing so, the dignity inherent in each person and the contributions of immigrants to our Church across generations will be more greatly recognized and valued.

Each local Church must remain informed on the cultural and language needs of its communities in order to properly serve the people of those communities. Doing so shows a level of care and respect to these brothers and sisters and allows them to experience the liturgical and pastoral aspects of our common faith in ways that will effectively connect with them. With this taking place, it is hoped that these families, parishes, and communities will continue to grow, providing a diverse array of Catholic life, devotion, and vocations for the future.

The sinfulness of racism fueled by events in our country in recent years must also remain an ever-present concern and be acknowledged by our Church. As we do so, we must continue to listen. Providing forums for conversations on race, immigration, and loving openness to others is critical in allowing individuals to be heard and understood. This can help more actively in promoting better cultural and racial understanding in churches, seminary formation, and religious education.

Along with educational programs providing information and training in regards to these issues, it was suggested that any segment of the population that does not think they are being viewed as an important part of the Universal Church or their local parish could be surveyed or even brought in for discussion on the matter, in the hopes of finding out the reasons why they feel excluded. Such direct outreach and resultant actions can provide for greater respect, improvement of relationships, and meaningful remedies that, when practiced and taught by the leadership, will hopefully be undertaken by parishioners and the broader community as well.

X. FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH COMMUNITY

In the spirit of the synodal theme of “journeying together,” a recurring area of concern among our region is that of outreach to the marginalized, with the general perception being that the Church excels in its outreach to the poor, homeless, and hungry, but that it cannot seem to find its footing with outreach to women, divorced and remarried persons, and the LGBTQ+ community.

It has been expressed by many throughout the region that the visibility of women in the Church is severely lacking. Many participants mentioned the lack of women in leadership and decision-making roles at the local, diocesan, and global Church. Some female participants expressed a sense of alienation by the Church, and the desire for the Church to tell them they are valued. While some participants vocalized support for the idea of female deacons or priests, this

notion continues to be a divisive one, with opinions sharply divided. A similar division exists regarding the notion of allowing priests to marry.

A clear area of shared concern is the Church's relationship with those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Participants in our region desire greater acceptance and welcome of those who identify as gay, lesbian, or otherwise, and a greater engagement of LGBTQ+ issues and concerns. Confusion about why the Church would not make these strides, especially in consideration of the culture of contemporary society, was not only perplexing but often very frustrating and hurtful for many. A middle school student from one diocese in our region commented, "The Holy Spirit invites us to take steps of acceptance with different cultures and communities, such as the LGBTQ community, people of color, immigrants . . . our actions should show kindness and respect to all."

The Church's treatment of those who are divorced or remarried remains a consistent topic of concern among our region. In addition, the exclusion from Communion of those who are remarried is frequently cited as being out of step with the Pope's own message on Communion being "not the reward of saints, but the bread of sinners." Many observed a general lack of welcome from the Church to those who are divorced. It was also expressed that the annulment process is esoteric and confusing, and that greater clarity and education on this process could prove vital in allowing the Church to not let slip away those who wish to participate in the Mass and Eucharist.

CONCLUSION

In Pope Francis' opening address of the youth synod of 2018, he said, "We recall that the purpose of the synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but 'to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.'" Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we, the people of Region I, hope that our findings will be the seeds to plant the dreams of which our Holy Father speaks. Across our region, thousands of people participated in the synod consultation process, and many were appreciative of the opportunity to participate. Being that the Church's willingness to listen to the people was frequently cited as an area of shared concern in our region, those who participated were delighted to offer their heartfelt and candid comments, as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Despite this delight, some participants and leaders alike expressed skepticism, confusion, or uncertainty at the synodal process. These feelings were partly due to a lack of effective communication, timing, or (in)action from past Church initiatives. Additionally, there were concerns that there would be attempts to make changes to Church teachings or go beyond the scope of what a Synod can do.

Despite these frustrations and apprehensions, it is abundantly clear that the people of God in New England who participated in our synod are on fire with the love of Christ, and eagerly welcome the opportunity to journey together with the many who have yet to embrace Christ, and move forward with our Church into Her next chapter. As one diocese in our region commented, "the synod delegates cannot emphasize enough how often people spoke with pride about being Catholic." With this "holy pride," the suggestions and findings contained within this report will enable future journeying as a Church, as a diocese, as parishes, and as disciples.

