



Synod  
2021  
2024

For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Joy-filled greetings in Our Lord Jesus Christ!

With a joyful heart, I write today to share how the Diocese of Green Bay has embraced the Synod on Synodality while benefiting greatly to the call for deep listening to the Holy Spirit and to others. As the diocese prepared for this synod, we realized the many ways we have been living synodality for the past several years in our work and ministries. We also discovered new ways to listen and discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we made our way on this journey.

Enclosed you will find our synthesis report detailing how the consultations took place, what was heard and how listening continues to be integrated heavily in all that we do to advance our two foremost diocesan goals. Our two primary objectives are to form 1,000 missionary disciples who, in turn, go out and disciple at least two others, and to increase our number of young men pursuing priestly studies to 30 seminarians by 2025.

We are grateful for "Evangelii Gaudium," "The Joy of the Gospel," which our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has gifted to us. In light of this holy document, and the upcoming synod, the Diocese of Green Bay has become more intentional in integrating gathering, prayer and listening into our everyday work and missionary discipleship formation. We have found the following statement to be particularly true, "Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others" ("Evangelii Gaudium," #46). Doing less, to listen and be more present allows for the flourishing of human relationships and deeper encounters with Christ, whether it be in communion with the Holy Eucharist or our brothers and sisters.

Through this synodal process, we have been blessed to hear from a diverse audience, and we have devoted a deeper sense of engagement to listening. This has allowed us to better understand others and to share the Gospel of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in a more effective and meaningful way so that others might come to experience the love and transformation that our Savior yearns to offer. It is our hope to live synodality as a way of life allowing the truth and beauty of the Gospel to permeate within our diocese and the world.

With hope-filled gratitude and blessings for this most important initiative, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend David L. Ricken, DD, JCL



## WHAT IS SYNODALITY?

Synodality is a style, a culture, a way of thinking and being, that reflects the truth that the Church is led by the Holy Spirit who enables everyone to offer their own contribution to the Church's life. This synod process seeks to "strengthen cooperation" in all areas of the Church's mission, to enhance communion, participation and mission.

Synodality is also reflected in a synodal style of governance, in which people participate in decision making, share responsibility for the Church's mission and cooperate and collaborate more in the day to day life of the Church. Some call this "co-responsibility."

Church is neither a monarchy nor a democracy. Pope Francis has made clear that the synod is not a parliament, or a convention, or an opinion survey. Although it has many elements familiar to political and similar processes – listening, speaking, taking votes – what differentiates a synod is that it is a spiritual process that takes place within the Church.

"The Synod is an ecclesial event and its protagonist is the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is not present, there will be no Synod" (Pope Francis, October 9, 2021).

## Overview

The Diocese of Green Bay, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and through the leadership of Bishop David Ricken, has embraced the Synod on Synodality and benefited greatly from its call for deep listening to the Holy Spirit and to others. As the diocese prepared for this synod, we realized the many ways we have been living synodality for the past several years in our work and ministry. We also discovered new ways to listen and discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

This synthesis report will cover how the consultations took place, what was heard and how listening continues to be integrated heavily in all that we do as a diocese to advance our two primary goals of forming 1,000 missionary disciples who disciple at least two others and increasing our number of young men in the seminary to 30 men by 2025.

## Diocesan-wide Broad Listening & Consultation

### “Parishes: Called to be Holy, Fully Engaged, and Fully Alive”

The diocese’s intentional listening processes began in 2011 when Bishop Ricken released the pastoral letter, “Parishes: Called to be Holy, Fully Engaged, and Fully Alive.” This pastoral letter involved listening to the Holy Spirit and others in its preparation and moved the Diocese of Green Bay toward living synodality more intentionally in her ministry. To prepare, there was a process of listening to different voices representing many facets of parish and diocesan life.

This beginning phase included “Four Voices”:

- **Thirty Focus Groups:** Catholics, representing six specific age groups offering input.
- **Parish Discovery and Dreaming Report:** Each parish solicited input from parishioners and parish leaders; some surveyed each member and others queried pastoral, finance and/or education councils.
- **Diocesan Leaders:** Twenty-one leadership groups ranged from priests, deacons, diocesan staff, lay ministers, educators, campus ministry leaders, health care leaders and other ministerial groups.
- **Wisdom Committee:** A group of theologians, pastors and parish directors studied the history and mission of the diocese and came up with a new vision for parish life based on the definition of parish found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

As a result of the listening sessions and discernment, the diocese narrowed what was heard into six key areas of urgency: 1. Evangelization; 2. Youth, Young Adults and Family; 3. Leadership; 4. Education; 5. The Eucharist; and 6. Dignity of Human Life.

### Disciples on the Way

In 2014, after further prayer and discernment of previous listening to the Holy Spirit and others, Bishop Ricken invited the diocese on a multi-year journey to re-energize our faith and revitalize our communities in “Disciples on the Way.”

This multi-stage path called for each parish and person to renew our relationship with Jesus through a process by which we are called to Discover, Follow, Worship and Share Jesus. This process began with an intensive and intentional focus on formation in prayer, our path to holiness. Formation in discipleship and formation in mission followed.

### New Vision and Mission for the Diocese of Green Bay

In 2016, through hours of prayer, listening and discernment, we recognized that the first step needed was to address the diocesan culture and work on deepening our relationship with Jesus and with one another.

A new Vision and Mission for the diocese was created, along with corresponding values to be lived:

- **Diocesan Vision:** We are missionary disciples striving to lead all people to the Kingdom of God.
- **Mission:** As friends and followers of Jesus, we are devoted to fostering households and communities of discipleship through the mission and ministry of the Catholic Church.
- **Values:** Explore Potential, Connect to Inspire, Embrace People’s Hearts, Empower to Act, and Nurture Abundant Life and Growth.

For the last several years, the entire diocesan staff has been driving culture formation (including inviting consultants outside the diocese to assist) to challenge ourselves to be missionary disciples and serve more deliberately and authentically Christ and one another.

“This pastoral letter is not intended to be a ‘how-to’ manual. Rather, I present it to the faithful of the Diocese of Green Bay as a starting point **for parishes to use in building on their own dreams for the future.**” — Bishop Ricken, “Parishes: Called to be Holy, Fully Engaged, and Fully Alive”



### Disciples on the Way:

Discover, Follow, Worship & Share Jesus with Others!



Friends & Followers  
of Jesus

### Regional Listening Sessions

From Sept. 19 to Oct. 4, 2018, Bishop Ricken held six listening sessions across the Diocese of Green Bay:

- St. Rose Parish, Clintonville
- St. Mary Parish, Appleton
- Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, De Pere
- St. Mary of the Lake Parish, Lakewood
- St. Francis and St. Mary Parish, Brussels
- St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Newton



**“By listening to one another’s experiences, we can come to understand and to empathize, which leads to those right relationships that unite us as brothers and sisters. This justice finds its source and strength in the love of Christ who laid down his life for his friends.”**

— USCCB, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism”

## Regional Listening Sessions

In 2018, Bishop Ricken completed widespread regional listening sessions throughout the diocese relating to the sexual abuse crisis in the church. All feedback and questions from the broad listening was then broadcast out to larger audiences via social media and The Compass, our diocesan newspaper. An outside consultant was hired to review all files and make recommendations, and a list of clergy with substantiated allegations of the sexual abuse of a minor was posted publicly.

Bishop Ricken communicated and has adhered to the Seven Action Steps to Accountability he promised to his people, including:

1. I will increase and improve our pastoral care, concern and efforts to accompany victims of sexual abuse in their journey toward healing.
2. I will provide as many ways as possible for those who have been victimized to come forward without fear to share their story of sexual abuse.
3. I will listen to your concerns and suggestions through listening sessions.
4. I will make priests files accessible for complete and independent review.
5. I will express my full support to USCCB in their efforts to establish a national lay independent review board.
6. The diocesan capital campaign was delayed to focus on listening.
7. I will continue the practice of turning over all substantiated allegations to civil authorities.

## Catholic Diocese of Green Bay Messaging Research

In 2018, the diocese also embarked on listening sessions through messaging research. The following audiences and markets were invited for participation by an outside agency: Diocesan Staff (38), Engaged Catholics (24), Connected Catholics (18), Disconnected Catholics (25), and non-Catholics who reside in the diocese (28). The focus groups intentionally were formed throughout the entire diocese to include those in our cities and our rural regions. The markets included: Green Bay Area (26 people), Fox Cities Area (27), Sturgeon Bay/Door County (21) and Marinette/Northern Area (21). The research included an additional Quantitative Values Study of 325 Catholic participants (72 Active, 73 Inactive), 41 Protestants, 48 Non-denominational Christians, 5 Religious non-Christians and 86 non-religious.

As a result of the listening sessions, the following themes emerged:

1. The topic of religion and spirituality remains very important to people.
2. There is a remarkable consistency across population segments in the Diocese of Green Bay.
3. There is common ground and sincere respect around the idea of the servant church (feed the hungry, comfort the sick, shelter the homeless, etc.).
4. Beliefs about heaven and salvation are a polarizing source of religious and spiritual conflict.
5. People in this diocese drift or disengage from the Catholic Church for three different reasons:
  - They felt judged by the church or often by the people in the church.
  - They have a values misalignment with the institutional church (i.e., inclusion vs. exclusion).
  - They were looking for something deeper and more meaningful.
6. There is a great and unsatisfied hunger for joy.
7. The diocese is largely viewed as the local arm of the institutional church. Nearly all participants (except for a subset of Engaged Catholics) struggle with the institutional church, which they view as self-serving, controlling, judgmental and lacking compassion.
8. People expect the church to anticipate and respond to their wants and needs.

## Parish Community – Broad Listening & Outreach

*From 2019 and through the pandemic, the diocese continued to listen to many voices through a variety of means. The diocese, through her parishes, schools, ministries and other organizations, has engaged in ongoing broad listening and outreach that continues today.*

## Open Wide Our Hearts Photo Exhibit

In November 2019, the Office of Living Justice launched the Open Wide Our Hearts photo exhibit. Inspired by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ 2018 pastoral letter, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love — A Pastoral Letter Against Racism,” the photo exhibit features photos of 13 Catholics from various racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds within the diocese alongside written narratives. While not representative of all people, their stories document and provide a glimpse of what life in the church has been like for them as a person of color.

Providing the opportunity to listen to their voices encourages all those who experience the exhibit to open their hearts to the unique perspective of the narrator’s experience (both positive and negative) of our parishes and schools. Furthermore, the exhibit is intended to facilitate conversations amongst Catholics about issues of race, diversity, discrimination and inclusion within our churches and schools.

Since its launch, the exhibit has traveled around the diocese to parishes, schools, ministries and community groups. In addition, an online version of the exhibit was launched.

The following captures some of the impact of the exhibit:

- 15 in-person exhibitions
- 1,000+ in-person attendees
- 500+ people who have participated in a discussion/presentation related to the exhibit
- 2,600+ unique visitors to the website who spend an average of nine minutes on the site.

Key themes from this exhibit continue on page 4A.

The following were some of the themes that emerged from the Open Wide Our Hearts photo exhibit narratives and listening:

- Challenges to integrate into the parish/school community; not fully accepted
- Pride in their culture and what it brings to the Catholic faith
- Discrimination, racism and prejudice experienced within and outside of the Catholic community
- Reluctance of people to reach out to someone they don't know or who looks different
- Optimism for things getting better
- Desire to be embraced within the church for who they are
- Beauty of diversity, especially within the church
- Importance of bridge-builders who reach out and help them feel welcome
- Importance of representation of many cultures within the church community (music, art, worship styles, etc.)

## Parish Life Line

The Parish Life Line, developed to accompany parish leaders online through the pandemic, was a virtual forum where connections were made and best practices shared. Leaders gathered virtually over 75 times with 23-200 participants at any given session, including diocesan and parish leaders throughout the diocese to pray together, listen, network, learn and share creative ideas. The main themes heard included the challenge of reengaging people, the need to outreach to young adult and Hispanic populations and to address burnout/exhaustion concerns within staff and the general population.

## Discipleship Support Sessions

Parish and diocesan staff, leaders and volunteers joined online monthly to pray, explore parish renewal and learn how to form missionary disciples. These were held virtually every month with 20-30 participants at each session.

## Diocesan Pastoral Council

In addition to the Presbyteral Council and the Regional Vicars, the Diocesan Pastoral Council is a consultative group of laity that gathers regularly to pray, listen and discern and to provide the bishop feedback in many areas of governance of the diocese. We are working toward a greater collaboration between these three groups and plan to have a greater impact and accountability by working via focused regions with a Regional Vicar assigned and accountable with a direct diocesan connection.

## Presbyteral Council

Through ongoing listening to clergy via the Presbyteral Council and other means, it was discovered that there is need for training in practical supervision and leadership to assist the clergy in working more effectively with parish staff and volunteers.

## one by One Campaign

Inspired by Bishop Ricken's call, the *one by One Campaign* is an opportunity for the diocese to strengthen our individual faith journey and, by doing so, transform our communities. It is a chance for each parish to discuss, listen to one another, reflect upon and address the needs of its members and community. This fundraising campaign offers the space for individuals and communities, through their parishes, to consider how they can meet the needs of those who wish to follow Jesus.

The *one by One Campaign* takes up this call and invites each of us to:

- Ensure a vibrant and sustainable future for our parishes
- Provide opportunities for growth in our Catholic schools and faith formation programs, including funding scholarships for thousands of families for years to come
- Respond in a stronger way to those who live on the margins, including expanding our social services outreach to even more people each year
- Secure the future for those considering a life of ordained service and for those clergy who have retired from active ministry
- Help families and individuals discover, follow, worship and share Jesus with all people
- Modernize communication strategies to share the Good News and help more people to discover, follow, worship and share Jesus

## Parish Webinars

Parish operations virtual training sessions were held and continue to be held in areas such as finance and accounting, human resources, communications and parish administration and parish reengagement. This assisted in expanding the reach throughout the diocese in offering listening and support for the actual needs of the communities.

## External Vicar Position

This position was created specifically to be a listening ear on behalf of the bishop by traveling to each parish in the diocese and listening to pastors and parish leadership. These reports are shared directly with Bishop Ricken.



## Parish Life Line

Julianne Stanz, director of discipleship and parish life for the Diocese of Green Bay, said the effort came after praying about how to "personally walk with people" during the pandemic. The goal was "to bring parishes together, to provide a life line for conversation and prayer as disciples and a place to listen to their needs."

## Feedback from the Field:

"Since the start of the pandemic, the diocese has been wonderful in its efforts to support parish staff. This connection makes us all stronger and more unified. Thank you for that."

"We just like getting together and seeing each other every week on Zoom. Especially hearing positive stories of parishes and groups doing cool, innovative things in these times."

"It has been so helpful/needed for myself during this time to know that others are experiencing the same feelings and difficulties as I am. It is great to know that you aren't going through this alone."

"Very timely support, prayer, encouragement and realistic help has come in many facets of parish life and within the ministry I coordinate."



## V Encuentro Participants Shared:

- “It’s hard, the life of an immigrant. We want our voices to be heard because there are so many barriers.”
- “Having been in Hispanic ministry in the diocese for a number of years, recognizing the people from the different parishes, I just see a real energy, a real spirit.”



**“A través de este V Encuentro, ustedes buscan crear una cultura del Encuentro, que suscite esperanza. Encontrase – diversas culturas, diversos modos de vivir, de pensar, de sentir – se encuentran y se camina en esperanza.”**

— Papa Francisco

## Young Adults Shared:

- “We’re not the ‘future’ of the church, we’re the ‘now’ of the church.”
- “There are often high expectations of young adults to get involved in a parish (tithe, serve, volunteer, etc.) before we feel like we’re even a part of the community.”
- “I feel like we have energy, ideas, and a spark of faith to bring to the table; I just hope that others will take these seriously, listen and help us act on them.”



## V Encuentro – Missionary Disciples: Witnesses of God’s Love

Completion of a full listening process across the Hispanic population resulted in a concern for these main areas:

1. Shortage of priests to serve the Hispanic population
2. Need for an increase in Masses in Spanish
3. Need for additional services for Hispanic parishioners (i.e., parish staff)
4. A need for faith formation programs
5. Immigration reform – DREAM Act – fear of deportation
6. Need to create a Hispanic vocations office

Priorities were then developed in the following key areas: Pastoral Services, Faith Formation, Ministry Formation; Education, Evangelization, Vocations; Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Divine Worship

## Diocesan Clergy Congress 2021

Bishop Ricken intentionally used the annual clergy congress gathering with all his clergy to discuss and listen to responses to the following synod questions:

1. What promotes in me and my parish(es) a life centered on Jesus in the Mass? Eucharistic Adoration, confession, hospitality, community respect, sacred silence, an understanding of each part of the Mass, preaching on the Real Presence, the need to acknowledge and be aware that the new generation may be different than us.
2. What things distract me/parish from a life centered on Jesus in the Mass? Isolation and individualization, understanding the “other,” those not like us in thought, lifestyle and culture. Administration, political division, upkeep of old buildings (maintenance versus mission).
3. How do you believe the current *one by One Campaign* can assist your parish(es)? Majority of the parishes desire to be able to maintain and update the aging buildings and liturgical space to make them welcoming and to gather for prayer/worship and ultimately to deepen discipleship.
4. How can synodality help our parishes and diocese? It can create a hospitable environment and strengthen the faithful in Catholic values and tradition, develop the art of listening, allow for listening to people who are marginalized and do not have a voice and are not at the parish. It can help us learn why people are disengaged, and then discover a path to deeper communion.

## Young Adult Listening Sessions

In 2021-2022, young adult listening sessions were held in stages:

1. One-on-one sessions with key young adult leaders (25 diverse participants)
2. Group listening sessions (35 diverse participants)
3. Students on college campuses (4 students at St. Norbert College, 29 Students at UW-Oshkosh)

Themes that emerged:

- Authenticity — *How can we create communities and experiences in the church that feel authentic to young adults?* The young adults we spoke to all shared that authenticity is one of the things they value most from the church and others in their life. They want relationships and experiences that feel real and genuine.
- Leadership Support — *How are we supporting young adult leaders and assisting them to thrive?* Young adults feel a lack of support financially and from their pastoral leadership in their parish communities. There is a feeling that the church is operating out of a “we’ve always done it this way” mindset and they don’t have the freedom to try new ideas. They want to be a part of parish life and build community but feel they are not given the resources to do this.
- Communication — *Do our current methods of communication work for reaching young adults?* The young adults we spoke to feel frustrated at the lack of cohesive communication across the diocese, both at the diocesan level and in parishes, about ways to get involved and upcoming events. They expressed that while social media is fine, it alone does not solve this problem. Personal invitation is key.
- Discernment — *What opportunities exist to assist young adults in discerning how God is calling them to live a holy life?* Young adulthood is a time marked by change and uncertainty in basically every aspect of life. Young adults need help navigating this time of life from trusted spiritual leaders who show them how to hear the voice of God and follow his call.

## Additional Responses

In 2021, within a diocesan Marriage Tribunal training session of 17 advocates, a synodal question was asked: *What persons or groups are left on the margins, expressly or in fact?* Responses: 1. Young adults; 2. Young married/single; 3. Married; 4. Catholics who are not at Mass or engaged with the faith at all.

## Gather In Joy October 21, 2021

Parishes, schools and diocesan staff joined together with over 900 in attendance (in-person and virtual) to share responses on synod questions. Discussion included:

- Making personal phone calls to parishioners to develop a relationship and spend time listening to them as it pertains to returning/not returning to Mass after the pandemic. A personal invitation is what many felt is bringing individuals back to Mass.
- Parishes vary in what they are doing to “journey together.” Responses ranged from one-on-one mentoring, virtual sessions and town halls to offering a variety of ways of communicating outward such as livestreams, bulletin blasts and small groups/Bible study.
- Listening to what the Holy Spirit is asking includes themes like taking time to really listen and being sensitive to the other, less judgmental, focus on people over programs.

## Crisis & Community Response Team

Listening to members of our many rural communities, the following needs were identified:

- Mental health crisis
- They're private and independent, may not ask for assistance when needed
- Economic struggles (loss of family farms, etc.)
- For those who attend church, there is a strong familial and cultural identity with their parish
- Alcoholism and drug abuse present challenges
- Despite their issues and struggles, people are usually very happy with their community and are proud of their hometowns

## Mental Health Awareness Training

After numerous listening sessions in our rural communities, we identified the need for mental health first aid training for adults. As a result, and to reach more people in need, several individuals completed the Adult Mental Health First Aid trainer certification. The certification allowed them to bring a one-day workshop to faith leaders and community members in 2021, training 46 others in mental health first aid. The course focused on common signs and symptoms of mental illness and substance use, as well as how to interact with a person in crisis and how to connect people with help. As we hold more workshops each year, the number of people trained in our parishes, schools, and ministries continues to grow.

## Cultural Diversity & Human Dignity Diocesan Training

This training was developed by the Diocese of Green Bay to help our diocesan and parish employees understand their responsibilities with respect to fair employment through the lens of our faith, as well as the principles of Theology of the Body and Catholic Social Teaching. This was developed in response to the times when our ministries have fallen short in giving people of all cultural backgrounds the respect they deserve. As we listened to the experiences of people of color in our diocese, we recognized that if we are going to live up to our diocesan mission — *missionary disciples striving to lead all people to the Kingdom of God* — we must acknowledge the diversity of people within our diocese and examine how we can minister to all people in culturally responsive ways. This is what our faith calls us to do (especially viewed through the lens of the Theology of the Body), and this training lays the foundation for us to grow in our ability to effectively serve all people.

## Parish Mission Planning

Parish Mission Planning (PMP) is designed to align and mobilize parishes and schools to mission and community outreach by establishing three to five goals in the areas of evangelization and discipleship, collaborative leadership and community impact. PMP, by its nature, begins with a small but diverse group of parishioners and seeks to expand through communications, listening/connections and personal invitations to the parish community to become a part of the missionary nature of the church.

PMP begins with the pastor selecting a broad and diverse spectrum of parishioners representing staff, parish councils, trustees, families (emphasis on parents), young adults, multicultural and the disengaged. Steps are then taken to analyze parish and community demographics, economics and social/cultural values to discern human and spiritual needs. Prayer and discussion guide the planning team towards goals and projects designed to connect, invite, welcome and engage parishioners with intentionality to their mission field (community in which they live).

Common areas of needs and focus in most PMP goals include hospitality and welcome, young adult engagement and empowerment, parent and family needs. An overall theme with parishes/parishioners is the desire to be heard, inspired and connected. In the past two and a half years, over 1,300 people across 130 parishes have been involved with PMP. Most know it is important to "evangelize" and to be "disciples" but there is hesitancy on, how do "I" do this?

## Office of Child & Youth Formation

In early 2021, the office reached over 60 parishes via one hour, virtual sessions with their staff that included prayer, checking in, asking "What's exciting/energizing you about your ministry these days?", and how the office could work to better serve the parish. These sessions offered support through the pandemic and built relationships through the lens and in the context of each local community.

## The Family Ministry Project

In spring of 2021, the Office of Marriage, Family Life & Pro-Life focused on speaking directly with families and parish leaders to actively listen about their experiences of parish life and other input. Questions included:

- How would you describe family ministry?
- Who serves families in the parish or does outreach to families in the parish?
- How can we support you in reaching out to families?
- Please describe your thoughts and experiences on how things went with your family during the pandemic.
- Please describe your thoughts and ideas on passing the faith onto your children
- What would you like to see in the parish or diocese to better support families?

The outcome was plentiful including main areas: have diocesan offices/teams identify families as a target audience; relieve pressure on religious education and parish staff; create Family Outreach Teams; and build disciples and foster vocations.



## Parish Mission Planning

"A distinguishing factor with PMP, different from more traditional planning, is that it **invites parishioners from different experiences** and perceptions, allowing them to pray, **discuss and discern** together with their pastor/parish leader," shared Barry Metzentine, parish operations and mission planning director for the Diocese of Green Bay

### PMP Participants Have Shared:

"We need to continue to engage people and try to reach them in their own lives, rather than wait for them to come to us."

"We'll continue to listen to parishioners' needs. It's not just the time they spend at the church building that's important, but to support them in their lives, call them back more and more to the Mass and realize how important the church community is to all of us as Christians."

"We hope our parishes become parishes of community and welcoming for people."



## Diocesan Outreach for Broad Listening

*As part of the synodal process, the Diocese of Green Bay created and/or made more widely known, means of communication (letters, diocesan website survey, etc.) from all aspects of the field, from both Catholics and non-Catholics, those close to the Church and those distant.*

The feedback included a wide range of perspectives depending on where the person stood in relation to the church. Some noted that they are deeply drawn to the traditional Mass and would like to see more opportunities for worship in this way. Others noted a desire for more education on chastity, the sacrament of marriage and abortion, as well as the seriousness and repercussion of mortal sins.

One letter received, that was signed by 15 individuals of the diocese, shared that they believe the institutional church and its leaders/clergy have lost credibility and relevance within society and fail to address the basic needs of its members. They noted as examples: the handling of pedophilia, ignorance of Vatican II and unconscious clericalism. These signers noted they would like to hear more from the church in these areas: teaching on "Laudato Si"; social and economic needs of society; Jesus' physical, mental and spiritual healing; how to engage youth; a broad pro-life message; more involvement for women in the church; a need to hear divorced Catholic's voices; women's ordination; ordination of qualified men; additional training in theology and scripture for deacons and priests to better proclaim the Gospel; embracing the finger of God working in the "secular"; and to listen more broadly and regularly to the baptized.

The diocesan website provided a wonderful means to listen to a wide variety of topics that were shared. Feedback included a desire for a more spirit-focused church versus a business-focused (financial, corporate) church. It was noted that a large percentage of devout Catholics feel left out without a voice in the church. They yearn for a shepherd to provide and guide them to become saints. They heard from broken people who long and desire to experience the beauty of our faith and church yet do not see or experience it.

Other online feedback shared that people are turned off by the church and feel that change is necessary. They feel additional listening is needed to understand those who experience same-sex attraction and those who struggle with their sexual identity. An effort to really listen to people and hear their story, meet them where they are and take the necessary time to journey with them with the utmost humility.

Many parishes integrated synodality into their regular activities or created gatherings specifically for this purpose.

## Looking to the Future

### Worship Jesus Years (2022-2025)

As noted earlier, the Diocese of Green Bay has a discipleship pathway that includes: Discover, Follow, Worship and Share Jesus. Worship Jesus is the next three-year phase. In the spirit of synodality, the Office of Divine Worship has created a cross-functional team composed of Curia members and those in parish ministry to strategize and execute events and formation opportunities during these three years.

The efforts and implementation strategies of the cross-functional team have been presented and feedback has been collected at the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Diocesan Presbyteral Council, at the diocesan Executive Leadership Team meetings and in focus groups specifically targeting ministry areas to be affected.

## Conclusion - Synodality Lived

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, gave us the gift of "Evangelii Gaudium" ("The Joy of the Gospel"). In light of this document and the synod, the Diocese of Green Bay has more intentionally integrated gathering, prayer and listening in our everyday work and missionary discipleship formation. We have found this statement particularly true: "Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others" ("Evangelii Gaudium," #46). Doing less in order to listen and be present more, allows for the flourishing of human relationships and deeper encounters with Christ whether in the Eucharist or in our brothers and sisters.

Through this synodal process, we have been blessed to hear from a diverse set of people. We have engaged and continue to engage in deep listening. This listening has allowed us to better understand others and to share the Gospel of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in a more effective and meaningful way so that others might come to experience the love and transformation that the Lord has to offer.

It is our hope to live synodality as a way of life that allows the truth and beauty of the Gospel to permeate our diocese and the world.

*"The message of our synodal way is simple: we are learning to walk together, and sit together to break the one bread, in such a way that each is able to find their place. Everyone is called to take part in this journey, no one is excluded. To this we feel called so that we can credibly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to all people." — Synod, Working Document for the Continental Stage*





**“A special word of gratitude  
... to all of you who  
participated. Your wisdom  
is deeply appreciated.”**  
— Bishop David L. Ricken

## Closing Mass for the Local Synod Process

Nov. 27, 2022, at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral, Green Bay

In 2021, under the direction of Pope Francis, the Diocese of Green Bay, together with all the dioceses throughout the world, began a journey to a synodal church.

Throughout our process here, we listened and learned how we as a church can grow and journey together. We dreamed about the church we are called to be and becoming better witnesses to the Gospel. And we listened to one another, in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit. ... Although today at this Mass I close the process, the journey will continue. While the local synod process concludes, the continental synod process continues with a few local representatives across multiple areas.

The insights garnered through the synod process will assist us as we continue our diocesan journey of discipleship as Disciples on the Way, to discover, follow, worship and witness in sharing the goodness of Jesus and to grow more deeply in love with him as he gives our lives meaning and hope.

— Bishop David L. Ricken

## Additional Resources

**Diocesan Website Landing Page:** [www.gbdioc.org/synod](http://www.gbdioc.org/synod)

To access materials and resources related to the synod process in the Diocese of Green Bay, please visit [www.gbdioc.org/synod](http://www.gbdioc.org/synod). You'll find:

- Bishop Ricken's homily to open the Synod on Synodality (Oct. 17, 2021)
- "Synod in Action" articles that were published in The Compass
- Synod theme areas and questions
- Additional information about the worldwide synod

Also available on [www.gbdioc.org/synod](http://www.gbdioc.org/synod) are links to the following resources from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

- **Creating a Culture of Encounter through One-to-Ones** | As members of the body of Christ, we are each created in the image of and loved by God. We are called to form relationships with one another, and we are called to "create a culture of encounter." How can we "encounter" one another? One tool that is used by many faith communities and community groups is the one-to-one relational meeting.
- **Questions to Facilitate Encounter** | This activity is to help members of a faith community to "encounter" one another and get to know other members of the family of the body of Christ. The questions in the activity are geared towards "going deeper" and will be most useful at a planning day, retreat or other event where time is not an issue. For shorter events not as conducive to community building, a single question could be used for discussion.
- **We Are Salt & Light** | Includes resources intended as a catalyst for both the New Evangelization and the continuing development of vibrant communities living the Gospel. Communities that strive to be salt and light share God's love with others, as we encounter Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit's transforming presence. Inspired by the Trinity's dynamic of community, we Pray Together, Reach Out Together, Learn Together and Act Together.
- **Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish** | This statement offers a basic resource for pastors, parish leaders and all Catholics seeking to strengthen the social ministry of their local community. The bishops' reflection represents neither major new teaching nor a new national program. Rather, it brings together the principles of our social teaching and local pastoral experience in a framework for vibrant Catholic communities.
- **Following Pope Francis: Dialogue in "Fratelli Tutti"** | This resource explores the themes and ideas in "Fratelli Tutti" to recognize that the ability to dialogue across perspectives is essential in order that social love can inspire "new ways of approaching the problems of today's world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations and legal systems from within" ("Fratelli Tutti," #183).
- **Loving Our Neighbor Through Dialogue** | This resource can be used by parishes and dioceses to reflect and engage in authentic dialogue with their family, neighbors and friends.

**“During the opening of the synodal assembly, I used three key words: participation, communion and mission. These arise from a humble heart: without humility there can be neither participation, nor communion, nor mission. ... Three ways to make the path of humility a concrete path to follow in practice.”**  
— Pope Francis

The **communion** we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. Together, we are inspired by listening to the word of God, through the living Tradition of the church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* ("sense of the faith") that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God's call for his people.

**Participation** is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit in baptism. In a synodal church, the whole community is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will.

Our **mission** is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This synodal process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical and existential peripheries of our world.