



**Our Holy Father Pope Francis wants to hear from all the  
People of God.**

**That means you!**

# THE PARISH OF ST CATHERINE OF SIENA AND ST AGNES

## Summary of Synod Responses

July 29, 2022

We began this effort with discussions with our Pastor, Fr. Bill Platt, where he laid out his vision for conducting the process of listening to a diverse selection of parishioners, from those who are very active in our parish life to people who attend Mass mostly on major church holidays. In addition to providing multiple opportunities for attending small listening sessions it was agreed that we would put attention-drawing cards in the pews for the Christmas and Easter Masses, hoping to catch our least active parishioners and guests. The question on the cover of the flyer was **“What would you like to tell Pope Francis?”** This was followed by an announcement from the pulpit and an opportunity to mail, email, or drop off responses.

Additionally, listening sessions were set up for small groups to respond to the following questions:

- What would you like to tell Pope Francis?
- What keeps you here in the church?
- What are the challenges that you see in the institutional Church?

There were five major themes running throughout the responses that we received: **The role of women in the Church, the clergy, the culture, the importance of acceptance, and the wish of the parishioners to thank Pope Francis for the opportunity to speak out.**

**The role of women in the Church** and how they are treated was the topic of most concern to those who responded. It was recognized by both women and men that women have been marginalized by the Church and by the Church hierarchy. They are of equal intellect and faith to men and should have the opportunities to become mentors, deacons, and priests. The Church lacks authenticity because it has only a male voice.

The Church risks disappearing unless it recognizes the equality of women. We say that Jesus treats everyone equally – /clearly the Church does not. Past bishops of our diocese ignored women’s needs; no heed was taken by the Church hierarchy. There is a strong belief among respondents that the Church must welcome women into the Sacrament of Holy Orders. There is absolutely no reason to keep women from this important ministry. According to one respondent, *“I feel that I have to defend remaining in the Church when I am with people of other faiths.”*

According to many parishioners, **we are doing our priests a great disservice by not allowing them to marry.** They are missing out on the female perspective, and this translates into less effective counseling of both women and men.

**We are doing our seminarians a great disservice by not broadening their education and by not allowing women to teach in the seminary.** The education that they are receiving is narrow and is becoming less relevant in today's world. The current climate of inclusion needs to be embraced and the emphasis on teaching dogma reduced.

Regarding the clergy and the formation of seminarians, there exists a notion of the clergy being married to the institutional vision of the Church. They don't see the laity as part of the same community because they are "*stuck in clericalism.*"

**There has been a regression to a pre-Vatican II mindset** where women are not allowed to participate in many important rituals of Church life. Younger priests are not as intelligent or competent as those of former generations. Rather than emphasizing the rules and protocols of how we approach the altar and tabernacle, or who can be on the altar, we must open our hearts and welcome one another into the loving arms of Christ. Many clergy, those in the institutional Church, believe that Vatican II went too far, and that it is disrespectful of the Holy Spirit. In that vein, many respondents voiced a concern that the bishops will not be forthright with the Holy Father about the concerns of the people in the pews, even though they have been assured that the Holy Spirit is guiding this Synod.

**The culture of the Church should reflect the diversity of people who belong to it** while remaining relevant in today's society. Having the Church at the center of our lives should foster inclusiveness and a sense of community in the spirit of Christ's teachings. We need to be more welcoming and to encourage more participation by everyone. We must make every effort to include the marginalized rather than turning our backs on them.

At St. Catherine of Siena and St. Agnes there is a strong feeling among parishioners of being blessed with preaching, liturgy, and community. The life and teachings of Jesus are proclaimed most vividly here. It is a time to be present for God, hearing the Scripture and homily, and then being charged to go out with the same message to spread the Gospel. As one parishioner said, "*St. Catherine's is as open as Christ is.*"

Respondents spoke about the **need to use Scripture to address today's issues**. Racism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, and the climate crisis are all universally important. There is a need to tie the solutions to these issues to Scripture as well as to Catholic social justice teaching.

**There should be an air of transparency and a willingness to own up to our mistakes** from the Vatican down to the local church. The use of threats and dire consequences is counterproductive and drives people away from the Catholic Church into other houses of worship. We should promote the good works that the Church has done and make every effort to learn about other religions and how they do things. Why not share our resources, both spiritual and practical?

**Many people feel that while Jesus accepted all people, the Church does not.** We are not exhibiting the unconditional love that Jesus has for all humanity. We need to build a bridge for those in the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized people. The Church must also stop

teaching that homosexuality is unnatural, and therefore a sin. It must lead the way and the world in correcting this terrible belief.

**People appreciated the opportunity to voice their opinions. Many were surprised that they could speak freely without repercussions.** The Holy Father was thanked for his humanity, his attention to inclusiveness, his focus on children and youth, for his outreach to the poor and marginalized, and for inclusiveness of women among his advisors. People understand that he is pastoral and inclusive, and express tremendous gratitude. They worry about the institutional opposition to his efforts, and they worry about his health. He is greatly loved in our parish.

As one parishioner said, **“The best thing that he has said as Pope is ‘Who am I to judge?’”**

Respectfully,

Betsy Parker and Rhonda Morley  
Synod Delegates

## **Appendix**

Below are questions from the flyer and responses, as well as the number of respondents.

The main portion of the above text concerns responses to the question “*What would you like to tell Pope Francis?*” The numbers in parentheses below are the number of responses received for that topic.

**Responses not covered above because they were not one of the five major concerns are more fully covered below.**

**Women (49)**

**Clergy (39)**

**Thank you to the Pope (37)**

**Culture of the Church (33)**

**Acceptance (28)**

**Mass (17):**

- The sacramental system, particularly the Eucharist, is a significant issue that was frequently raised. “It sets us apart from other religions.” The Eucharist was sorely missed during the pandemic.
- People want to be able to understand the Mass. The language used should be easily understood by the laity with the homily relevant to today’s world, while still relating to Jesus’ experiences.
- Let women preach, and share the pulpit with other denominations.
- Keep the Masses simple but spiritually fulfilling.
- Don’t weaponize the Eucharist.

**From children (12)**

The children’s comments showed a concern for the poor, a sense of need for themselves, and a lack of understanding for the procedure of the Mass.

**Marriage (11)**

- Several respondents wanted the Church to allow same sex marriages and perform them inside churches. These respondents also wanted couples who have had children prior to marriage be allowed to be married in churches.
- There was a desire to accept divorced persons and to ease the onerous process required to obtain an annulment.

**Focus on children and youth (8)**

Focus on youth and find a way to attract young adults. We could target them in our outreach programs.

**Peace (6)**

Please pray for peace in the Holy Land, and be involved in world affairs, but lead gently.

**Birth Control (5)**

The Church should not penalize Catholics for using contraception and should provide more clarity on the subject.

**Religious Education (3)**

Religious education has fallen short of its intentions – it does not come close to the teachings in Catholic schools. *“Why have so many parochial schools been closed?”*

**Confession (3)**

A request to relax the Sacrament of Penance. There was a concern that there are too many mortal sins, and that too many people have left the Church because of it.

**The Environment (2)**

A request to keep defending our planet – how can we care for the Earth?

**The role of men in the Church (2)**

The dominance of male interpretation has not allowed the Church to flourish.

**Catholic Charities (2)**

Two diametrically opposed comments, one of which asked that the Church work with Catholic Charities to bring refugees from Afghanistan into the US, and the other exhibiting an erroneous belief opposing the bussing of “illegal immigrants” around the country.

**Responses to the question “What keeps you here in the Church?”****The liturgy (30)**

- People mentioned the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, and the liturgy as a place of tranquility, hope and love to be able to “chat with Jesus.”
- The music, the beauty of the holiday rituals (especially the Triduum), and the preaching and learning about the life and teaching of Jesus were also mentioned.

**Community (20)**

- Respondents mentioned the hospitality, the sense of healing, and the opportunities in our parish community. *“I was raised in the Church, and I have a sense of community and belonging. It is as open as Christ is.”*

**Scripture (10)**

“It is where I find Jesus.”

**Responses to the question “What are the challenges that you see in the institutional Church?”****Clergy (18)**

## **Culture (11)**

### **Acceptance of all (5)**

- Among the concerns voiced by respondents was that the Catholic Church is becoming a wall between the people and God, where it should be a bridge.
- Also, respondents said the Church needs to practice inclusiveness and allow divorced people to receive Communion.

### **Religious Education (3)**

Three concerns were mentioned:

- We are unfamiliar with the Bible.
- There is no focus on the Bible in faith formation.
- There is no continuing faith formation for adults.

### **Marriage (1)**

The one response asked the origins of the rules for marriage and divorce.