

I WAIT FOR THE LORD;
WHO BENDS DOWN TO ME AND HEARS MY CRY.

PSALM 40:2



SYNOD ON SYNODALITY: DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS

 Diocese of San Bernardino

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus
We stand before You

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;

Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.

Amen.

DIocese OF SAN BERNARDINO



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 2022

My dear sisters and brothers,

Peace and wellbeing to you.

As the first phase of the Synod on Synodality draws to a close, I want to thank all of you who participated in listening sessions in our Diocese. Our hearts are touched and changed by listening to each other's experiences of joy and sorrow and our dreams for the Catholic Church.

This document is the echo of your voice, the voice of the People of God in this diocese. It expresses a genuine desire for both a personal and universal communion and full participation in the mission of the Church.

It also reveals your wounds and struggles which calls us to foster a permanent attitude of synodality in our families, parishes, and diocese; a way of life that encourages authentic listening from every believer to the Word of God; a Christian response that demands we journey together and leave no one behind, regardless of our differences; and a praxis of discernment that seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit and calls for a participative, inclusive, and co-responsible Church.

I am deeply committed to synodality, confident that it is the Holy Spirit who guides us to live according to the Gospel! I pray, as Pope Francis invites us in *"The Joy of the Gospel"*, that this synthesis inspires a missionary impulse in us capable of transforming all that we do so that our work, our time, schedules, language, and structures can be transformed for the evangelization of our Diocese.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Alberto Rojas
Bishop of the Diocese of San Bernardino

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS WITH REFLECTION AND DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS	3
Introduction	3
Discernment of the Collected Contributions	5
The Centrality of the Eucharist	5
Pillar 1: Synodal Community	6
Pillar 2: Back-to-Basics	7
Pillar 3: Rules and Policies	8
Holistic Formation	9
Christ-Like Exercise of Authority	10
Combating a Culture of Fear	11
Going deeper in our Communal Discernment	12
Journeying in Synodality	12
Diagram of the Diocesan Synthesis	14
Blessing	15



***"The synod is a process of
spiritual discernment, of ecclesial
discernment, that unfolds in
adoration, in prayer and in
dialogue with the Word of God."***

Pope Francis,
"Homily from Opening of the Synodal Path,"
October 10, 2021

Diocesan Synthesis

Introduction

The Diocese of San Bernardino officially began the local phase of the Synod on Synodality with an Opening Mass on October 17, 2021. Prior to that, diocesan directors had gathered to reflect and share on the official Synod documents: the Preparatory Document and the *Vademecum*. From this group of directors, a small core team was formed to reflect on the documents and discern the best way for the Diocese to embrace the synodal process, as well as to help resource pastors and ministry leaders as they entered the synodal process in their communities. In addition, a diocesan committee was appointed to be responsible for consulting underrepresented and marginalized groups.

Throughout the fall, the diocesan core team worked to develop resources such as a Facilitator Guide and video training modules that individual facilitators could use to guide their synodal consultations. The core team also began to learn about and practice communal discernment. In November, the diocesan core team held Synod Orientation sessions on Zoom. In January, the same core team hosted online training sessions. In February and March, the Diocese held the annual Combined Vicariate Meetings. Sr. Nathalie Becquart, X.M.C.J., and Bishop Alberto Rojas gave the keynote addresses. The remainder of the meetings modeled synodal listening sessions with clergy, lay leaders, and young adults.

Synodal consultations began in earnest in the spring. These consultations took many different forms. Some parishes used surveys and open-invitation meetings to conduct broad parish-based listening sessions. Many parish-based and diocesan ministries teams conducted listening sessions both with their ministers and those served by the ministry. In addition, there were specific consultations for priests, deacons, seminarians, religious, pastoral councils, young adults, families of those with special needs, the incarcerated, the LGBTQ+ community, diocesan employees, and other groups. Hundreds of people opted to complete individual questionnaires available online. Thousands of reports and syntheses were submitted both electronically and physically. In addition, another diocesan team distilled and reported the relevant echoes from the *V Encuentro* process and the recent *Raíces y Alas* conference.



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Many who conducted listening sessions described being transformed by the process of listening to others' stories and hearing about their faith journey. Those who shared their stories, especially those who participated in small group sessions, stated that they felt listened to by the Church for the first time. As a result of these positive pastoral outcomes, the Diocese of San Bernardino is committed to continuing the process of synodal engagement in the years to come and allowing it to shape our structures and practices - our way of being Church.



Discernment of the Collected Contributions

In June 2022, the discernment team gathered daily for two weeks to prayerfully re-read all submitted materials, listening attentively to the voice of the Spirit. During the second week, Bishop Alberto Rojas joined the group and entered into the discernment process. The results of that communal discernment are described below.

The Centrality of the Eucharist

The most surprising and distinctive realization is that, despite the widely reported findings of the Pew Research Center surveys, the People of God in the Diocese of San Bernardino retain a profound love and desire for the Eucharist. One participant reflected on the centrality of the Sacrament, noting, “God has always been reaching out through” the Eucharist. For many others, the Eucharist is the “line in the sand.” It is the defining characteristic of what it means to be Catholic and what they cannot or will not live without. This same love and desire is also found in the hunger for the Sacraments and the ache for the Eucharist expressed by those who feel they cannot partake because they are divorced, not married in the Church, or have same-sex partners. Nonetheless, there is resounding joy and gratitude for the gift of faith and profound love for the Church among the People of God.

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BECAUSE the primacy of the Eucharist echoes across so many diverse groups, it emerges as the central organizing reality through which all other common trends are related and understood. These common trends can be organized around three pillars: a desire for a Synodal Community, a desire to get “Back-to-Basics,” and a desire for just and prudent Rules and Policies within the Church.



Pillar 1: Synodal Community

Like society at large, the Church struggles with internal tensions and divisions. The unity of the People of God is threatened by the conflict between keeping Church teachings and welcoming all to full participation, especially those who are not married in the Church, divorced, or members of the LGBTQ+ community. Other divisions exist between those who identify as liberal and those who identify as conservative, between those who long for change and those who cling to tradition, between those who love the Latin Mass and those who embrace other spiritualities, and between and even within ministries and ethnic communities. These divisions sadden people in our Church.

Despite these tensions and divisions, many who participated in the synodal process have a strong sense of belonging to a faith community. Most identify their family as the primary faith community, through which they remain connected to the People of God, even when they feel abandoned by their parish or Church. Some extend this sense of faith community to friends and small ministry groups. The defining characteristic of these various faith communities is the sense of personal support and accompaniment found within them. There is a strong desire for community, connectedness, and a sense of belonging, over and above doctrine and program content. Another expression heard in a listening session stated, “[People] succeed more when they are in a group but fail alone.”

Interestingly, both participants and facilitators of synodal listening sessions note the many good fruits born from the synodal process. Those who shared their stories report that they finally feel someone has listened to them. Both those who shared and those who listened say they now understand that, even though we share the same faith, our individual journeys and experiences can be very different. Hearing what others value as important to their faith touches and enlarges the hearts of those who listen. The synodal process thus suggests a way forward in which we learn to hold and live within the tensions manifesting in the Church, rather than trying to resolve them. In doing so, we build a synodal community.

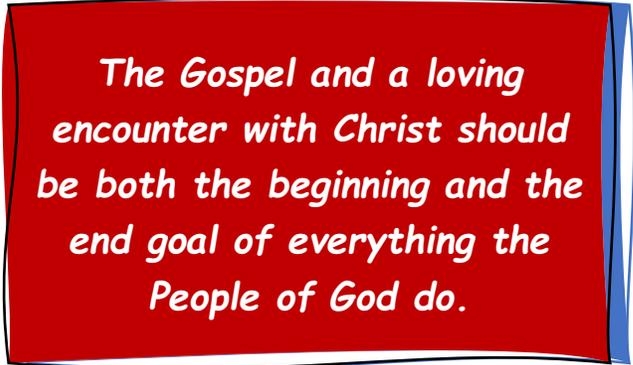
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Pillar 2: Back-to-Basics

The People of God, both within and at the peripheries of the Church, voice a deep longing to get “back-to-basics.” These basics include the common practices of civility, such as having a welcoming attitude, learning and addressing people by their name, and inviting individuals personally, rather than through pulpit announcements, to join events and ministries. In another sense, the basics include sacramental celebrations and especially Eucharistic celebrations that are done well and beautifully, giving homilies that are well-prepared, teaching people how to pray, and generally practicing what we preach.

Youth and young adults especially raise the concern that the presentation of the faith at all levels has become too complex and technical, and occasionally even too divisive. They desire to promote and practice Gospel values in all areas of life and to prioritize a loving encounter with Christ and each other before all else. Their desire to return to the rudiments of the faith echoes an insight from Pope Francis’ recent book, *Let Us Dream*, in which he suggests that a crisis is almost always a result of a self-forgetting and the way forward comes through recalling our roots.

The call to get “back-to-basics” is not framed in terms of a desire for a new program or campaign. Rather, it suggests an approach that should characterize everything the Church does. In other words, the Gospel and a loving encounter with Christ should be both the beginning and the end goal of everything the People of God do. If these are given their rightful priority, other basic pastoral and spiritual practices will naturally follow.



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Pillar 3: Rules and Policies

The People of God express concern about the proliferation and blanket application of rules and policies within the Church. The clergy and lay leaders often perceive rules and policies written by the diocesan leadership as being both disconnected from the parish reality and an impediment to meeting the pastoral needs of the community. The laity, and especially the younger generations, view some of the rules, laws, and policies of the Church as an obstacle to full participation in the life of the community and the sacraments. Common impediments include the requirements and processes to be granted annulments, rules relating to Godparents and Confirmation sponsors, and burdensome sacramental preparation programs and fees.

There is an implied concern that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to applying rules and policies not only restricts freedom but also belies a mistrust of the good intentions and motives of the People of God. At times, it may even deny the *principle of the primacy of conscience*. At the level of parish leadership, the “one-size-fits-all” approach may fail to honor the *principle of subsidiarity* and to allow decisions to be made by those who know the local reality and needs best.

The development, interpretation, and implementation of rules and policies should always be done in light of the two most important commandments, namely, to love God and love one another.

The concern about how rules and policies are applied suggests that, at a practical level, they may be understood as an end unto themselves, rather than as a means to promote the flourishing of the community and a loving encounter with Christ. The development, interpretation, and implementation of rules and policies should always be done in light of the two most important commandments, namely, to love God and love one another. Their role, therefore, is to organize and unite the community in concrete ways that foster and realize the mission of Christ.

IN ADDITION to the three pillars described above, new hopes, aspirations, and dreams emerged that are best understood within the dynamic relationship of the individual pillars to each other and to the Eucharist. These have been organized into three general areas of priority that may guide our path forward towards a Synodal Church: Holistic Formation, a Christ-Like Exercise of Authority, and Combating a Culture of Fear. Each is described below.

Holistic Formation

The People of God desire ongoing holistic formation and accompaniment that is rooted in an encounter with Christ and serves to build the community and strengthen the sense of belonging. Many are asking for Bible study groups and resources by which they can come to better

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understand the person of Jesus and the Gospel's message of divine love and salvation. Others emphasize the need for formation with respect to practical Christian living that caters to every stage of life and vocation.

This desire for holistic formation is expressed strongly by younger generations who perceive a disconnect between the content of their sacramental preparation programs and the realities they face in their lives. This disconnect also emerges in reflections on the family as the primary faith community. It was a surprise to hear that youth leave the Church not because they disagree with doctrine, but because Christian virtues are not practiced within the home. Youth from families who model the virtues reported being less likely to leave

the Church than those who come from families that do not.

The People of God share a clear expectation that this kind of holistic formation should come primarily through *homilies* that connect Scripture to life experiences. Many express the need for more opportunities for evangelization within the parish community by offering more retreats, opportunities for prayer, adoration, and reflection, as well as extending invitations to explore the different spiritualities of the Catholic tradition. It is implied that these opportunities should take



priority over education and formation programs. In other words, an encounter with Christ ought to precede religious instruction.

Also related to this dynamic interplay of a synodal community, a “back-to-basics” approach, and the centrality of the Eucharist is a hope for the use of more inclusive and accessible rhetoric in the presentation of Church teachings. The language of some teachings of the Church can be closed to dialogue with human nature, human behavior, and the sciences.

Christ-Like Exercise of Authority

The People of God express concern for how leaders exercise authority within the Church and the impact this has on the community. There is a widespread perception that clergy and lay leaders abuse the power entrusted to them through a merciless application of *rules and policies*. The effect of this dictatorial exercise of authority is two-fold: it excludes and drives away from the Church both individuals and communities who have come seeking support, consolation, and belonging—in short, those who desire a loving encounter with God; it also creates a sense of fear and unhealthy dependency among the People of God who learn to anticipate punishment and are wary of assuming any responsibility within the life and the mission of the Church.

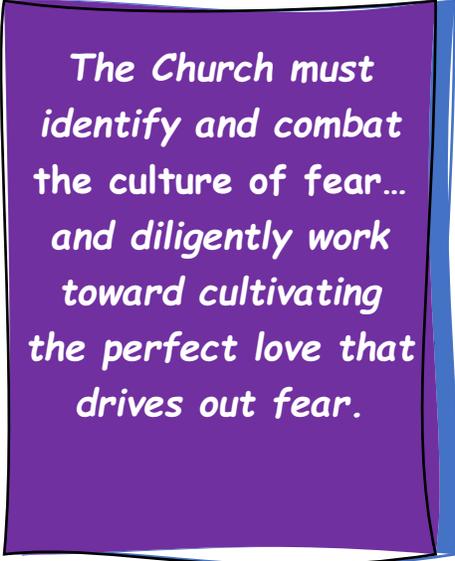
The People of God have an expectation of and desire for a consistent Christian example from our elders and leaders, whether in the family, at work, or in the institutional and hierarchical structures of the Church. Hypocritical behavior is especially damaging to the faith community, however narrowly or broadly understood. Clericalism, judgmentalism, critical attitudes, double standards, arrogance, a lack of accountability, the flaunting of titles, and mercilessness all exclude and turn others away from the Church. It was strongly expressed that, “each of us has a different experience of the Catholic faith, and it’s usually people that create the barrier to our faith.” For most, the sex abuse crisis remains the preeminent example of hypocrisy and the abuse of power within the Church.

Those who assume positions of authority within the Church are expected to manifest the image of Christ and to follow the example of servant-leadership given to us in Scripture and especially in the Gospels.

Those who assume positions of authority within the Church are expected to manifest the image of Christ and to follow the example of *servant-leadership* given to us in Scripture and especially in the Gospels. This includes embracing the reconciling practices that characterized the earthly ministry of Jesus and which restored individuals to their community. It also includes following Jesus's example of how we can mercifully and lovingly fulfill God's commandments.

Combating a Culture of Fear

The People of God speak of the need to *combat a culture of fear* within the Church and society at large. Frequently, fear is disguised as the virtue of prudence. Prudence, however, is not the mere exercise of caution, but rather the exercise of counsel, foresight, and judgment that allows all other virtues to be realized. Within the institutional Church, fear, rather than prudence, drives the development of many of the *rules and policies* within the diocesan administration, as well as the application of these rules by leaders at the local level. Fear is therefore a frequent and consistent motivation that underlies many decisions, for example, regarding pandemic policies and responses to the sex abuse crisis. Unfortunately, fear of being sued, of losing money, of retribution, or of having bad publicity shapes not only how we speak, but also determines the public actions we are willing to take as witnesses to our faith in Christ. As Pope Francis has in several instances noted, the Church often prioritizes self-preservation over prophetic vulnerability.



The Church must identify and combat the culture of fear... and diligently work toward cultivating the perfect love that drives out fear.

Fear is also recognized as one of the root causes of poor communication at all levels. Parishioners, parish and diocesan employees, and clergy want to be better informed about and involved in the decision-making process, especially those decisions that affect them. Limiting access to information and restricting involvement in decision-making processes perpetuates a silo-mentality and a lack of accountability that is rooted in a fear of losing power. To break and transform this pattern, the Church must identify and *combat the culture of fear* that prevents openness and transparency in the entrusted mission.



Among the People of God, fear keeps us from encountering and acknowledging the image of God in others and respecting their innate dignity. It justifies a cynical rather than loving attitude toward the stranger. Fear, therefore, divides us from each other and blinds us to God's gracious presence. Accordingly, the People of God must continually recall and be reminded of the biblical imperative to "fear not" (Is 41: 10) and diligently work toward cultivating the perfect love that drives out fear (1 John 4:18).

Going deeper in our Communal Discernment

The synodal process has revealed the profound love and desire the People of God have for the Eucharist and the transforming joy they experience in the gift of faith. A loving encounter with Christ must be the first and primary focus of who we are and what we do as the Church. It should be reflected in the life of our faith communities, our efforts to evangelize and form others in the faith, the development and implementation of rules and policies, and our efforts to foster unity as a Synodal Church.

Synodality calls us to walk together regardless of our differences; it is a practice of discernment based on the action of the Holy Spirit, which calls for a participatory, inclusive, and co-responsible Church.

The three pillars that emerged from synodal consultations, namely, a Synodal Community, a "Back-to-Basics" approach, and just and prudent Rules and Policies, must be set in right-relationship to each other and to the Eucharist. When this relationship is established, the dreams and desires expressed by the People of the Diocese of San Bernardino will become a reality: co-responsibility, accompaniment, accountability, participation in decision-making processes, and respect for human dignity.

Journeying in Synodality

As we contemplate Mary, who walks with us as a woman who listens, who is a disciple of Christ, and is present in the nascent Church with the disciples, we find the path and the attitudes we need to become a Synodal Church.



The voice of the People of God expressed in this Synthesis commits us to continue in our synodal process of prayer, reflection, and discernment as a local Church. This synthesis calls us to an intentional encounter among ourselves at diocesan, vicariate, and parish levels, and in all ecclesial, educational, and corporate structures, in order to see, discern, and act today, building a path to a better future.

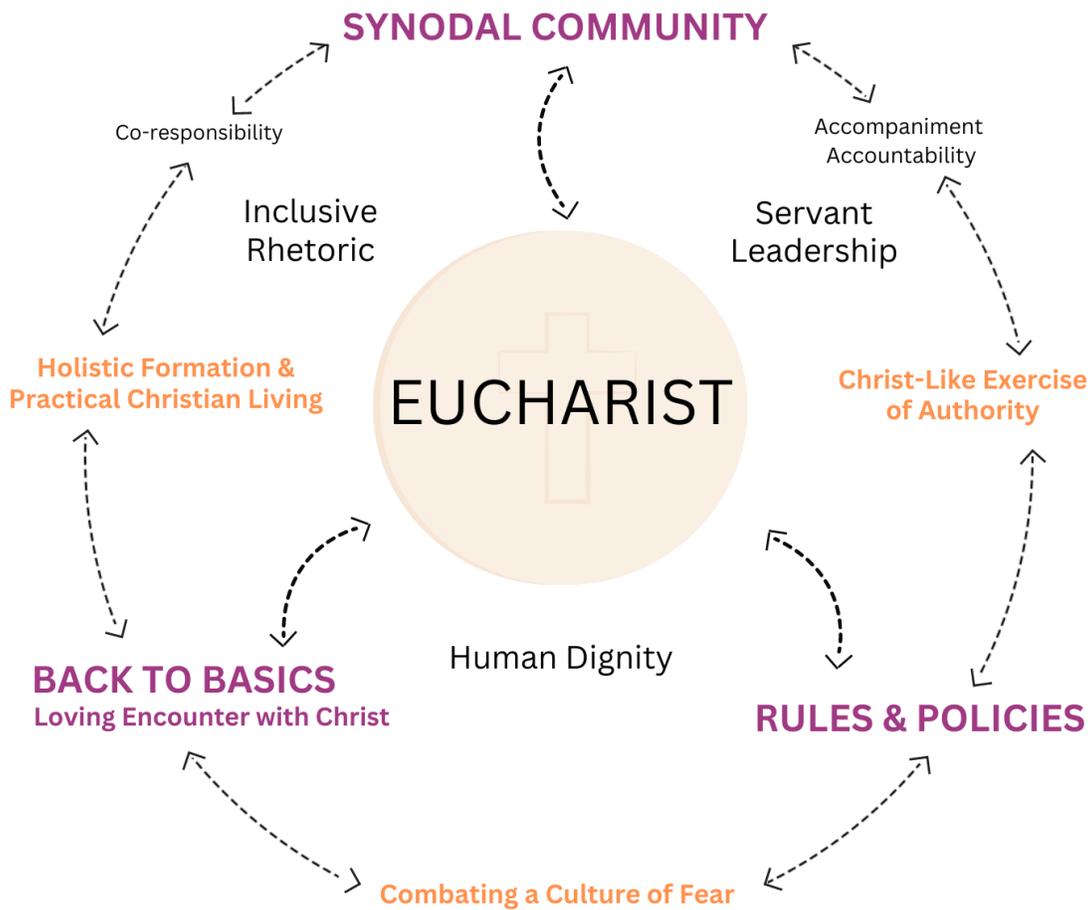
Diagram of the Diocesan Synodal Synthesis

The diagram on the following page reflects how the fruits gathered in our diocesan synodal discernment process are called to be in right-relationship with each other and the Eucharist.



Diagram of the Diocesan Synodal Synthesis

"God's Love is all we need"



Diocese of San Bernardino



Blessing

Heavenly Father,
Pope Francis has invited the Church to journey together
in the Synod on Synodality.
He asked Diocesan Churches throughout the world
to listen to the voices of the faithful.

And this we have done.

Through the diversity of voices,
we heard a common echo that reflects the people's love,
concerns, and dreams for Your Church.
Inspired by the Holy Spirit reflected in the rich variety of voices,
we have written this synthesis.

Now, we wish to take what has been revealed by Your people;
to inspire the discernment and reflection that pave a path to the future of our
Church;
turning words into actions for our Church in the Diocese of San Bernardino.

Bless this endeavor to which we commit ourselves:
to deepen our communal discernment for Your glory and for the salvation of the
world.

And may Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of this Diocese, guide us on this
journey.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning,
is now,
and ever shall be.

Amen



Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission