



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BURLINGTON

Fifty-five Joy Drive
South Burlington, Vermont 05403
(802) 658-6110

Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington Synthesis of Synod on Synodality

In the fall of 2021, Pope Francis launched the Universal Synod on Synodality inviting dioceses around the world to listen to the Catholic community and others on the periphery about our journey thus far as a universal Church to learn how we can live better in communion, to achieve participation and to open the Church up to Her true mission to bring the salvation of Jesus Christ to all.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington received 299 survey responses, 19 parish listening session responses and hosted three delegate listening sessions in addition to a UVM Catholic Center listening session with Bishop Coyne. While the Synod questions developed by the Vatican were open-ended creating some challenges to analysis, certain themes arose across all forms of data collection.

Synopsis

Most respondents identified vibrant liturgy, pastor engagement, and lay leadership opportunities as the top priorities to renew the Church. While 93 percent of participants attend Mass regularly and 25 percent are engaged in a parish ministry, several barriers were identified that hinder full participation. Barriers include church hierarchy, church politics, over-extended priests, uninspiring liturgy, unwelcoming environment, lack of lay leadership opportunities and limited religious education for parishioners of all ages, including spiritual retreats. In addition, some survey respondents said the exclusion of those on the periphery pushes people away, such as the LGBTQ community, women, divorced people, young people and married priests. Covid and an aging Church with few families and young people were noted as a major barrier to renewing our parishes. In addition, a reluctance to preach the true catechism of the faith and a trend toward adopting secular beliefs made some respondents feel marginalized. These responses included the Traditional Latin Mass parishioners who appreciate the Masses that are offered in Burlington but are discouraged that more cannot be offered in other locations.

Respondents are mixed on shared responsibility and authority in the Church as some say the pastor and parish council make all the decisions without input from parishioners and others say parishioner input is welcome. Some said Church hierarchy make all the decisions with a top-down model starting with the Vatican and bishops while others felt local decisions were made by the pastor in collaboration with the parish council and parishioners.

Most respondents said that the celebration of the Mass inspires them to live the faith. The Eucharist followed by the homily were the two most important aspects of the Mass that provided them with the nourishment needed to give “strength for the week ahead.” Those that had a negative liturgy experience due to a poor homily, music and overall unwelcoming environment expressed a lack of spiritual strength and hopefulness. Overall, Covid had an impact on outreach and parish community engagement activities to “welcome” parishioners into the community. Many said more outreach is needed to invite those on the periphery. Most respondents listen to the marginalized through outreach and service through their work, volunteerism, media or news and parish social service

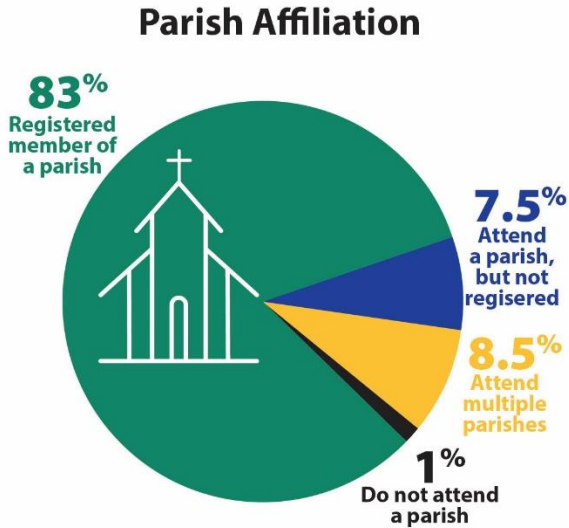
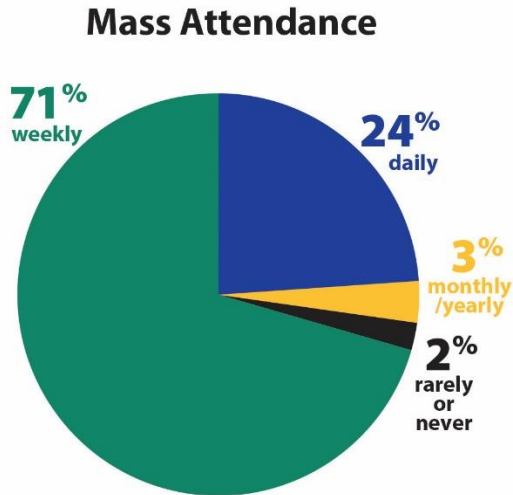
ministries, such as food shelves and thrift shops.

Data Analysis

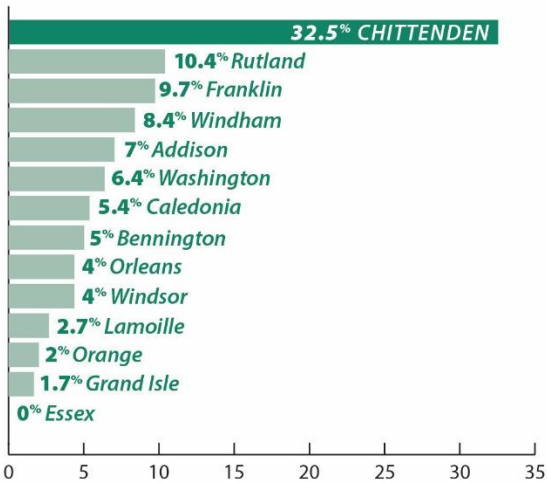
The survey monkey tool specifically allowed for analyzing responses based on categories and keywords providing percentages of respondents identifying specific themes. These themes were cross-referenced with responses captured in the parish and delegate listening sessions. Under each topic there is a breakdown of the top 4-5 categories echoed across all formats.

Survey Respondent Demographics

Age: 86% of respondents are 65 years and older.



Location — County

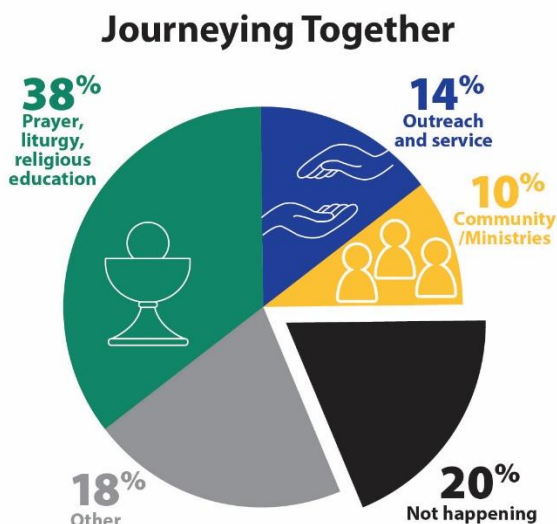


Survey Responses

*Infographics were included as a snapshot but do not capture nuanced responses which are captured in the text. Only the top 4-5 responses are highlighted so the graphic may not equal 100 percent.

1. Journeying together

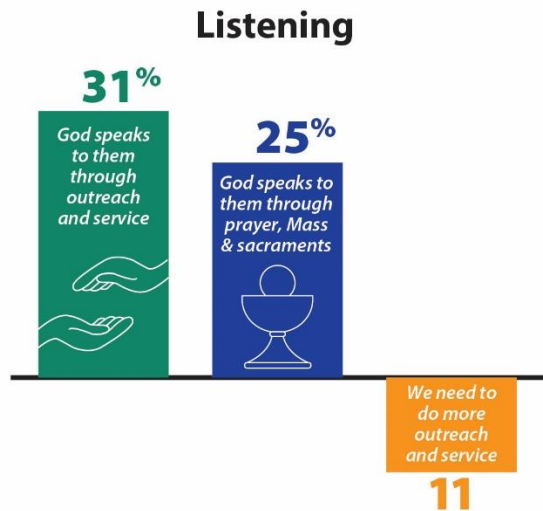
How is this “journeying together” happening today in your parish? How is the Holy Spirit inviting your parish community to grow in “journeying together?” Where in these experiences do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?



- 38% of respondents said people are journeying together through prayer, the liturgy and religious education. These activities build community and help parishioners hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.
- 20% said journeying together is not happening. They cite issues with the church hierarchy, church politics and lack of religious education for parishioners. In addition, survey respondents said the exclusion of those in the LGBTQ community and women not having higher roles in the church hindered the journeying process.
- 14% said participating in outreach and service helps them journey together. This includes serving the community and volunteering at functions at their parish as well as reading/serving/singing at Mass.
- 10% said having a sense of community in their parishes is bringing them closer to the Holy Spirit. This includes participating in different church ministries, groups and getting to know each other as a whole.
- UVM Catholic Center participants said they need more spaces like the Catholic Center to engage college students.

2. Listening

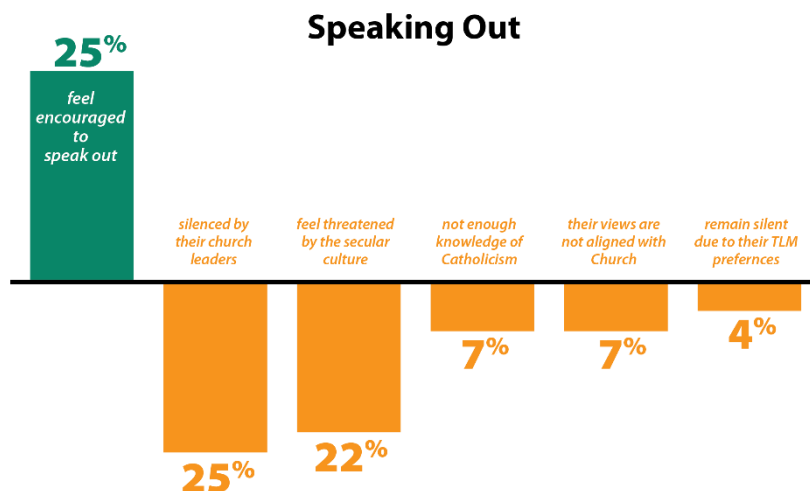
How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst? How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore, including those on the peripheries? What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, the disabled, those who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?



- 31% said that God speaks to them through those on the periphery through outreach and service to the poor through their occupation, volunteerism and financial support of nonprofits that serve this community.
- 25% said that God speaks to them through prayer, Mass and the sacraments.
- 11% said as a Church we need to do more outreach to those marginalized, including the LGBTQ community, women, divorced, and the poor.

3. Speaking Out

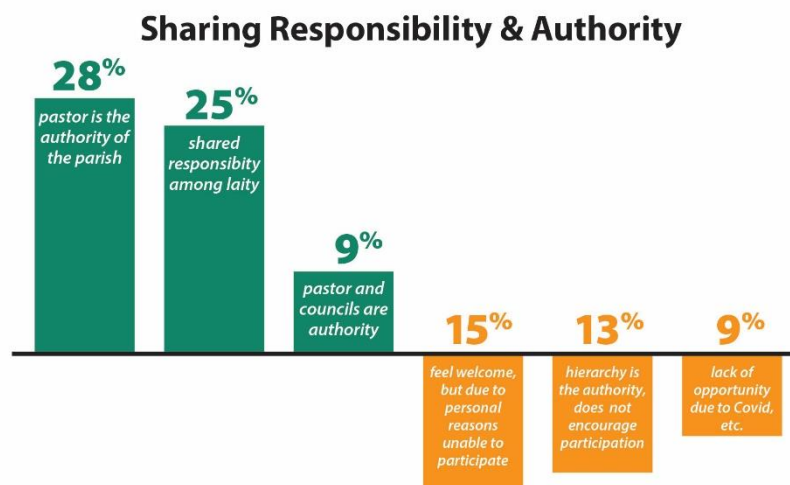
What enables or hinders you from speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in your parish and society? What space is there in your parish for the voice of people, including active and inactive members of our faith?



- 25% said they can speak up and feel encouraged by their priests, the Diocese and fellow parishioners.
- 25% said they do not feel comfortable speaking out due to feeling silenced by their priest, the bishop and other church leaders. A common response was that these individuals do not listen to the needs or wants of lay people.
- 22% of respondents said the secular culture hindered them from speaking due to fear of physical and social repercussions given the liberal politics, locally and nationally.
- 7% don't feel educated enough about Catholicism to speak out or defend their faith.
- 7% are not comfortable speaking out since they feel their views do not align with the Church's. These views include support of those in the LGBTQ community, a desire for priests to get married, ordaining female priests and being pro-choice. A few respondents said that because they are a woman, they feel excluded due to the lack of leadership roles offered to them.
- 4% of respondents say because of their preference of attending the Latin Mass and restrictions from the Vatican, that they are not encouraged to speak out.

4. Sharing Responsibility & Authority

How are the baptized members of your parish able to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel? What hinders people from being active in your parish? How is authority or governance exercised in your local parish? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in your local parish?

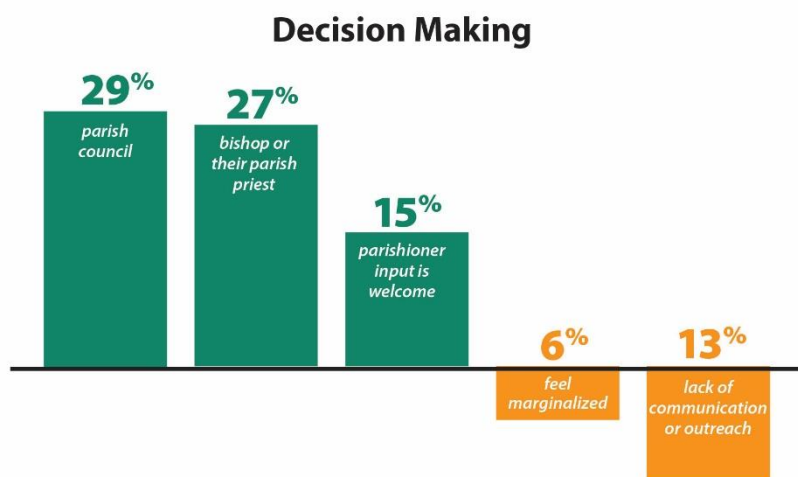


- 28% identified the pastor as the parish authority along with the parish and finance council (9%). 13% identified the church hierarchy as the true authority to make decisions which is often a hinderance to engage.
- 25% share responsibility for mission by participating in a parish ministry, including but not limited to Eucharistic minister, lector, parish council or committee, music ministry, religious education instructor, greeter, etc.

- 15% felt welcomed to participate but cited personal reasons from participating, such as health and old-age, family commitments and time constraints.
- 9% felt there was a lack of opportunity to participate at their parish due to Covid along with an unwelcoming atmosphere, and lack of encouragement.
- Other barriers to participation include an aging population, lack of opportunities for women to participate, dwindling family participation and lack of young people.

5. Decision Making

How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking (consultation to make decisions)? How does your parish promote participation in decision-making within the hierarchical structures of the Church? Does the decision-making methods of your parish help you to listen to all members of the community, including those who are on the peripheries of parish life?

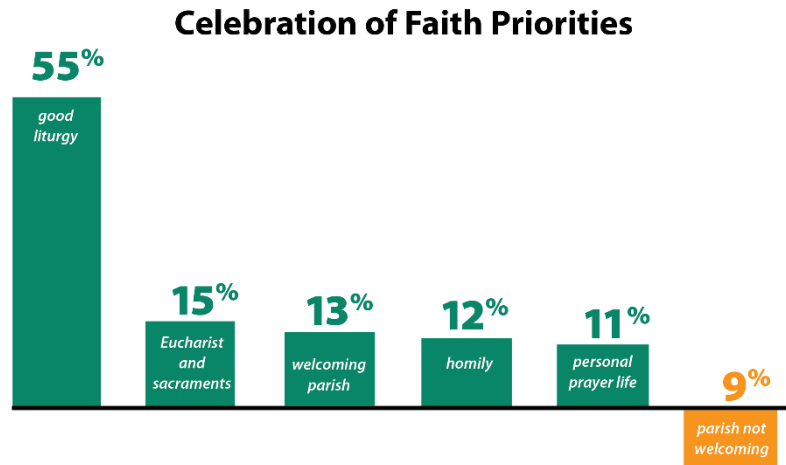


- 29% said their parish council mainly makes all the decisions. However, the responses are mixed. Some say the council is great at listening to parishioners, while others feel that the council has too much power and ignores input from parishioners. Some noted that council meeting dates and times aren't announced to the public and meeting minutes are not made available.
- 27% said they are being listened.
- 15% said decisions are only made by the bishop or their parish priest. Numerous responses conveyed that the priest doesn't listen to anyone and runs the parish without input.
- 6% saying they aren't being heard or are marginalized.
- 13% said there is no reaching out or communication to those on the peripheries (8%) and overall lack of communication that is creating a barrier between parish leaders and parishioners (5%).

- 3% said that the shrinking Catholic population in the state, lack of priests and churches being closed has hindered communication. Many respondents don't feel that their priests have time to listen to them or that they have any control over the closure of their parish.

6. Celebration

How does prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide your parish? How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions and decisions in the parish community? How does the parish invite all baptized Catholics, including our ethnic communities, youth, families and persons with disabilities and their families, into the active life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass?



- 55% said Mass and Liturgy were the inspiration and guide to their daily life decisions and living the faith.
- 15% said the Eucharist and sacraments were the most important of their faith followed by 12% homily and 11% prayer life.
- 13% said their parish was welcoming but 9% said the liturgy was not good for various reasons including homily, music, and overall liturgy.