



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BURLINGTON

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

Synod For a Synodal Church USCCB Interim Stage Report

Per the USCCB Interim Stage Guidelines for the Synod for a Synodal Church, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington held four virtual listening sessions with priests, religious, deacons and laity representing parishes throughout the state of Vermont from January – March 2024. Below please find a summary of the responses to the guiding questions.

Where have I seen or experienced successes within the Church's structure/leadership/life that encourages the Mission?

- Deanery leadership and encouragement to create priest support groups.
- Appointment of Delegate for priests.
- Active parish council, a lot of involvement of parishioners, and a growing congregation.
- Fellowship is key. Retreats like Light of the World are popular and help establish fellowship in parishes.
- Many of the faith formation programs offered by the Chancery: men's/women's retreats, faith formation programs, and parish retreats.
- More full church, coffee hour is lively, more young families and more baptisms than funerals.
- More young couples in RCIA.
- Last bishop was very communicative and forward thinking.
- Women included in the Synod, especially at the Bishops' Conference.
- Recent change in parish council bylaws.
- More parishioners helping those in need on the margins especially after the flooding.
- Synod at the Vatican in October was inclusive – two sisters of Mercy participated.
- New Abbey in Vermont.
- Annulment process made easier when the Pope removed the second review process.
- Diocesan communication improvements.
- Parish photo address books have connected the community and allow for fellowship.
- Alpha Program brings people to Jesus and includes fellowship.
- Popular parish family faith formation program monthly which provides catechism for the full family and includes dinner together.
- Friday Lenten program with Stations of the Cross and potluck dinner has created fellowship.

Where have I seen or experienced distresses within the Church's structure/leadership/life that hinder the Mission?

- We need to have in place “structures” to help facilitate smoother transitions of pastors and their various administrative styles in parishes. Perhaps the diocese can help with this.
- We need to first form relationships before we can evangelize. Be more welcoming – go out into the community. More priests need to be involved in the synodal process.
- Latin Mass has attracted many families with children; church is full on Sundays. There is too much “noise” at regular Mass when there should be silence to enable a spirit of reverence to prevail.
- There is a need for “balance.” The Roman Catholic Church has less of a spirit of fellowship than other, reformed churches. The Church, as Vatican Council II reminded us, is the People of God.
- We must educate priests, and require them, to be open to lay participation. The laity must also be educated in this so they can more effectively participate in parish life.
- There is very little contact with fellow priests.
- There is very little oversight and guidance from the Chancery about the priest's role within the Parish.
- The Diocese has no unified sense of identity and a failure to communicate the mission.
- The bishop should be wed to the Diocese as a sign of long-term Commitment.
- Laity have no true leadership roles.
- Sacraments of Initiation are not done all together.
- Unwelcoming parish community.
- Conflict between USCCB bishops and the Pope.
- No bishop leading our diocese and it's harder and harder for priests to accept this leadership role because they do not want to deal with all the negativity and legal issues.
- Synodal process ignored in some parishes.
- Vocations shrinking and only eight seminarians with some at the very beginning of language school.
- Not many young people want to sign up for celibacy and our Church already accepts married priests who convert from other religions.
- St. Peter had a mother-in-law. Celibacy is a discipline not church doctrine.
- While Pope Francis called to demasculinize the church, women cannot be ordained.
- Not many Catholic school options outside Chittenden Country and evangelization starts with children. Need more Catholic schools.
- Disappointed about the turnout at this synod discussion. No communication about it.
- No homilies on the Synod.
- My church was told Eucharistic ministers are not needed given the attendance and the priest prefers to give out communion.
- Eulogy not included within the funeral Mass.

- Remarried Catholics do not feel welcomed.
- Engaging young people in the Church, especially teenagers.
- Pastors are not trained to be administrators.
- Only one-third of Catholics believe Jesus is in the Eucharist.

How Can the structure and organization of the Church help all baptized respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?

- Many people do not want to take on responsibility for the parish – they just want to do their “duty” on Sunday and go home. While other people in positions in the parish often do not want to let go of whatever authority they think they have.
- Many new faith formation programs in the parishes: Family Faith Formation, Parish Missions/Retreats, Men’s groups/ Women’s groups, and Retreat for the Laity.
- Evangelization is assisted and strengthened in East Africa by the establishment of small Christian communities which meet weekly, pray together, study the next Sunday readings, and create actions plans for the group. Perhaps we can learn from them?
- It is discouraging to learn that priests and deacons are not participating in this synod.
- Priest preparation needs to include the value of acceptance, how to give meaningful homilies, and how to lead by considering input from the parishioners.
- Allowing priests to marry will help them understand the real world if they were allowed to marry.
- Each parish should have a regular synodal process to get to know each other and lift the burdens off priests.
- More coffee hours to get to know each other.
- Church greeters are important.
- Vermont is different than other areas of the country that are much more friendly.
- “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words (St. Francis). Prophesying rather than living by example can be a turn off and push people away.
- Improve communication: Flocknote and other technology.
- Schedule youth masses where young people are singing, reading, carrying up the gifts. This engages young people and involves families who are more likely to come if their children need to be there.
- Do not wait to implement good ideas that arise during the synod process.
- Eucharistic Adoration and Eucharistic Adoration witness should be done together in the churches.
- The Church needs to be open to change. It has survived 2,000 years but it has also changed.
- Women in leadership roles such as deacons or priests. This would send a message to young people that the Church is open and we are all called to be a priestly people.
- More feast days highlighting saints who have overcome trials would help others see a path to sainthood.

- Unpacking the symbolic side to the liturgy.
- Embrace technology, podcasts such as Word on Fire, to spread the message.
- Incorporate the Hail Mary in every Mass which allows for women to be represented in the liturgy.
- Contemplative prayer.