



DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO

SYNOD

2021 - 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FINDINGS FROM THE SYNOD SURVEY
F E B R U A R Y 2 0 2 3

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This executive summary provides an overview of the empirical findings from a survey administered to parish participants throughout San Diego and Imperial counties as part of the ongoing synod process. The survey was developed from data gathered from more than 1,100 listening sessions held at parishes throughout San Diego and Imperial counties and based on the eight themes that emerged from them. For each of these themes, we constructed three related statements where we asked participants to rate their level of agreement on a four-point scale, with response options given by strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). For each respondent, we then calculated an overall average score for the three related statements; this became the respondent's score for that theme or construct.

In addition to these 24 statements, we also asked respondents 14 questions, including eight traditional demographic questions and six faith-based questions. While the demographic questions contained measures such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, zip code, and marital status, our six faith-based questions ranged from type, frequency, and place of worship to the respondents' relationship with both God and the Church, and the single thing that they would change in their parish if they had the opportunity.

Our final sample consisted of 27,670 individuals who answered at least one of the survey questions. Most respondents (89%) took the survey in English, followed by 10% in

Spanish and 1% in Vietnamese. From a gender perspective, women were over-represented among respondents compared to men (60.1% vs. 37.3%), and the sample was well-educated, with almost 73% of respondents having at least some college and slightly less than one in four having earned a graduate degree. From a racial and ethnic perspective, the two largest groups of respondents were White (38.3%) and Hispanic (33.6%), followed by Filipino at 11.1%, Vietnamese at 3.1%, Multiracial at 2.6%, Other Asian at 1.6%, and Other at 1.2%; the other four categories (Native American or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern or North African) had 1.0% or less representation. Most of our sample was also married (59.1%), with 22.2% never married and 13.4% either widowed, divorced, or separated.

From a faith-based perspective, 95.9% of respondents considered themselves Catholic, and 91.6% were baptized as a child or an infant, with the rest being baptized or confirmed as an adult. More than two-thirds of respondents (67.8%) reported attending Mass weekly, while 9.7% reported attending Mass daily. There was a strong preference for attending Mass in person, with 87.7% of respondents selecting that choice versus 12.3% of respondents who preferred Mass virtually in the future. When asked to rate their relationship with God and then the Church on a ten-point scale where higher numbers are associated with stronger feelings, their relationship with God was stronger than with the Church (7.12 versus 6.96), and there was significantly more consensus around



their relationship with God compared to their relationship with the Church.

When respondents were asked if they could change one thing in their parish, 29.9% of respondents selected “helping to spread the faith,” followed by 23.4% who chose “outreach to the marginalized.” In order, the next three responses were about “making our parish more welcoming” (20.5%), “better homilies” (13.6%), and “less emphasis on money” (12.6%). Interestingly, respondents mentioned almost 100 parishes; the three most represented parishes were: Good Shepherd, Corpus Christi, and St. Francis of Assisi.

An Overview of the Constructs

As described previously, we created eight constructs, each consisting of three statements. These constructs are in Table 1, and their averages are all close to 3.0, with a range of less than half a point (2.82 to 3.24). The fact that these averages are close to 3.0 means that respondents were most likely to “agree” with the various statements that made up the construct. Among the eight constructs, The Sacramental Life of the Church and Community Life received the highest scores, while Synodal Statements and Inclusiveness and Acceptance vs Doctrinal Strength were the lowest. Interestingly, the highest degree of consensus was for Anger at the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandals, and the least was for The Sacramental Life of the Church.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for the Constructs

Construct Scores (Highest to Lowest)	Mean *	Standard Deviation **
The Sacramental Life of the Church	3.24	.61
Community Life	3.21	.60
Priestly Ministry	3.06	.56
Issues of Youth and Young Families	3.04	.56
Church as a Pathway to God	3.00	.64
Anger at the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandals	3.00	.47
Synodal Statements	2.84	.55
Inclusiveness, and Acceptance vs Doctrinal Strength	2.82	.60

- Mean is the average of the given set of values. It denotes the equal distribution of values for a given data set.
- Standard deviation is a measure of how dispersed the data is in relation to the mean. Low standard deviation means data are clustered around the mean, and high standard deviation indicates data are more spread out.



Discussion

There are several important takeaways from the survey analysis, and the first involves the willingness of more than 27,000 parishioners to have their voices heard through participation in the survey, which has allowed for a robust analysis of their responses. In addition, the demographic and religious diversity among respondents speaks to the level of comfort that respondents felt when completing the survey, something to be celebrated given the highly personal nature of the questions and statements. Together, this suggests that the results of the analysis have value in presenting a snapshot of where parishioners were at the end of 2022, as well as in allowing Church officials to tailor interventions and programs to the area of greatest need. In an era of diminishing resources, this information should prove enormously helpful.

Given the large sample size, the fact that the mean scores for all eight constructs are within a narrow band around the number representing agreement (3.0) suggests that most respondents agreed with the statements that formed the constructs. Despite this overall level of agreement, some construct scores were higher than others. For instance, the two highest scores were for the Sacramental Life of the Church and Community Life, both largely involving personal participation events. The scores for these two constructs (3.24 and 3.21) suggest a strong level of agreement in contrast with the two lowest-scoring constructs, Inclusiveness and Acceptance vs. Doctrinal Strength and

Synodal Statements, which involve things controlled by the Church, such as listening, achieving a deeper level of participation from members, and balancing inclusiveness and acceptance with doctrinal strength.

In addition to the constructs, several individual statements stand out for their inferential value. While respondents felt welcomed in their parish community and enjoyed participating in events that brought them closer to God, more work is needed to draw younger people into the Church; one way to do this is to communicate the Gospel in more contemporary ways. Respondents also felt that while the Catholic Church is now handling sexual abuse issues more positively, the scandals have made it difficult to attract people to the Church; however, respondents put most of the blame on the coverup conducted by the bishops rather than the individual cases themselves.

We also discovered several factors that helped explain some of the differences in construct scores. For example, age was an explanatory factor for all eight constructs, with older parishioners generally having more traditional values than younger ones. For instance, this occurred in stronger positive feelings about sacramental life, Church as a pathway to God, the priestly ministry, community life, and anger at the sexual abuse scandals, and stronger negative feelings about inclusion and acceptance. From a racial and ethnic perspective, Hispanics, Filipinos, and Vietnamese consistently displayed the same attitudes as older parishioners, with an important exception in that they supported



more inclusion and acceptance rather than siding with the relative importance of Church doctrine. Education also played a role in that we generally found that the more educated a respondent was, the less likely they were to agree with the statements involving the sacramental life of the Church, community life, the Church as a pathway to God, issues of youth and young families, priestly ministry, and synodal statements, and more likely to agree with anger at the clergy sexual abuse scandals and the importance of inclusion and acceptance vs. doctrinal strength.