

The San Diego Diocese began a process in September of 2019 that asked young adults from every parish to “dream big” about how they would create a Church that engaged their generation and helped them to grow in their faith. The consultation, called a synod, was titled “Christ Lives! A Time of Dreams and Decisions.”

It was inspired by Pope Francis, who urged bishops worldwide to update their ministries to serve families and young adults in a teaching document, called an apostolic exhortation. In that document, “Christus Vivit” (Christ Lives), issued in March of 2019, the Pope reflected on the challenges young people face today and encouraged them to be vibrant voices in the Church.

“We all anguish on how to engage our young people in the life and mission of the Church,” San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy wrote in a letter to priests announcing the young adult synod.

The Bishop said that the goal of the synod was for the Catholic Church in San Diego “to provide a time for young adults to dream big and make decisions about walking with Christ and to engage the local Church to accompany them in the mission of Jesus.”

The synod process involved listening to young adults, ages 18 to 39, who were active in the Church, and those who considered themselves unaffiliated. Each parish priest selected one young adult who served as a delegate, along with three additional ones, for a total of 240 who participated in the synod. The average age of participants was 26 years.

They represented a variety of social, economic and cultural backgrounds found in the diocese, including single people, married (with and without children) and divorced. They also included perspectives from the military, “Dreamers” and LGBTQ, among others.

The young adults met in regional meetings, held in the diocese’s seven regions (called “deaneries”) in September and October. The young adults explored five themes at these meetings:

- Walking with God: Evaluating their spiritual and personal relationship with God.
- Walking with the Church: Assessing their perception of the Catholic Church today.
- Walking in Solidarity: Exploring how they are welcome and accompanied in their parish communities.
- Walking with Purpose: Exploring their calling and purpose in life by assessing their leadership, their sense of social service and making a difference in life as a Christian.
- Walking towards Freedom: Exploring the elements of Christian freedom

They were asked to share their own views and experiences around each theme and how the diocese and parishes can support them and nurture their spiritual life.

Then each parish delegate met at a General Assembly on Oct. 26 and 27. They fleshed out the ideas that emerged from the deanery meetings to form recommendations that could be implemented throughout the diocese.

The final session was held on Nov. 9 at the San Diego Mission, the place where the Church in San Diego was first established, and now the setting for renewal led by young faithful. The delegates presented a total of 25 proposals to Bishop McElroy, who said he was committed to implementing as many as possible, in coordination with the diocese's priests and leadership staff.