

**Synod on Synodality Summary  
Our Lady of Nazareth Catholic Church  
Roanoke, VA**

Dear Parish Family,

Enclosed is the Synod on Synodality Summary. Many volunteers spent long hours assimilating the results and putting it into a well thought out document. This was sent to the diocese and is now ready to share with the parish.

The parish staff discussed the results and addressed a few of the bulleted items. Please see the last page's "action points". Parish Council will next review the document and advise our pastor on how to proceed with possible parish action ideas.

A huge thank you goes out to participants that came to the community meetings (280 people) and those that completed either the online (54) questionnaires or the paper (50) questionnaires.

And finally we want to thank Wendy Mellinthin and Cyndy Unwin who were instrumental in leading this important process.

May God continue to inspire Our Lady of Nazareth in building the Kingdom of God in Roanoke and beyond as we share the Good News with those Christ puts in our path,

Monsignor Patrick, the Synod Team, and OLN Staff

**Synod on Synodality Summary**  
**Our Lady of Nazareth Catholic Church**  
**Roanoke, VA**

**Synod Statistics:**

17 community meetings  
280 participants in community meetings  
50 completed paper questionnaires  
54 completed online questionnaires

**Demographics:**

A majority of community meeting attendees were 60+ years in age. About half of the completed online questionnaires were under the age of 50, for a total of about 25% of all the questionnaires completed. Very few people of color attended the community meetings or completed the questionnaires.

**Communion**

**Summary:**

Synod participants characterized the community of Our Lady of Nazareth (OLN) as welcoming, friendly, and kind. The multitude of outreach and parish ministries at OLN was mentioned frequently as evidence that many parishioners are involved in parish life. “We have outreach groups that bring people to the mission and the mission to the community.” There are also many opportunities for parishioners to engage in religious formation offered to children, families, youth, and adults.

Regarding liturgies, people appreciated being able to celebrate the Eucharist as a community again. Said one participant, “Our liturgies at OLN are one of our greatest gifts.” Opinions were broadly positive about the homilies given by our pastor and our visiting deacon. Most praised OLN’s music ministry, though a few expressed desire for more traditional music options. Several indicated they preferred Mass in the vernacular rather than in Latin.

A common theme was the need for greater connection, even prior to the COVID-19 epidemic. Respondents overwhelmingly felt that the pandemic has made our parish community more fragmented. The suspension of events that brought our community together (coffee/donuts after Mass, shared meals, in-person gatherings) has separated us. Some feel there are “cliques” in the parish—groups that associate mostly with each other without enough opportunities to come into relationship with people from other groups. In particular, newcomers to the parish during the epidemic have not felt specifically welcomed. They said they would have appreciated a personal call or someone to tell them about ministry opportunities at OLN.

An area of need at OLN is related to how those on the margins engage in our parish community. Respondents felt there are certain groups at OLN that are either under-represented, not involved, or not listened to. Examples include young people (young adults in their twenties and youth), singles young and old, those with mental illness, LGBTQ+ individuals, divorcees, widows, immigrants, and the elderly/homebound/disabled. In addition, OLN is primarily a white, middle class community, though we do have small groups of parishioners of color (Haitian, Latinx/Hispanic, Filipino, African, African American, Indian), and our parish diversity has gradually been increasing. Respondents felt our parish community could be doing more to minister to people of color in our parish life.

Although there was a small minority who expressed more traditional opinions, there was a broad desire (particularly among younger respondents) that the Catholic Church be more inclusive, rather than exclusionary. One youth said, “We are putting ‘rules and old traditions’ first, rather than the people in our community.” A 22-year-old respondent who has left the Church wrote, “The Church needs to...find common ground in fully recognizing and affirming all of humanity.”

Beyond OLN, there was a desire for our church (and the broader Catholic Church) to be more ecumenical—to reach out, learn about, and connect with people of different faiths. There was a recognition that OLN was more involved in ecumenical activities prior to COVID (and under the leadership of our former pastor, for whom ecumenism was a particular interest).

## Discussion and Dialogue

### Summary:

Participants in the Synodal process felt that the communication at Our Lady of Nazareth (OLN) is good. They referenced the weekly bulletins, the online newsletter, email and text messages, and OLN's Facebook and Twitter pages. There was recognition by many that those without access to a computer (or lack of transportation to attend Mass) have a harder time getting access to information about our parish.

Respondents felt grateful for OLN's good audiovisual system (and the staff who operate it), because the quality of streamed Masses during COVID is so high. Some indicated that the continued streaming of Masses may give people "an excuse" not to return to church in person. Others indicated the streamed services and the ability to attend Zoom meetings are the only ways they continue to be connected to the parish, because they have health conditions or vulnerabilities that preclude their return to the parish in-person. Some staying at home are frustrated because they feel they are being judged negatively.

Regarding how our Church is dialoguing, collaborating, and resolving conflicts, most OLN respondents did not know how our parish does this. They are unaware of how or whether the Parish Council, Finance Council, and the clergy/staff address problems and make decisions. They would like better communication and transparency about the role of these leadership bodies.

OLN participants felt that there is polarization on many issues, both within our parish family and in the broader society and Church. They felt that this was related to the political polarization we see in our country and world. People tend to stay in their own corners with like-minded people. They are civil with others when speaking to them in person, but can be much more divided in online forums. Said one respondent, "I have been frustrated by the interactions within Catholic communities on social media...I feel a strong spirit of accusation along political lines and a severe lack of charity between people of opposing political tribes."

Many respondents welcomed more opportunities for us to dialogue on issues like immigration, racial justice, and climate, in addition to the issues the Church tends to be focused on, like abortion, religious freedom, and gay marriage. Many mentioned the importance of making others aware of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. A few thought OLN should avoid these polarized social issues because they were too "political" or "leftist." One respondent felt we should seek ways to reduce "toxic disagreement." Another said, "Many of us don't have the proper skills to dialogue, collaborate and resolve conflicts."

## Participation and Mission

### Summary:

There are many opportunities at Our Lady of Nazareth for “people to go out and be on mission for Jesus Christ in their regular lives.” The most common theme across all the Synod groups and all the questions was that OLN has incredible outreach. Respondents had good awareness of OLN’s various outreach ministries and often mentioned them by name: the OLN Giving Garden, the RAM House day shelter, the St. Francis House food pantry, OLN’s Habitat House, prison ministry, Valley Home, and Afghan Refugee Resettlement, to name a few.

The formation opportunities at OLN were also mentioned as a strength in preparing us to live Christian lives: Bible studies, Family Faith Formation, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for children, RCIA, retreats, Naz Nights, and JustFaith modules. Regarding evangelization, most respondents felt that Catholics are not taught how to evangelize. They were uncomfortable with direct proselytization and felt more comfortable with living lives of witness through their actions. “I don’t feel we have active evangelization efforts at OLN...we don’t actively pursue the marginalized to ‘come and see.’”

There was a broad concern that young people in our church are not staying, both in our own parish and the broader Catholic Church. Our youth who attended the diocesan youth conference in Richmond were deeply impacted by Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and would like to see OLN provide more experiences like this. They also wanted greater visibility within our parish, and leadership opportunities. Other respondents felt we are not doing enough to minister to young adults (ages 20-30), and parents of children and teens.

Regarding leadership at OLN, some said that the same people in our parish assume all the lay leadership positions, and have done so for many years. “The Spirit is inviting those of us in leadership roles to open wide our arms and grow our leadership. Those who have been in the inner circle for many years need to open their hearts to new generations of people and ideas so we can all learn, grow, and move forward together.” There was broad lack of understanding as to the purpose of the Parish Council, and how to find out who is on it or how the Council functions.

There was a concern among many regarding the ongoing impact of the priest sex abuse scandal. Some also indicated concern about clericalism of some priests (that they may, in one respondent’s words, convey a “holier than the rest of us vibe”). This was not a specific concern about clericalism within OLN clergy, but a broader concern that some priests are elevating themselves above the laity. Several participants expressed support for the Church to allow priests to be married.

There was also a broad belief that the role of women in the worldwide Church needs to be revisited. Several respondents expressed support for more leadership opportunities for women, including ordination of women into the diaconate and the priesthood.

### Fundamental Question

**A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together’: How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?**

## Summary:

Synod participants from Our Lady of Nazareth (OLN) emphasized the important role of the Holy Spirit and prayer in our journeying together as a faith community. We journey together by welcoming ALL others with open hearts. We come into relationship by dialoguing in a spirit of love and forgiveness and by encouraging one another in our mission of service and evangelization.

While many of us feel embraced and accepted in our parish, others do not. They may not be actively engaged in the life of the Church, and we may not have heard their voices in this synodal process. These could be people we regularly see in the pews, or those whose voices we haven't heard because they no longer choose to be part of our community. We do not truly *know* each other, since we have a large parish, several Masses, and tend to stay in our established groups. According to one respondent, "We are not 'journeying together.' We have many groups journeying independently." Indeed, Pope Francis understands the "needs of the times" in calling for synodality.

## Many concrete steps were suggested by Synod respondents to help us grow in synodality as a Church. Some suggestions were to:

- Understand that the "Eucharist draws us together, it is our common ground."
- Increase the number and type of community and social gatherings as COVID-19 restrictions ease (e.g., coffee and donuts, retreats, Naz Nights, the community pool, fall festival, ecumenical Thanksgiving service).  
**Staff Action Item:** We have started Coffee and Doughnuts (bagels during Lent) once again. Naz Nights continue periodically and we plan to continue to offer the fall festival and will promote once again the ecumenical Thanksgiving service.
- Become more intentional about welcoming newcomers (e.g., Newcomer Sundays) and sharing opportunities for involvement in church life and ministries.  
**Staff Action Item:** Donna plans to contact all families with young children who join our parish to welcome them and share the opportunities we have at OLN for faith formation. She plans to do this proactively rather than waiting for them to step forward and request information. Rita plans to bring up newcomers and welcoming them once again to parish council at their next meeting.
- Use the power of *personal invitation* to build community, connect with those who are different than us, and evangelize.
- Prioritize our youth and young adult ministries; provide opportunities for young people to have leadership roles and involvement in parish and outreach ministries.
- Clarify and make more transparent the role of the Parish and Finance Councils and how they work with the pastor and staff in making decisions.  
**Staff Action Item:** The Parish and Finance Council are advisory councils to our pastor. They are back to in person meetings and are listed on the OLN Website. An explanation of the groups has been added to bulletins and the Financial Report that was mailed to each household this spring is also included in the weekly newsletter.
- Continue providing formation opportunities that help us understand who we really are as Catholics (e.g., the Mass, the Eucharist, the Gospels, theology, Catholic Social Teaching).  
**Staff Action Item:** The new Adult Faith Formation Director will continue to offer a variety of opportunities as we move forward into the fall. Donna: Family Faith Formation has been well received and we plan to continue. Parents who participated consistently this past year had wonderful experiences and commented that they loved this idea of growing in faith as an adult,

and having the opportunity to share faith with others. Rita is updating our ministry brochure to have available so all can see the amazing outreach opportunities and ministries (Catholic Social Teaching in action) offered at Our Lady of Nazareth.

- Create opportunities for those with differing opinions to come together and communicate in positive ways.
- Seek to connect to other faith communities and ecumenical groups in our area (like Voices of Faith and LARCUM) in a spirit of listening and dialogue.
- Identify those on the margins who may not feel welcome in our faith community: our youth and young adults, single Catholics, LGBTQ+ individuals, divorced Catholics, and people of color, to name a few. Explore ways to communicate with them about their needs and goals. Make our faith community welcoming to all. As one parishioner said, “When we say All are welcome, let’s mean ALL and not leave out a specific group...”
- Celebrate OLN’s diversity of cultures and ethnicities through shared meals and multicultural music.
- Continue to connect with the elderly, homebound, and disabled in our area who have become increasingly isolated as a result of the pandemic.

### **Additional Information:**

Parishioners at Our Lady of Nazareth (OLN) were provided ample opportunities to participate in the Synodal process. Letters were mailed to each registered family, the process was explained at every Mass, and multiple dates and times were offered as participation options (advertised on paper and electronically on multiple platforms). Parishioners could stay after one of the Masses to participate, share their thoughts in Synod meetings held by various OLN ministry groups, attend an in-person Synod session, or join one of two evening Zoom sessions. They were personally handed the Synod questions on paper after the Masses one weekend, and they also had the opportunity to complete the questions online.

The vast majority of the attendees at the community meetings and the people who completed the questionnaires were white people, aged 50 or older. Meetings were held with the youth group and the parents in Family Faith Formation in an attempt to more broadly access a more representative age range. About half of the online questionnaire responses were completed by people under 50 years of age. Despite this, we feel many younger voices were not heard. In addition, very few people of color participated in the Synod community meetings or completed the questionnaires (based on the demographic information OLN requested). This, in and of itself, shines a light on the nature of our journey together. With so many voices missing from the dialogue, how well can we say we are practicing synodality? We remain committed to three of the most common themes heard throughout this process: the importance of making connections, maintaining our commitment to outreach, and extending personal invitations to people not currently engaged in parish life.

In the voice of one respondent, **“Let’s together practice ways to share our faith. Let’s never do this alone. The Spirit invites us to sacramental lives of repentance and joyfully inviting others into the wonder, awe, beauty, and joy of life in Christ.”**