



SYNOD

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH

COMMUNION · PARTICIPATION · MISSION



Diocese of Lansing Summary Report

June 22, 2022

Diocese of Lansing Synod Team Acknowledgements

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I. Introduction

The Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, serves and includes:

- 10 counties
- 72 parishes
- 124 active diocesan and religious priests, 60 of whom are pastors
- Three religious mother houses
- 64,173 registered households in the Diocese of Lansing
- 32 Catholic schools
- Six Catholic Charities agencies
- 14 colleges & universities

Our synod team comprised six members, including leaders in Catholic Charities, Youth and Young Adult ministries, College Campus Ministries, Hispanic Ministries and Parish Ministry.

Following the formation of our Synod team, our prayerful discernment led us in a different direction than perhaps many other (arch)dioceses would take. In 2012, our Bishop, Bishop Earl Boyea, released a pastoral letter entitled “Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord.”¹ In it, he identified three groups of people to whom our diocese needed to direct its pastoral efforts: The Household of Faith, The Lost Sheep and The Court of the Gentiles.

In response, our diocese has engaged in several initiatives over the last decade where we collected feedback from the Household of Faith (the baptized lay faithful). These included three diocesan assemblies, a Synod on Youth and Vocational Discernment², and a discipleship assessment tool called “The Disciple-Maker Index”³ from the Catholic Leadership Institute. (<https://www.catholicleaders.org/disciple-maker-index>) We are also in the midst of a strategic restructuring of our diocese to realign resources to better serve mission. As part of this process we held listening sessions around our diocese and heard much of what is on the hearts and minds of the lay faithful. Through our synodal discernment two things became clear to our team:

1. Further surveys and listening sessions would be duplicative, as we have recently collected good data from the lay faithful. We did not believe we would have heard anything new from this group of people.
2. We did not believe we would reach those on the peripheries (i.e. The Lost Sheep or Court of the Gentiles) by sending out general invitations to listening sessions due to the fact that many of them do not feel welcome or interested in coming to an event at a Catholic parish or run by a Catholic entity.

¹ See Appendix item 1, “Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord, Pastoral Letter of Bishop Earl Boyea, 2012.”

² See Appendix item 2, “Synod on Youth and Vocational Discernment, Summary document, 2018.”

³ See Appendix item 3, “Disciple-Maker Index Diocesan Results, 2020.”

For these reasons, our discernment led us to create a synodal initiative where we invited the lay faithful to engage in synodal conversations with those in their lives who are no longer or never were connected to the Church.

Our Synod Team created a conversation guide⁴ that was printed and sent out to all of our parishes and made available for download from our diocesan website. Based on our reading of the guiding Synodal documents and the Vademecum, we discerned eight questions to form the synodal conversations:

1. How would you describe your present relationship with God?
2. How much of a connection do you presently feel towards the Catholic Church? This could refer to your connection to ordinary Catholics in your life, your local parish, your local diocese, the Universal Church or other Catholic entities.
3. Tell us about a positive experience you've had with the Catholic Church.
4. Tell us about any times when you've had a negative experience with the Catholic Church.
5. Would you say that the Catholic Church helps you or has helped you to understand the Good News of Jesus Christ? If so, in what way?
6. How could the Catholic Church better help you grow closer to Jesus Christ and His Church?
7. Is there anything you would like the bishops of the Church, or other Church leaders, to know about you?
8. Is there anything I didn't ask that you think would be helpful for me to know?

We encouraged those entering into these conversations to

- do so in a prayerful posture, including the praying of the Adsumus Prayer prior to each conversation
- invite the person to ask any further questions that seem necessary or appropriate

Each conversation guide included a QR code and web address to upload feedback and responses from these conversations. This Synod Portal, as we called it, remained open for two months. Our conversation guides were also produced and disseminated in Spanish. Our communications office created six "Synod in a Minute" videos⁵ encouraging our lay faithful to engage in these conversations.

We also curated and made available resources for those willing to hold group listening sessions⁶ in parishes or other locations, such as homeless shelters or warming centers and created space on our Synod Portal for those leaders to upload feedback from those sessions.

Based on this approach, our synthesis will primarily contain the themes and responses found in the feedback from these synodal conversations with those on the peripheries.

⁴ See Appendix item 4, "Synodal Conversation Guide, 2022".

⁵ See Appendix item 5, links to "Synod in a Minute videos, 2022".

⁶ See Appendix item 6, "Group Listening Session Guide, 2022".

II. Key Themes from Synodal Conversations

A. Individual Conversations in English

A total of 286 individuals⁷ reported feedback to our synodal questions. Approximately 60% of responses were reported from synodal interviews, while 40% were personal responses. After reading through all of the responses, several themes began to emerge across all demographic categories. Themes were separated into Positive and Critical. Since our primary efforts were to engage those who were no longer or never had been connected to the Catholic Church, it was not surprising that there were more critical comments than positive.

Dominant Positive Themes

1. Connection to the Church through fellow Laity

Numerous individuals, though *no longer actively practicing the faith*, reported that their most positive experiences with the Catholic Church were in personal relationships with fellow laity. Relationships with family and friends, attendance at sacramental celebrations (such as First Communions, Weddings, Funerals, Holidays) were considered positive experiences with the Church. Individuals also noted Catholic School or Youth Ministry experiences to be positive memories from child or teen years.

These respondents had a distinct positive experience with laity, while frequently noting negative experiences with Church leaders, teachings, or institutional structures.

2. Feeling of welcome in small faith sharing groups

Many people who struggled with or disagreed with Church teachings but *still practice the faith* felt a sense of welcome through Catholic activities and community groups (ex. Alpha, faith studies, bible studies, etc). Through these small groups, people continue to feel welcome by other members of the laity rather than Church leaders or institutional structures.

This theme was seen in multiple demographic groups, and indicates that there are many people who struggle with or disagree with certain Church teachings, but still feel a connection with the Church and yet participate despite these disagreements. Some of the disagreements included Church teaching on marriage and human sexuality, the roles of women in the Church and what they feel are outdated rules and teachings.

⁷ See Appendix item 7, "Individual Synodal Conversation Demographics, 2022".

3. Appreciation for the Sacraments, Church teachings and apostolic activities

The appreciation for the sacraments was mentioned by many people, including real devotion centered in the Eucharist. Meditative beauty, the atmosphere of peace and music as powerful worship aides were mentioned as important for the celebration of the sacraments as were various types of worship, from contemporary to traditional worship including the Latin Mass.

Apostolic activities include:

- Food pantries & Catholic hospitals
- Scholarship to attend Catholic School
- The faithfulness and example of Catholic lay people
- Dominican and Ignatian spirituality seen as especially helpful
- Faithful, on fire Priests who are available to the people
- Charismatic Renewal
- Importance/Gratitude for consistent magisterial teachings

Dominant Critical Themes

1. Lack of Acceptance/Belonging/Welcome

There were two primary areas where people did not feel welcome, belonging or acceptance:

- A. In general, at any Church related events or activities, these people simply felt unwelcome or that they did not belong at all in the Church.
- B. Specific to the Mass and other sacraments. These people may identify as Catholic but feel they are not accepted or welcome in the sacramental life of the Church due to personal circumstances. Personal circumstances may include separation and divorce, lifestyle choices or past decisions.

In both instances, it seems consistent that the respondents feel the Church does a poor job welcoming and accepting people who are living contrary to Church teaching or who have been hurt or scandalized by the Church.

There is a distinction between being welcomed and accepted in “the Church”, and welcome to participate at all levels, events or activities, particularly in the Sacramental life. This needs to be more consistently and accurately communicated.

2. Role of Women in Church Leadership

The role of women in the Church was raised by at least 10% of the individual survey participants as a concern and also among several of the group survey respondents.

For some of the participants, the comments were general, such as “Women are not treated as equals” or “Women are not provided opportunities for leadership”. Other participants were more specific, such as women not eligible for ordination to the diaconate, the priesthood or other

positions of authority. These concerns appeared to cut across all age groups and included survey respondents who are active in their faith and those who have left the Church.

Among those who have left the Church, the role of women tended to be one concern among several that were raised. A few of the respondents provided substantial input as to how they perceive that female leadership could help the Church to better respond to individuals, families and communities.

3. Marriage/Divorce/Annulments

A dominant theme of those who indicate that they are divorced is the experience of feeling unwelcome, judged, or ostracized by the Church or her members. Many mention a lack of support after getting divorced. Some report that they were then told not to receive Holy Communion or that they were denied Communion by a priest because they were divorced.

Some of the struggles related to divorce & annulment included:

- Feeling intimidated by the process after hearing negative experiences of others
- Personally experiencing an annulment process that wasn't very pastoral
- Choosing not to proceed with an annulment and getting remarried and now feel they are not able to fully participate in Mass
- Some have left the Church for another faith
- Some mention that annulment is an outdated practice of the church that should be let go to be more welcoming, as they have experienced in some protestant faith communities

4. Irrelevance/Too many (outdated) rules - also people just drifting away

Slightly more than a quarter of all the surveys of people who have left Catholicism cited rules, regulations, legalism, and rigidity as major reasons.

Multiple respondents felt the rules were "arbitrary" and the Church as is "irrelevant." Interestingly, almost the same percentage of people who still self-identify as Catholics choose to remain while holding the opinion that "it's all about the rules."

When respondents referred to "the rules", many were referring to morality and sexuality concerns that influenced reception of the Sacraments. Being in LGBTQ relationships, remarried without a declaration of nullity, in "a state of mortal sin" were commonly described as "man-made rules" that can and should be rescinded. Several respondents mentioned liturgical rules, from music to the role of lay people.

Some respondents (practicing Catholics) were concerned about the rules from the opposite position: they believed the Church is going "too soft" and there is fear that there will be changes to the rules on morality and tradition.

5. Treatment of LGBTQ Persons

Though this theme is closely related to Dominant Critical Theme #1, we felt it was dominant enough to stand alone. The related feedback heard in our synodal process came both from individuals who are living in homosexual relationships as well people who felt the Church was not supportive or accepting of those who identify as LGBTQ.

Because our culture continues to embrace and promote this issue, the Church must do a much better job teaching and evangelizing in this area, and without changing magisterial teachings, find ways to accompany and welcome those who are engaged in LGBTQ interests.

6. Scandal or Personal Woundedness by Church Authority

Finally, another common issue noted by participants was the impact of institutional scandal (sexual abuse by clergy, misuse of financial or human resources, or poor leadership) or negative personal events or interactions with someone in Church authority. This was a frequent reason for disassociation or negative experience with the Catholic Church.

The gravity of scandal and personal woundedness among those who have left active practice of the faith should not be taken lightly or dismissed as a result of weak faith. The mission of this synod is to more effectively listen to and walk with our brothers and sisters- particularly those on the margins. Scandal and personal woundedness have seriously damaged the trust of many of our brothers and sisters in faith and pushed them to the margins. An example:

"The church lost me when my wife had a late in life pregnancy which subsequently she miscarried... The priest we went to for some spiritual support was an immature ass. We learned about the late in life pregnancy and it was shocking and also frightening due to the health implications for my wife. However, we came to accept the pregnancy and were cautiously walking hand in hand with God on this. Then she lost the baby. This has a wide spectrum of emotions because on one hand, we grieved the loss of a child. On the other hand, there is some relief given the serious health implications the pregnancy posed for my wife. This immature moron deals with the subject like I would expect a very immature teenage boy....yuck, yuck, yuck...."you can always try again. That's where all the fun is isn't it?" Seriously? Is the emotional intelligence of seminary grads that low that they would joke about something so deeply penetrating to a parent? You complain to others and they just are all "rah rah" about priests. Well, this priest was useless. No, he was worse than useless. He was damaging at a time that we were very emotionally fragile." Male, age 63

Trust has been described as the first threshold of conversion to a life of intentional discipleship. Many evangelization trainings imagine the subject of our efforts to be vaguely aware of the tenets of Christian beliefs, but somewhat neutral ground for introduction to Catholicism and relationship with Jesus Christ.

Yet those whose trust has been radically damaged by institutional scandal or personal woundedness deserve some special consideration. Too often these persons are perceived as suffering some weakness of faith or formation. This narrative dismisses the gravity of the sin of scandal, and palliates/dulls consciences where they ought to be aroused.

We have to acknowledge that the efforts made - in particular- around reparation for the sins of sexual abuse scandals have not brought full healing inside the Church, let alone to those on the margins. This sensitizes our brothers and sisters to further distrust when institutional leaders err in smaller ways.

Sadly, most of our institutional leaders bear the burden of healing wounds that they did not inflict. Yet this does not diminish the need for ongoing reparative efforts. Further professional training is necessary for both lay and clerical leaders to properly respond to woundedness on this front.

B. Groups

A total of 28 Synodal group conversations were provided and documented into the diocesan website. Group sizes ranged from 2 - 21 individuals. There were 178 participants. The average group size was 6.6 participants. 18 of the groups occurred in parish settings, three at Catholic Charities locations, with the remainder in homes, virtually, a psychiatric hospital and other community settings. Only five of the groups contained non-white members. The parish-based groups were Catholic or primarily so. Two of the Catholic Charities groups were made up of service recipients, with only a very small number identifying as Catholic. Most of these participants had faith-based backgrounds, but with no current participation. The group sessions held in homes and other community settings included a large number of former Catholics, often no longer having a church connection, though some now identified with various other Christian denominations.

Many of the participants report a personal relationship with God and identify areas of parish life and their participation in the sacraments as important to them. Amongst the believers, many raised concerns regarding the role of the Church. Some examples are:

This group felt that in the areas of war/peace, the poor, addressing the abuse crises the church was doing well. Areas of improvement would be the response to abortion, explaining Church moral teaching, birth control. There was also a concern that the church was not doing as good a job as it could in recognizing female perspectives on issues.

Not relating well in regard to the dignity of women or the LGBTQ populations, don't recognize the LGBTQ struggles, inconsistency of Catholic Teaching on certain moral issues when it comes to leadership statements , other Catholics seeing or knowing the Social Justice teaching of the Church. The work of the Church for the poor is positive.

In addition to LGBTQ acceptance, other themes included the divorce/annulment process, need to improve homilies, lack of female leadership, the pedophilia scandals, and a lack of trust in Church leadership - particularly at the diocesan or national level. Some comments were very supportive of Pope Francis, while others were critical of him. Some group participants described very welcoming parishes, while others described not feeling welcome.

Group activities at the parish level were highlighted by several participants as positive; this included RCIA, Alpha, Wild Goose, bible study, Formed and Just Faith. The feeling of welcoming and community was mentioned several times. Among the regular mass attendees, the Eucharist was also identified as very important.

Social concerns were raised by many of the participants. This included both Catholics and non-Catholics. Views of pro and anti-masks, divergent political views, both national and international, were raised, along with LGBTQ as noted above.

The comments about “better” homilies included the desire for more relevancy, to be based on the readings of the day. One example of a comment is:

Support all people, accept all people. Be more open-minded. Church is very judgmental. Want church to care more about issues affecting youth - depression, gun violence, etc. They can't talk about God at school - they get put down.

Many of the Catholic participants reported some ambivalence. One example comment is:

One woman reported conversations she had had with several others who had left the Church for a variety of reasons (didn't get anything out of it, too many rules, clergy sex abuse, perceived judgementalism among clergy, marital issues). Most members of the discussion group feel very connected to the Catholic Church, though some have children who have departed from it.

There were also many group conversation participants who either reported a disbelief in God or reported that God was not important in their life. Most of these participants did not report a connection to the Catholic church, with a few exceptions such as Saint Vincent DePaul, Catholic Charities or other basic needs.

Group Synodal Survey in Catholic High School

In one of our four Catholic high schools, the 10th and 12th grade theology teacher created a survey using our conversation guide, and invited 92 students to respond.

About half of those teens reported they have a good relationship with God and feel connected to the Catholic Church. The other half reported that they do not have a good relationship with God, or that it is non-existent.

The most dominant theme seen in these responses was boredom. Many of the students shared that they were bored with the Catholic Faith and particularly with Mass. This included the homilies, music and general atmosphere.

Another theme that jumped out was that of feeling judged. Many shared experiences of feeling judged by Church leaders from interactions they had, as well as through certain teachings that were conveyed.

Social Concerns. One dominant theme concurrent in other synodal conversations seemed to be mostly absent in the school survey. Things we may normally expect to hear about from teenagers, such as life and human sexuality issues were most likely absent because these are students in a Catholic school who know what the Church teaches about these issues and so didn't feel comfortable speaking against it.

One poignant remark from a female teen stuck out in particular, where she stated, "Pay attention to us."

C. Group Conversations/Listening Sessions in Spanish

Demographic Information

According to the 2020 census, 76,598 Hispanics live within the 10 counties of the Diocese of Lansing, this represents 4.2% of the total population. 25 Hispanic persons participated in the synodal conversations; 10 men and 15 women.

Locations of Listening Sessions

The conversations were conducted individually in home visits or at farms.

Key Themes

Many of the responses from Hispanic people reflect a close relationship with the Lord, although for some, their work schedules make it difficult for them to attend Mass and other Church activities.

Several respondents mentioned positive experiences with the Church, including:

- Emotional support they receive in their communities
- Services they receive in their own language (Spanish)
- Religious sisters visiting their homes or workplaces
- Bible studies

Some felt there was a double/standard in the Church:

On one hand the Church promotes certain moral teachings, on the other hand Church leaders have been engaged in scandals related to those same teachings.

Some Hispanics feel they are not accepted, mentioning specific negative experiences with priests or consecrated people due to their racial origin and how that has caused them to separate from the Church.

III. Key Themes from Synod on Youth and Vocational Discernment

In 2018, we participated in the Synod on Youth and Vocational Discernment⁸. This is one of several ways we have engaged the faithful and strived to listen to what they were saying to the Church. As part of our efforts engaging in this present synod, we looked at the responses we gathered during the 2018 synod for any responses that coincided with the questions we were asking using our Synod Conversation Guide and in our group listening sessions.

Though this was four years ago, we found several concurrent themes with this present synod. When asked “what do you need from the Church today,” among 760 respondents the overarching theme was that young people needed support, love, guidance, reassurance, acceptance and community.

These answers correlated closely with the responses we have seen to a question in our Synod Conversation Guide for the current synod; “How could the Catholic Church better help you grow closer to Jesus Christ and His Church?” The themes of acceptance and belonging are echoed throughout both sets of data.

Another concurrent theme between our responses to the 2018 Synod on Youth and Vocational Discernment and the present synod is an appreciation for good formation along with access to Mass and the sacraments. This positive sense is echoed in the feedback we received in the current synod in relation to two questions in our Synod Conversation Guide; “Tell us about a positive experience you’ve had with the Catholic Church?” and “Would you say that the Catholic Church helps you or has helped you to understand the Good News of Jesus Christ? If so, in what way?” The answers we have received regarding these questions reveal a positive attitude and experience towards the Mass and the sacraments, particularly when received in youth as well as an appreciation for and desire that the Church do a good job forming people to understand and explain the Faith.

IV. Key Themes from DMI (Disciple Maker Index)

In 2020, our diocese surveyed all of the lay faithful using an anonymous survey tool called the Disciple Maker Index⁹. This tool helps the lay faithful to articulate various elements of their faith practice. In addition to demographic data, it indicates where the people of our diocese find themselves in regards to their discipleship, including;

- What drives them to recommend their parish to a friend?
- Is their parish helping them to grow spiritually?
- Do they talk about their faith, invite others to parish activities or perform various acts of service or answer other’s questions about the Faith?

⁸ See Appendix item 2, “Synod on Youth and Vocational Discernment, Summary document, 2018.”

⁹ See Appendix item 3, “Disciple-Maker Index Diocesan Results, 2020.”

- Are they growing in their faith?
- Do they feel welcomed in their parish community?
- Does the preaching help them to grow spiritually?

Since this survey was directed at the lay faithful the overwhelming majority of respondents were baptized, practicing Catholics, whom we would call the Household of Faith. This tool gave us the opportunity to listen to the hearts of many people and gives us a glimpse into their lived experience in the Church.

The same themes of acceptance and belonging as well as the appreciation for the Mass and sacraments and clear teachings of the Church that we see in the current synod responses are evident in the feedback seen in the DMI survey.

V. Conclusion and Next Steps

In conclusion, our approach to this Synod was to reach out intentionally to the Lost Sheep and the Court of the Gentiles; those who are no longer or never were connected with the Catholic Church. We wanted to hear from those we are not reaching in hopes that we would create opportunities for them to return or to come to the Church, but also in order to learn why people leave the Church so that we may prevent this in the future. As a result, we heard much more critical feedback than positive. Generally speaking most of the critical themes we noticed were aimed towards the institutional Church and those in leadership in the Church. Most of the positive themes found were aimed primarily towards fellow, lay Catholics.

It seems clear that the Church needs to continue building up the laity to not only know the Faith in order to pass it along, but equip the laity with exercises such as this synod in order to bring the listening and compassionate ear of Christ to those they encounter.

In our local context, our synod team will submit a separate proposal to our Diocesan Curia, to become more intentional in ministering to those:

- Who suffer from personal woundedness or institutional scandal
- Who are divorced or remarried
- In the LGBTQ community
- Who due to differences in culture, language or immigration status find themselves on the margins

We will also propose that we rework our synodal conversation guides to be promoted and used into the future, outside of the context of an official synod but simply as part of our ongoing efforts to equip our household of faith to go out and have conversations with those in their lives and to listen to what they have to say.

“This was the first time we have even had a serious conversation about religion in years. Her beliefs are so far removed from her upbringing that it is a very difficult area. Must

say, however, that we talked about these questions for at least 30 minutes (she lives in another state), stayed on the phone for another 30 minutes and all was well. So, it took me a month to find the courage to initiate the conversation, but I am thankful for it. Perhaps it cracked the door open just a little. Only God knows.” Female, age 47

What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church?

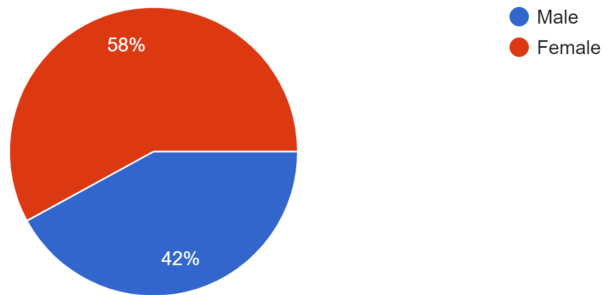
In answering the foundational question of the Synod, our diocesan team believes that the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to deeply listen to the needs of the present culture in order to witness to the joy of the Gospel and accompany those who carry with them wounds and scars, some inflicted by the Church. This is a call to discern the most effective means by which to accompany people in truth and charity.

VI. Appendices and Attachments

1. [Go And Announce the Gospel of the Lord](#), Pastoral Letter of Bishop Earl Boyea, 2012.
2. [Synod on Youth and Vocational Discernment Summary](#), 2018.
3. [Disciple Maker Index Summary](#), 2020.
4. [Synod Conversation Guide](#), 2022.
5. [Synod in a Minute Videos](#), 2022.
6. [Group Listening Session Guide](#), 2022.

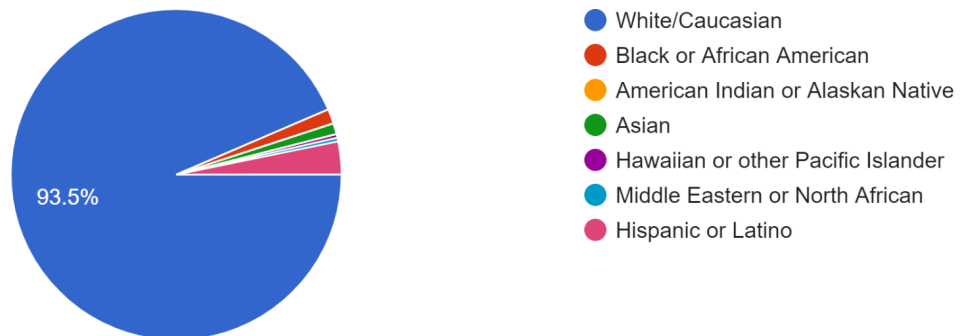
Individual Synodal Conversation

Gender of person interviewed
283 responses



Demographics, 2022.

Race or Ethnicity of person interviewed
279 responses



*The small, colored lines on the chart represent answers that were given in synodal conversation that were unique but not common responses.

Marital Status of person interviewed

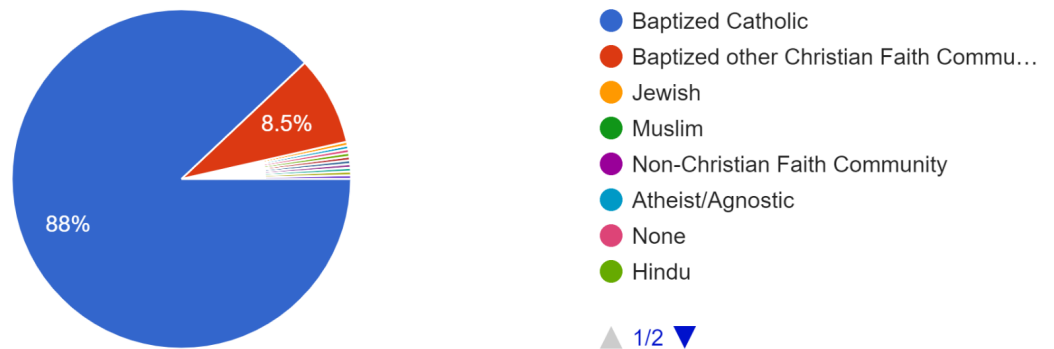
282 responses



*The small, colored lines on the chart represent answers that were given in synodal conversation that were unique but not common responses.

Faith of Origin of person interviewed

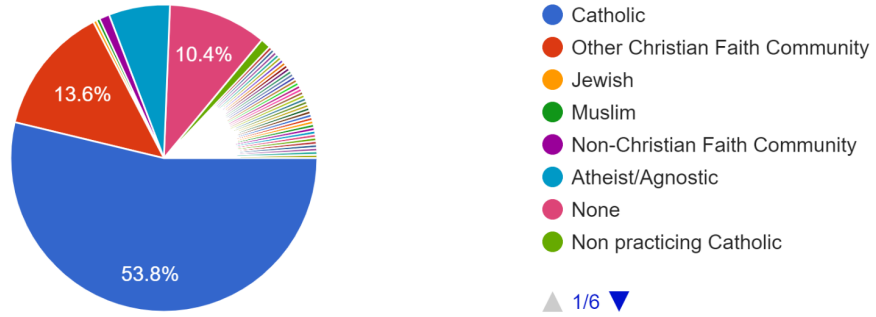
283 responses



*The small, colored lines on the chart represent answers that were given in synodal conversation that were unique but not common responses.

Current Faith Identity of person interviewed

279 responses



*The small, colored lines on the chart represent answers that were given in synodal conversation that were unique but not common responses.

Age Ranges of Responses

