

# Diocesan Synthesis Report



DIOCESSE of  
MANCHESTER



## Small group process

The goal in the diocese was to have two deacons and their wives assemble a group in their deanery to engage in a weekly prayer and faith sharing session, using a prayer to the Holy Spirit, and then responding in groups of 3 or 4 to a set of six questions. Every effort was made to avoid gatherings that would evolve into gripe sessions. Those that were gripe sessions do not appear in this report. Our understanding of synodality



was to form spiritual relationships among one another, and to share our journeys of faith. A goal achieved among those who participated in the Synod on synodality was to build community. Individuals got to know one another, and spiritual relationships began to form. Our hope is that not just the 100 or so diocesan participants but hundreds and thousands of people in New Hampshire, Catholic and non Catholic, practicing and non practicing, would form these kind of synodal relationships. Practicing telling one's faith story, stories of conversion, become a means of evangelization. Each of us is learning to reflect on

qualities of God, experiences of God's love, and to recall what God has done for me. It became very evident from the start that this process has the potential to transform our parishes into communities of people who know one another and whose stories keep challenging us all to recognize what God is doing to save us.



## Responses that provide a synthesis of the experience

"I liked that the groups were small and non-threatening. I am not always comfortable expressing personal feelings or ideas with others so this was a bit of a challenge for me or at least I thought it was. In reality it was not and I am glad I made the effort to participate.

I also liked the question format and the ability to read and think about them beforehand. It gave me time to order my thoughts.

I always had one constant [person] in each group setting. This was good because I became comfortable always having this person in my group. We could build on what we already knew about each other. The Church appears to have played a huge role in our stories of faith. Parochial school students had different experiences from public school students. City children had different experiences than country children. Yet most of us had similar experiences and habits."

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"The sharing on such a faith and personal level has me re-living and renewing my own history. These 'strangers' are now part of my church family. I feel safe and grateful that I can explore a forgotten piece of my life with them and they with me."



**Groups began with prayer**

"I liked that we met in the church and that you opened the gathering with a prayer invoking the Holy Spirit and a blessing. I liked that my group consisted of not more than four people, increasing the potential for intimate conversation. Our backgrounds and our life experiences were very different from one another, and it was a delight to perceive that our Catholic faith permitted us to transcend, and also to enjoy (marvel at) our differences. It was our dedication to our Catholic faith, and thereby to each other, that we shared in common."

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"It was a pleasure to meet some of the friendliest and open people that I have met in a long time. Everyone I met in all of the groups shared how God plays into everyday life in some unique and personal ways...I took away energy to take steps to work more prayer into everyday life and also to show God the gratitude I have for how he plays such an important role in my life. Without the small group discussions I would not have heard about how others are prioritizing God in their lives."



There was definitely a sense of community built within our group over the weeks, as sharing became more personal over time. I think we all experienced a family commitment to attending mass during our formative years. More than one of us drifted in young adulthood, but returned as age brought wisdom. Searching for a faith community brought us back into the celebration of mass, and more, as the people in our discussion group all had further involvement.



"We liked the human contact getting to know intimately people from the parish through sharing very personal life experiences. Ones I may have never given another thought to. The questions were really engaging."

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"All in all, this was a good meeting and I feel that we are beginning to bond closer with each other, encouraging each other to share our faith journeys so that we can get to know each [other] and God better by listening to what is in our hearts."

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"Our last session was 10 which is the largest number we have had. The feedback has been tremendously positive. I believe we have all learned something about our faith, and the great need for men to gather and pray. We plan on meeting two more sessions. I have some gentleman saying this [has] been great therapy. I have many asking and hoping that this is not the end of it. I will be working with our faith formation Director in order to keep their hunger alive and fed. The format that you have given me has worked wonderfully. Last evening we talked about conversion experiences. Overall I would say it has been an extremely fruitful time."

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### Personal sharing

The questions, beginning with more surface and icebreaker kind of sharing, gradually led to more personal sharing within each of the groups who participated. By the end, participants remarked how by the end "I felt a close bond", "this felt like church", "strangers became friends", "when I see that person, I now know the rest of the story", "it felt like natural sharing and not coerced", and "we should do this more often".



Sharing thoughts and opinions can often lead to division. Sharing experiences and sharing the impact of faith in one's life, however, has a way of leading to closer connection because it helps people get in touch with the deeper foundational bonds that connect us as a human family and as a church.