



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 1, 2022

Responding to the Diocese of Sacramento's Synod Synthesis Report

Dear Friends in Christ:

Last October, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, asked bishops around the world to conduct listening sessions in preparation for the next Synod of Bishops in 2023. As I shared in a previous message, the root meaning of the word “synod” connotes journeying together. A synod is a time for consulting, listening, and learning. The Holy Father has asked us to be more intentional about how we listen and learn from one another.

Over the course of 5 months, many parishes in the Diocese of Sacramento answered the Holy Father's call, holding more than 250 listening sessions, and reaching more than 2,000 people in the process. These people included those who go to daily Mass, people who identified as Catholic but are non-practicing, participants from other Christian denominations, non-Christians, and non-believers. Truly, this was a grace-filled time to listen to a wide range of experiences.

These sessions were not just an “exercise” in listening, nor was this process a new one for the church. The process reawakened a tradition and the Holy Father's repeated desire that shepherds “smell like their sheep”. This meant that pastors make every effort to be close to the people that we serve, that we all may journey together, clergy and laity together.

There were many surprises and challenges that arose from this synodal experience. I heard examples of great joy with the Church, as well as examples of great pain. The fullness of these experiences shows that we have many opportunities to bear fruit in this part of the Lord's vineyard of Northern California. At the same time, I acknowledge that we are not going to resolve every single issue raised through this process. With such varying perspectives and experiences, we will not be able to walk with each other by only going “this way” or “that way”. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We must follow him, and him alone. Let us not give in to polarized notions of church that will only prevent us from journeying together as brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus.

The synodal process is not intended as a version of democracy. St. Paul reminded the Colossians that Christ “is the head of the body, the church. ... Through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of the cross.” (Col. 1. 18-20) All the work of the synod is intended to see Christ, hear him, and heed the voice of the Good Shepherd.

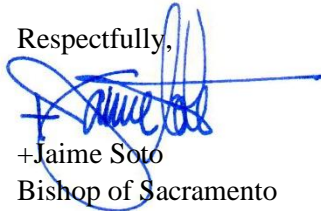
The turmoil of the pandemic has revealed our hunger for both Communion and fellowship. In fact, the main themes that emerged from the listening sessions included a deep love for the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Along with this were many expressed desires for community building, spiritual growth, discipleship, and hospitality. This yearning for the sacramental life of the church, and all that it contains, is providential. The Catholic Bishops of the United States are embarking on a three-year initiative of Eucharistic revival in our country. The emerging themes heard in the listening sessions will stimulate the work of this initiative. In the coming months, I will encourage further listening sessions with clergy and laity as we seek to become what we receive in the diocese honored by the name “Santísimo Sacramento”, the Most Blessed Sacrament.

It is my hope that these respectful and prayerful consultations among clergy and laity will become more habitual across our parishes, schools, and charitable organizations. Parish Pastoral Councils especially will have a critical role in fostering these opportunities to listen and learn.

Guided by the Holy Spirit and accompanied by the maternal intercession of Blessed Mary, Mother of the Church, may our efforts to journey together bring us closer to the Lord Jesus. May our hunger for Communion and charity bring us as well as many others to the Lord's Eucharistic table, where together we will taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Read the Diocese of Sacramento's Synod Synthesis Report at www.scd.org/synod/report

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jaime Soto", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

+Jaime Soto
Bishop of Sacramento