

A SUMMARY OF SYNOD RESPONSES FEDERATION OF DIOCESAN LITURGICAL COMMISSIONS



415 MICHIGAN AVENUE, NE | SUITE 70 | WASHINGTON, DC 20017
WWW.FDLC.ORG 202-635-6990

INTRODUCTION

The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions was founded by the United States Bishops in 1969 to assist with formation on the liturgical changes which followed the Second Vatican Council. Our mission remains the same – to serve our Bishops, dioceses, and parishes with liturgical formation and to assure the authentic celebration of the rites in accord with the vision of the liturgical renewal.

The synod sessions were conducted during our annual, regional spring meetings – March through May. The Executive Director prepared a seventeen-page booklet to help the Board Representatives lead the sessions. It included an Opening Prayer service, an introduction, a timeline, principles for engaging in effective dialogue, discussion questions (drawn from the Synod *vademecum* and divided into “communion, participation, and mission”), and a Closing Prayer. The booklet was accompanied by a ten-minute video which introduced the process, the history of the synodal practice in the Church, the nature of the “sixteenth region,” and how our organization would participate in the USCCB process. Forty pages (single-spaced) of comments were then sent to the FDLC national office to compile into this report.

It was particularly important to us to raise issues of liturgical concerns – a perspective that might not be on the immediate radar of other national organizations. It was also important for the FDLC to listen to its members so that their remarks might impact our own short-term and long-term planning. We already do this in a variety of ways and through a variety of networks, but to do this in harmony with the universal Church gave it a richer and broader perspective.

Approximately 160 members participated – priests, deacons, religious and lay, male and female. They serve in dioceses, parishes, and academia. Ages ranged from 27 to 80 years.

BODY OF SYNTHESIS
COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, AND MISSION

COMMUNION

UNITY -- The liturgy is a source of unity; indeed, the Eucharist itself is the sacrament of unity. The communal nature of the liturgy requires that it be celebrated well and authentically. This requires liturgical leaders –clergy and faithful –to respect the liturgical texts, their options, and the diversity of cultures in the expression of worship. This also demands real listening with consultative dialogue, healing, and respect for the voices of youth, the alienated, and the poor.

We long for more ecumenical dialogue with other Christian communities -- a trend once vibrant after the Second Vatican Council.

COLLABORATION – The Church needs to recognize the gifts of all the baptized and our universal call to holiness. We have seen recent growth in collaboration, especially among members and leaders of merged parishes and large effective parishes. We view lay leaders leading diocesan offices and teaching in seminaries as very positive. However, we have also seen some pastors who disdain collaboration with the laity, are dictatorial, or who are stretched too thin and less inclined to process, discuss, and discern.

NEW MODELS OF LEADERSHIP – It is not impossible to imagine new parish structures which respect the competence and gifts of all the laity, especially women, in management, catechesis, and regular preaching. This is supported by priests, too. (One lamented, “We are not just toll houses for the sacraments.”)

THE BISHOP AS CHIEF LITURGIST – In recent years, the authority of the Bishop has been undermined by rogue priests and parishes who do not follow diocesan guidelines and universal liturgical norms. It is scandalous and confusing to the faithful. In these instances, the Liturgy itself becomes a source of disunity and debate. A strong diocesan Office of Worship and liturgical commission would aid each Bishop (CSL 44-45). We applaud Pope Francis’ recent restrictions in *Traditiones custodes*.

PARTICIPATION

THE POST-PANDEMIC CHURCH – Our members expressed great concern about recent trends. Mass attendance is not yet back to previous numbers and some emergency liturgical practices have remained in place. Televised Masses during the pandemic served a vital purpose, but they also encouraged individualism at the expense of community. When it appeared that “only Father is required to say Mass,” the rich liturgical theology of the Council suffered. The nature of the entire People of God offering the Mass was rendered moot; clericalism, in some circles, increased. Televised Masses should be limited and we must continue to reach out to those who have not yet returned and ask why. Every parish needs a plan of inclusion.

Once again, we need to pay attention to the human elements of liturgy – a full complement of liturgical ministers (of all races, sexes, and ages), sung participation, Scriptures proclaimed well, and respecting symbols and rituals which engage liturgical assemblies.

The whole notion of “obligation” was misappropriated during the pandemic. Many people do come to Mass out of genuine desire and a duty to gather as a community. While it was necessary to suspend the obligation to attend Mass, alternate language regarding permissions, alternate participation, and invitation could have been used.

PREACHING – The preacher must be aware of what is happening in his community. In interpreting the readings and the liturgical texts, he must relate it to the needs of the listeners. Preaching can be both a source of catechesis as well as healing.

LITURGY VS. DEVOTIONS – In recent years, devotional elements and personal piety have crept back into the Mass, including postures, gestures, and the recitation of the prayer to St. Michael, the *Hail Mary*, and other insertions. The Council’s noble simplicity, the Order of Mass, and its *General Instruction* have been ignored or attacked.

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ASSEMBLY -- The full, conscious, and active participation of the Body of Christ is enabled by the careful preparation and execution of the liturgy. Music has great power to engage, teach, and unite. Pastoral musicians, then, need to understand that music's role is to support the assembly's participation; its role is not entertainment or performance. Practical and spiritual formation of liturgical ministers engenders competency. Buildings should not hinder participation nor create artificial barriers.

Vital to all this is a genuine sense of hospitality and respect. Too often we hear "I left because I did not feel welcome." Programs never solve problems; building personal relationships does. We do a poor job of going out to the marginalized; instead, we often wait for people to show up at our church door.

FORMATION -- People often ask for more formation on the Mass. This requires intentional catechesis in the bulletin, online, in preaching, and in formation at all age levels. The liturgical formation of children (and the parents who bring them to the sacraments) should not be forgotten. Mystagogical formation is most effective.

The formation of clergy requires additional scrutiny. The Council mandated better liturgical formation in 1963 (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, nos. 15-19). Courses in liturgical history, preaching, initiation, and practicums are lacking. All seminarians, deacon candidates, and liturgists require a thorough knowledge of liturgical books, rubrics, and documents. True formation involves apprenticeship and mentoring. One pastor noted that his intern needed the basics -- it should be second nature to meet with people, to create a check list before a celebration, and to accurately keep sacramental records. Ongoing formation of clergy, especially regarding *ars celebrandi* and preaching should be routine.

MISSION

THE VISION OF THE COUNCIL – Are we still striving to realize the vision of the Church and the liturgy enunciated at Vatican II? We recognize that the strong excitement and resolve after the Council has waned in recent years. There is still a trend among some to "reform the reform" and a tension between those who favor the extraordinary and ordinary form. Some circles still favor clericalism over collaboration.

DIOCESAN STRUCTURES – While 90% of dioceses have an Office of Worship, few diocesan/parish business models see it as a priority. Nor do they see the value of liturgy as central to our Catholic identity.

PARISH LIFE – We have seen growth in the number of baptisms during Mass, the use of a Children’s Liturgy of the Word (“occasional”), and the participation of the people (rosary beads during Mass have all but disappeared). The formation of parents and other adults is growing.

We still need to be more attentive to those who have left the Church, to young adults, and to families with young children. We must keep our hearts open. It is too easy to let go of people if we don’t hear from them.

INITIATION RITES – *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* (OCIA) is a vital part of the Church’s mission. Too often, it is treated as a catechetical program distanced from parish life. We require a solid, pastoral re-imagining of this process and deeper appreciation of the role of the initiating community. It is a rite of the Church. Its full complement of rites is mandatory and this should be enforced by the Ordinary. Restore the order of the sacraments of initiation and no longer permit them to be separated.

OTHER SACRAMENTAL RITES – Reconciliation should be offered more frequently. General Absolution (Rite III) should be offered more broadly. Catholic marriage celebrations are in decline and routine formation on this important sacrament should be part of every parish’s life. In general, parish clergy become the sole arbiter of the Mass and the rites. The People of God are entitled to authentic liturgy.

LITURGY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE – By its very nature, liturgy evangelizes and catechizes. We need a better appreciation for the dismissal rite of the Mass (*Ite missa est*) and how the Word and Eucharist empowers us to go out into the world. Create more intentional links between works of charity and the Mass. Collections need to be linked to the poor and accounting more transparent.

CONCLUSIONS

The Second Vatican Council was indeed led by the Holy Spirit. We must continue to plumb the depths of its theology, ecclesiology and liturgical reforms.

WHAT SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED?

- Continue to offer formation on the proper celebration of the reformed liturgy
- Promote the concept of liturgy as a corporate act of worship
- Appreciate that the liturgy is the source and summit of our faith and the manifestation of our unity, we, therefore, need to continue to dialogue with those still fighting the liturgical reform
- In general, listen more closely to women, children, young adults, single people
- Continue to dialogue -- listen, apologize, make amends, resolve to act differently
- Commit to radical inclusion of people of all cultures
- Continue to build up respect for the clergy whose reputation suffered as a result of the scandalous behavior of a few.

WHAT SHOULD BE DISCOURAGED? WHAT SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE?

- Weaponizing the Eucharist in polemic and political battles
- Rogue priests and parishes who contradict the authority reserved to the Bishop
- Holy Communion from the tabernacle
- Hybrid liturgies – the restored Order of Mass blended with elements from the Tridentine Mass
- The absence of lay people in important curial, diocesan, and parish roles
- The turbulence caused when a new pastor changes practices in a parish without consultation

Respectfully submitted,
Rita A. Thiron
Executive Director, FDLC
June 11, 2022