



August 15, 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Diocese of Stockton has completed the Diocesan phase of the Universal Church's Synod on Synodality. Parishes throughout the Diocese held Listening Sessions and over 2,000 people participated. In addition, approximately 1600 people completed the online survey. I am most grateful for the time, commitment, and thoughtful input of those who attended the meetings and responded to the survey.

The Synod Planning Committee met for five days, praying, reading, reflecting, and synthesizing each and every response - no response was left out of the synthesizing process. The attached report, containing the joys, pains, and hopes expressed by people of the Diocese of Stockton for our local and universal Church, was submitted to United States Catholic Conference (USCCB) at the end of June.

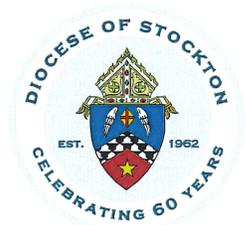
The synodal process will continue with many stages culminating in the General Assembly of Bishops meeting in Rome in 2023. I pray that we as a diocese (clergy, religious and laity) will reflect on and begin to act on the key takeaways and recommendations contained in this report. It is my hope that we will grow in our ability to "journey together" *As One*. Synodality is a means for all of us to work together to better advance God's message of love and salvation to all in our diocese and in our world.

May the Holy Spirit continue to guide the Universal Church and the Diocese of Stockton as we move forward with the next steps of the Synodal process.

In the Peace of Christ,

Most Reverend Myron J. Cotta  
Roman Catholic Bishop of Stockton

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## **For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission 2021 – 2023**

**Final Report:**

**Submitted by Most Reverend Bishop  
Myron J. Cotta**

**Bishop of the Diocese of Stockton,  
California**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In October 2021, the Diocese of Stockton began the journey of planning and conducting the diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality. The Stockton Diocese covers a large geographical area, comprised of 6 counties, 35 parishes, 14 missions, and roughly 240,000 Catholics. Organizing a series of committee meetings, Listening Sessions, and the Individual Online Survey in a short amount of time was no small matter, but, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the process came together.



**DIOCESE OF STOCKTON**

## PROCESS MILESTONES

1. Sister Patricia Simpson, O.P. and Kim Fuentes were appointed as contact persons for the Diocese in accordance with the *Vademecum* on the Synod issued by the Vatican.
2. A decision was made to develop both an individual online survey as well as hosting listening sessions at each parish to cover the synod questions.
3. Members of the Synod Planning Committee were identified. This committee assisted in preparing the questions for the listening sessions and online survey.
4. Information about the Synod process was presented at the Presbyteral Council and the Deans' meetings. Emails were sent to all priests, deacons and parish ministry leaders explaining the process and providing the necessary material to lead, participate, and report findings from the listening sessions.
5. The Committee reached out to Catholic Charities of Stockton in an effort to reach the peripheries. They were able to survey a small number of program clients.
6. Listening Sessions were also held for priests, permanent deacons and their wives, religious sisters, diocesan staff, religious education directors, and migrant ministry.
7. Associations and groups not affiliated with a single parish (Daughters of Isabela, Knights of Columbus, Serra Clubs, etc.) were provided materials and invited to hold listening sessions for their members.
8. Awareness of the synod was raised through the following means: the Diocesan website, emails to parish leaders, bulletin announcements and inserts, petitions in the Universal Prayer at Sunday Masses, and pulpit announcements. These spoke to the purpose of the synod, the meaning of synodality, and encouraged active participation in the synod. Copies of the Synod Prayer were distributed, and parishioners were invited to use it as part of their daily prayer.
9. The meetings were conducted in January through April 2022.
10. Sr. Patricia Simpson, O.P. and Kim Fuentes read through responses and assigned categories as a method to organize the responses for the purpose of the synthesis.
11. Members were added to the Synod Planning Committee to assist with the synthesizing of responses submitted through either the online survey or listening sessions. The Synod Planning Committee met for five day-long meetings to identify, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, the major themes in the responses, paying attention to the minor or quiet voices that demanded attention.
12. The results of this synthesis process were compiled into this document.
13. This document was vetted by the entire Synod Planning Committee for completeness and accuracy.
14. The document was then presented to Bishop Cotta for approval.

15. A total of 350 Table Reporting Forms, representing approximately 2000 people were received from listening sessions held in 20 of our 35 parishes. The online

survey received responses from 1600 individuals. See Addendum A for the demographic breakdown of the participants.

The following report is based on the input received; however, this report represents a very small percentage of the Catholics in our Diocese. The difficulty the Synod Planning Committee had engaging both the clergy and the people of God demonstrates the need for improved systems for synodality.

## **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

The following points stand out as common discussion themes after undergoing the synthesis process described above. The synthesizing team prayerfully considered all the responses, identifying the major themes. They also paid careful attention to “quiet” voices that were not numerous but represented strong and serious concerns for our community, as informed by the Holy Spirit. First are discussed the broad sentiments of the participants, then the specific concerns are shared.

### **Broad Sentiments**

1. In all cases there was high praise and gratitude for having this synod and for providing a platform where people could express their thoughts and be heard. In fact, many expressed a desire to continue active listening sessions locally.
2. Many of the participants expressed an appreciation for the gift of the priesthood, the service of Bishop Cotta, and the priests and deacons in their parishes. Parishioners can be quoted as saying “I love my priests.” During the Priests’ Listening Sessions, words of appreciation for the Bishop’s support and his availability to his brother priests were expressed as a source of joy.
3. In seeking out the joys and obstacles in ‘journeying with the Church,’ there was widespread agreement that attending Mass and being part of a community brought the participant’s joy. It is clear that the people of God truly want to be active members of a synodal church that is filled with joy because of their love of God and neighbor.
4. Many reported various experiences of pain, frustration, and sorrow as a result of their interactions with the church.
5. While many responses expressed hope that something positive would come out of this Synod, there were also expressions of cynicism and doubt that there would be consistent follow through. This attitude is shared by laity and clergy and is based on past experiences such as the 2006 Diocesan Synod and the multiple Encuentro processes.

6. This report contains takeaways and recommendations that came out of the responses received that do not need to wait for the universal Synod in Rome to be enacted. The people want follow-through and are looking to the bishop and their pastors to lead this effort.

### **Specific Key Takeaways:**

1. The clergy (priests and deacons) and the laity believe in and desire a synodal Church. All must work together to achieve this goal. It is important for clergy to lead the way. There is a strong concern expressed that clergy, parish staff, and ministry leaders need to be pastoral, compassionate, and nonjudgmental. The need to improve these qualities was expressed throughout the synodal process.
2. The Church must be a beacon of hope, and a source of opportunities for praise, worship, receiving the sacraments and fellowship. These opportunities must be open to everyone, regardless of race or culture. Respondents want to gather together at the Lord's Table at all times but especially when they are grieving or when they are happy. They want to pray together, for each other, for the world, for peace. The people are saying they not only want to be fed, but they also want to help feed others, as well, through ministry to those in need, alongside neighboring parishes – *As One*.
3. People connect with God in the liturgy in different ways. For some (a small minority) it is the liturgy that was used prior to Vatican II. For others (the vast majority) it is the liturgy in the vernacular that was promulgated after Vatican II. There was general recognition of the various ways in which liturgy can be licitly celebrated. Pastors/priests need to be sensitive to what will be spiritually uplifting for their parishioners in the celebration of the liturgy. Catechesis regarding liturgical practices is critically important especially when changes are made.
4. The People of God believe and say “that through Mass and the Eucharist and in serving others we find joy as we strive to be in community.” They called for more opportunities for prayer together regarding issues affecting our world. They also expressed a strong desire to gather in social settings as Catholics by providing opportunities for picnics, festivals, and celebrations of church feasts that are more family-based. Additionally, there was a desire for more regular post-Mass social opportunities. It is important that these social events take place at different times to accommodate working schedules.
5. A loud and strong theme was expressed that the people want good, challenging, effective homilies that are relevant to today's life and issues, i.e. “how can what we hear today help us to grow in our spiritual lives, in life's challenges, and in advancing the Mission of the Church?” They want homilies that in a short amount of time apply the Gospel to everyday life and Catholic Social Teaching.

6. There is a critical need for an effective means to re-engage the youth and young adults in the faith, in all cultures. The youth are the future of our church. Please reach out to them, invite participation, and provide programs that will help increase their faith and encourage participation. Once engaged, listen to, and respect their needs, ideas, and opinions. Of concern is that in some parishes, Spanish-speaking youth groups have been discouraged in the name of “one church – one language.” This attitude of not honoring the diversity of our diocese must be challenged. Also expressed was the need for a Diocesan English Youth and Young Adult Office to work alongside the Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Office.
7. There is also a need to catechize parents so that they can truly be the first educators of the faith by their words and deeds. More opportunities based on working family schedules are needed. This catechesis founded on church doctrine, needs to be multi-lingual and designed for more practical implementation, but using less “churchy” terminology.
8. A Church that journeys together needs to be an example of unity, to be welcoming and non-judgmental. People are calling for clergy to be consistent and unified in moral teaching, at all levels of the church. Of great concern is the feeling that they receive conflicting direction from church leaders, particularly on current moral issues. Too many respondents reported they felt unwelcome, judged, and criticized. Avenues need to be created to make new and longtime parishioners feel more genuinely welcomed when they come to Mass, parish events or the parish office.
9. The laity expressed a desire for pastors/priests to connect with all parishioners, not just active members, or large donors. They want priests to be more accessible and get more involved in parish and community activities. Many respondents commented that priests should be relieved of their administrative responsibilities so that they can minister more fully to the sacramental and spiritual needs of their parishioners. For this to happen, priests must be willing to allow laity to take on more responsibility in the parish. As we continue to endure the shortage of priests, it is clear that the laity stand ready to help. What is required is the willingness by clergy and parish leadership to invite, form, and train them.

The priests in their listening sessions expressed the challenge of connecting beyond the parishioners who are currently active. They desire to reach out and invite those not present but are not sure of effective ways to accomplish this.

10. Synodality also needs accountability. When diocesan wide directions are given by Bishop Cotta, directly or through Diocesan Office staff, to the pastor/priest or parish leaders, there needs to be follow-up and regular reporting to ensure consistent implementation throughout the diocese. The people want quality leaders (clergy and lay) who will be held accountable for creating a unified, welcoming and synodal church. To that end, priests/parish leaders need to be open to feedback from the people. Of widespread concern is the need for consistent policies and implementation throughout the Diocese regarding the requirements

and celebration of the sacraments.

11. Respondents clearly conveyed the need to form a Diocesan Pastoral Council and the creation or resumption of Parish Pastoral Councils.
12. The Church in Stockton is rich in cultural diversity. The people want a church that is accepting and welcoming to peoples of all cultures and backgrounds; a church that honors the many traditions, devotions, and customs. From the concerns voiced by the respondents, it is clear that our Church is struggling to live as a multi-cultural church and more attention needs to be paid to all cultures: racial, linguistic, and societal.
13. The marginalized are too often ignored. Examples of groups of people whose wisdom is missing, noted by the respondents, include the poor, the homeless, the disabled, the sick, the addicted, the elderly, the divorced/separated, the LGBTQIA+, and the Catholics who have stopped attending Mass. Quality leaders (clergy and lay) are needed who will be responsible for creating a unified, welcoming church that knows, hears, responds to the needs of those on the peripheries.
14. The need to provide programs/services for the mentally and physically challenged, the deaf, seniors, and homebound is an important concern for many respondents. Suggestions included providing more handicapped parking, wheelchair access, sign language, transportation, etc. Sacramental preparation programs for the disabled were especially mentioned.
15. Listening Sessions were held with the LGBTQIA+ community. They were thankful to be asked to participate in the Synod to express their joys and sadness with the church. It was clear how much they desire to be active members of the Catholic Church but have not been welcome. Many experiences of being judged and alienated were shared. They hope the church will find ways to welcome and accept them.

Based on all responses the Church is struggling with the LGBTQIA+ issue. They want to reach out to the LGBTQIA+ community but are unsure how to do this in a pastoral and non-judgmental way that remains true to church teaching. This issue, and our lack of a clear approach, keeps many young people away from the Church.

16. The People of God want opportunities for adult faith formation to grow in their personal faith journey. They desire a variety of methods, both in person and online for this formation including workshops, outside speakers, bible study, and ongoing catechesis. They also see a need for improvement of the religious education for youth and young adults. Strong but quiet voices also called for a focus on specialized areas including NFP, cultural awareness, and mental health.
17. The need for better communication was a theme noted by almost all respondents. Improvements were recommended between the diocese & parishes, parish to parish, parish to

parishioner, between parish ministries, diocese to priests, deacons, religious sisters, priest to priest, deacon to deacon, diocese to parishioners, and diocese to society. Respondents called for better use of modern means of communication such as social media, websites, email, text and apps.

18. The participants also want more transparency in all areas of Church communications: financial matters, handling of sexual abuse, changes in liturgical practice, or any other areas where the laity as a royal priesthood are able to contribute to the decision-making process.
19. When asked how parishes could make better connections with neighboring parishes there was a strong desire that opportunities be created to allow parishes to collaborate and invite each other to spiritual events like Mass, processions, retreats, and educational programs. Meetings between ministry leaders at neighboring parishes (possibly within a deanery) to share or exchange ideas, best practices and information were suggested. An idea expressed frequently was that priests occasionally celebrate Mass at neighboring parishes to allow both clergy and parish communities to feel connected.
20. The wisdom and gifts women bring to the church have been undervalued and not respected. Many women want to share their gifts as leaders in the Catholic Church. Therefore, it is important to invite women to serve in leadership positions, in liturgical events, and in decision making processes. “The spirit is calling women to participate in leadership and the mission of the Church to complement the current priestly role.”
21. Parishioners spoke of the value of the deacon within the parish and encouraged an increased role. The deacons expressed at their listening session a frustration with the relationship between pastor/priest and deacon in too many cases. The acceptance of the role of the deacon varies widely by parish/priest.
22. People expressed a desire to have Bishop Cotta visit their parishes more often. They would like to see him at other events rather than just for Confirmation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SYNOD TEAM**

1. The synod team believes that the synod process should continue in the diocese to focus on issues that can be addressed locally. Only a small portion of the People of God participated during this synod and a more long-term strategy to reach and listen to the remaining unrepresented group needs to be undertaken. The list of voices unheard, and their missing wisdom, during this process was staggering.
2. Participants indicated a substantial number of issues that can be addressed at the local level. The team recommends that the items listed in the “Key Takeaways” section be examined by the Bishop and Pastors to discern which ideas could be initiated in the short term, i.e. prior to

the start of the 2023 Synod in Rome. Feedback is critical to credibility. As the action steps are determined, they should be shared with the people of the diocese or parish.

3. It is important that the Diocesan Pastoral Council be reinstated. One of their first responsibilities should be to read this report and develop an implementation plan. Parishes are also advised to form (or reactivate) Pastoral Councils and establish a regular meeting schedule. These councils should reflect the diversity within each parish.
4. The participants indicated a desire to be more informed about what is happening in their parishes and throughout the diocese. Our current methods and structure for communication are inadequate. Participants do not just want to receive information; they desire that their voices be heard by the leadership of parishes and the diocese. A plan needs to be developed to assure open and effective communication through training and investment in adequate tools.
5. A challenge in many parishes is the entrenchment of long-serving ministers and committee members. This prevents new people from entering into ministry within the parish and limits the exchange of ideas, solutions, and information. Pathways for new members, staff and leadership should be identified.
6. It is strongly recommended that this report be posted on the diocesan website under the Synod tab, shared on parish websites, and a summary published in parish bulletins. Each parish will be provided with the responses offered by members of their parish. Pastors should share this information as well.
7. The importance of the homily in the lives of the people requires ongoing formation and evaluation of those who preach the Word of God.
8. To assist the diocese and parishes in the struggle to embrace our multi-cultural diocese, a committee focused on Intercultural Competencies at the diocesan level should be established.
9. The LGBTQIA+ community needs to be welcomed in our parishes in ways that are pastoral and non-judgmental. Clergy and lay leaders need continued formation and training in reaching out to this community.
10. The role of the permanent deacon is an important gift to the church. It should be embraced consistently by all pastors/priests to allow the deacon to fully participate in and live the ministry to which he has been called.

## Table of Attachments

Attachment A - Statistical Information

A1 - Listening Session Statistics

A2 – Online Individual Survey Statistics

~~Attachment B—Synthesizing Information (Tally sheets not released publicly)~~

~~—B1—Joys & Obstacles~~

~~—B2—Whose Wisdom are we Missing?~~

~~—B3—Youth & Young People~~

~~—B4—How is Journeying Together happening in your local church?~~

~~—B5—Church Authority/Leadership~~

~~—B6—Culture~~

~~—B7—Making connections with....~~



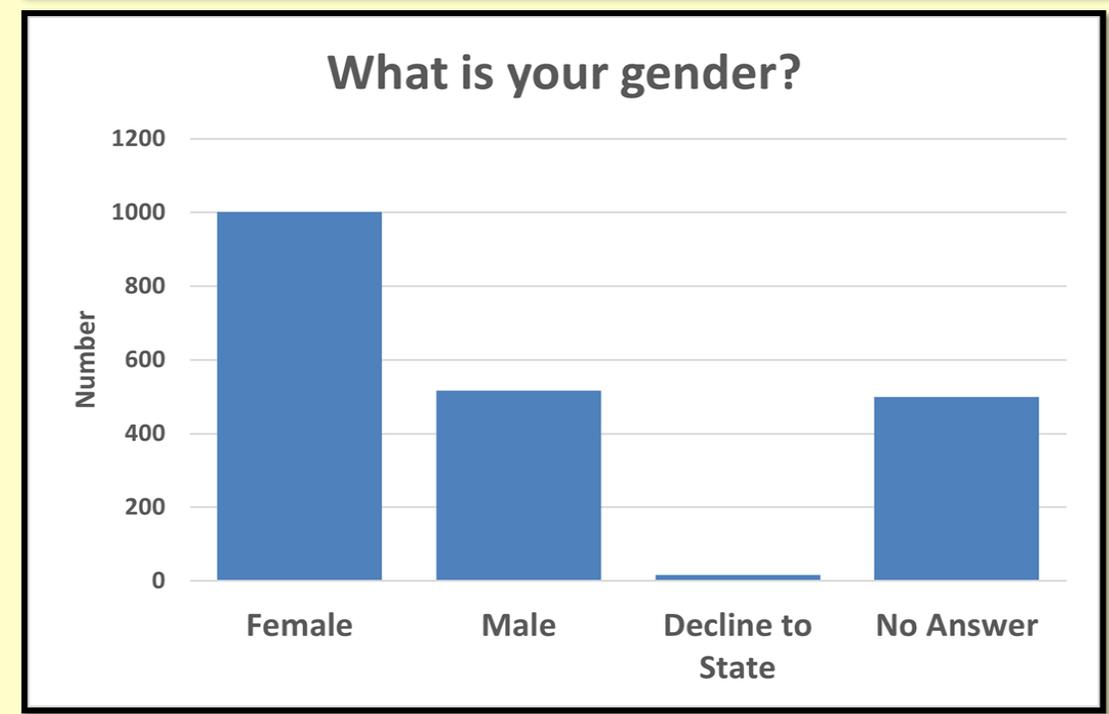
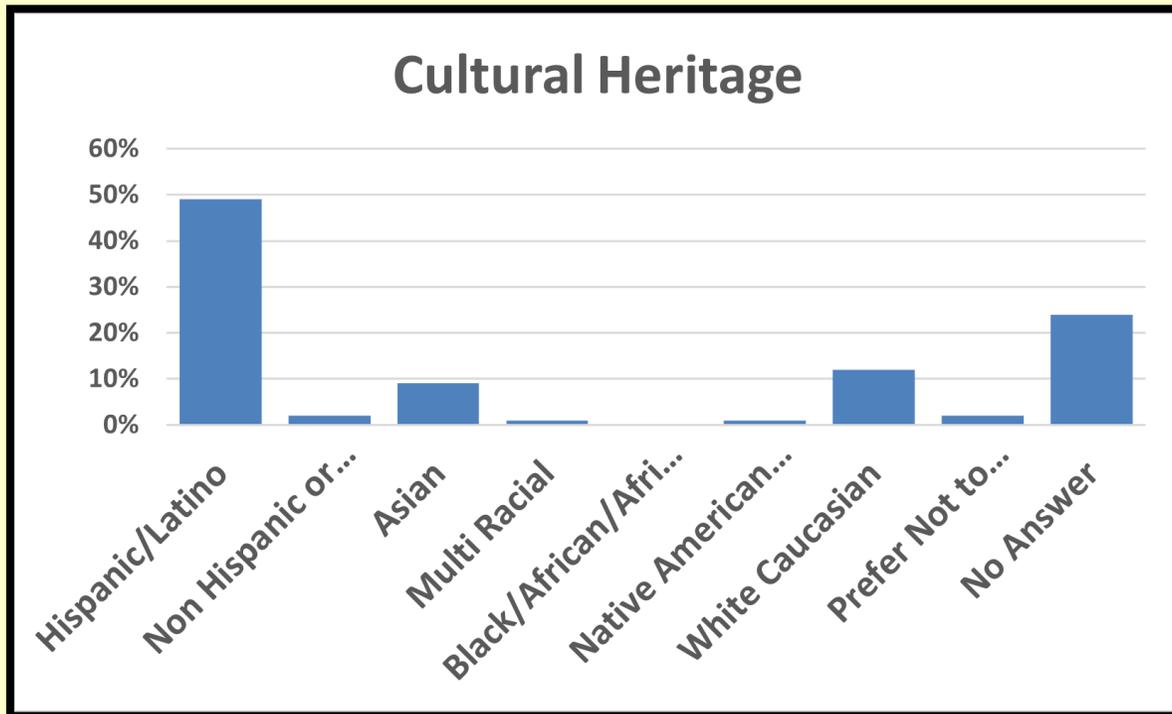
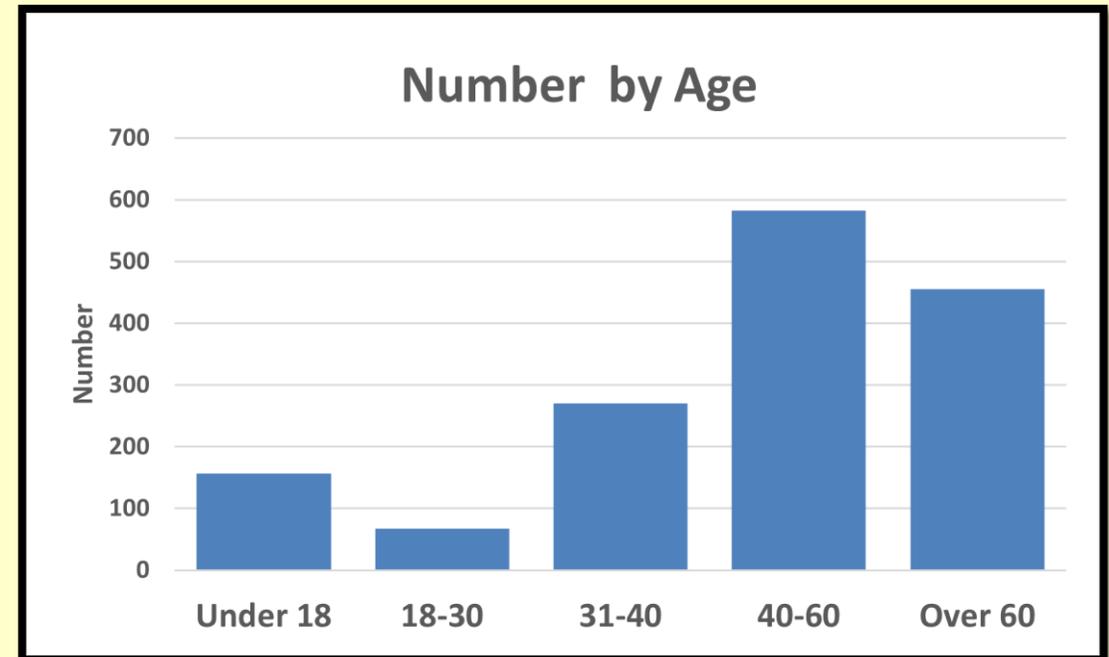
# Attachment A

## Statistical Data

### Diocese of Stockton, California

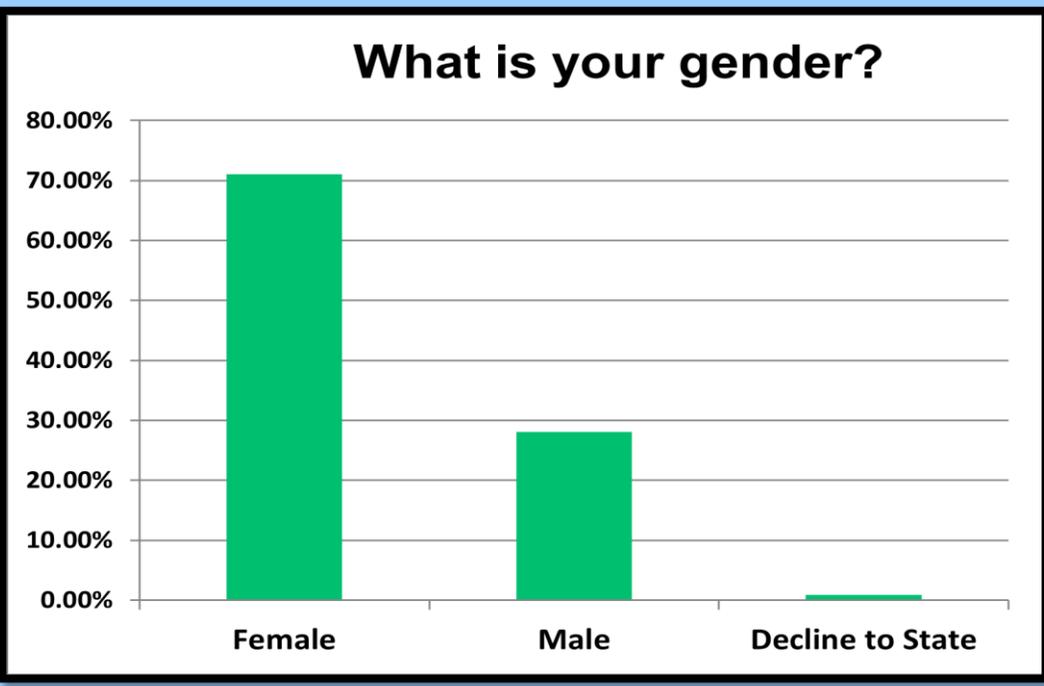
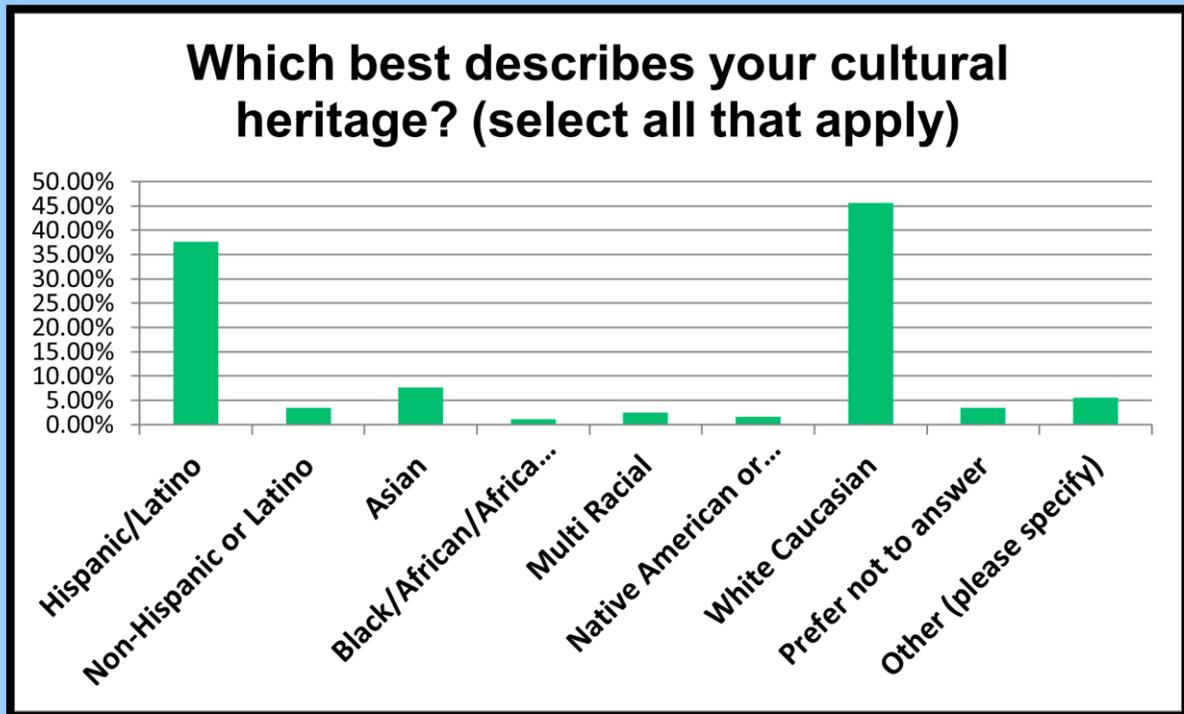
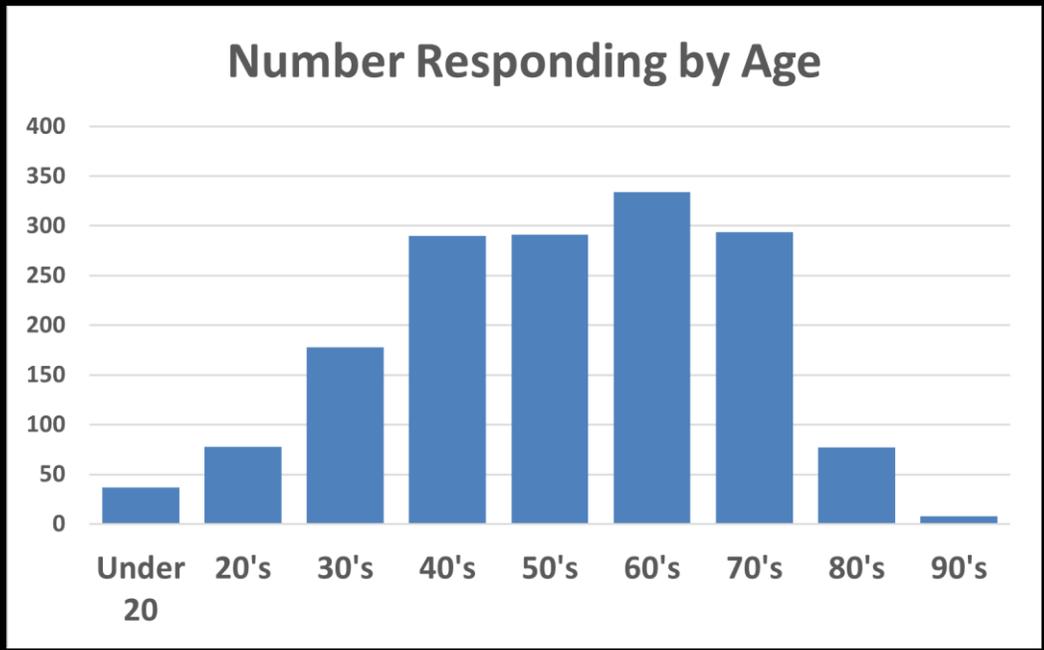


# Listening Session Statistics

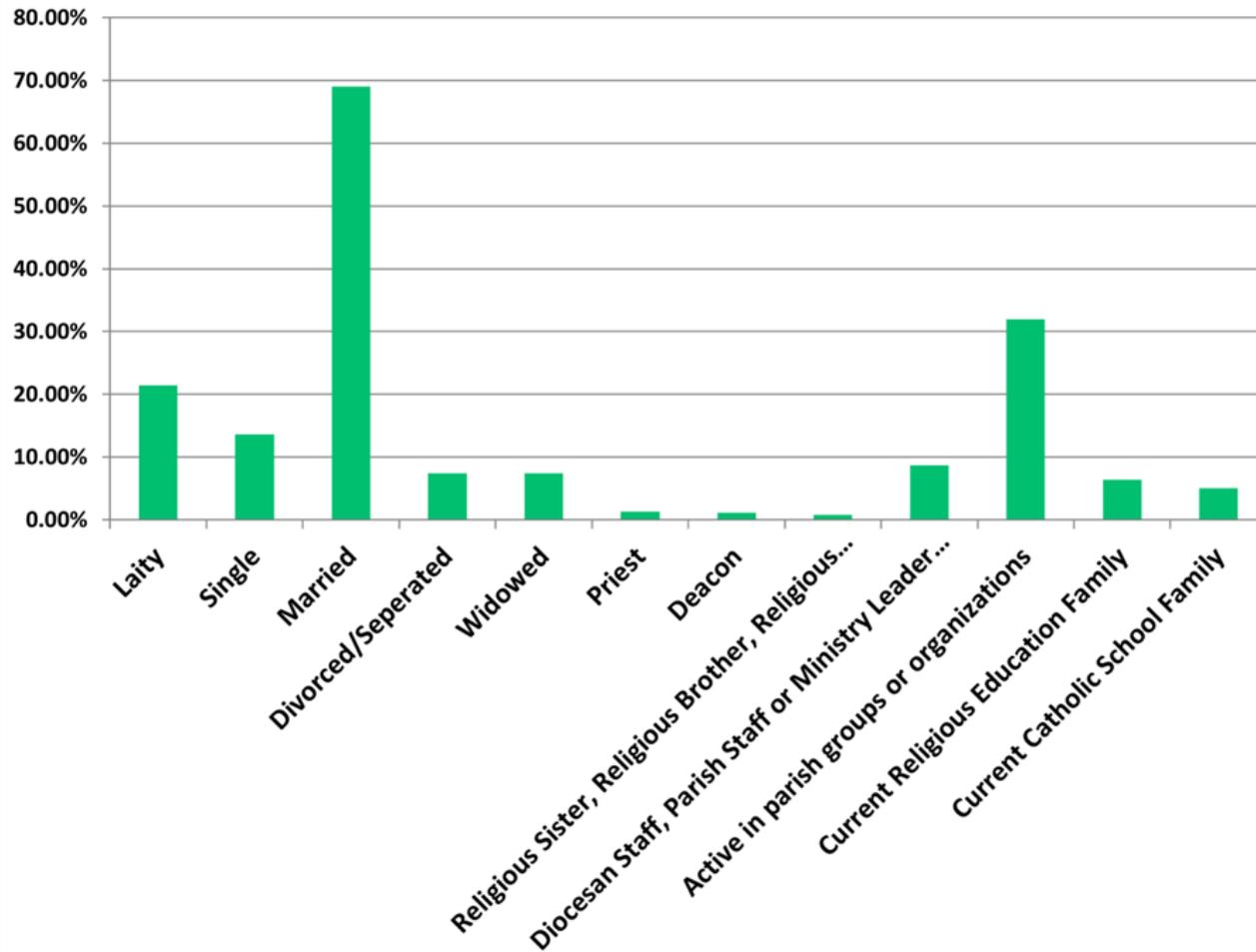




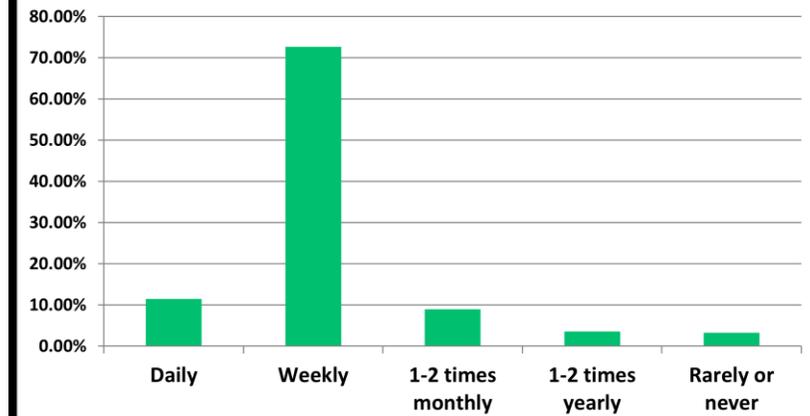
# Individual Survey Statistics



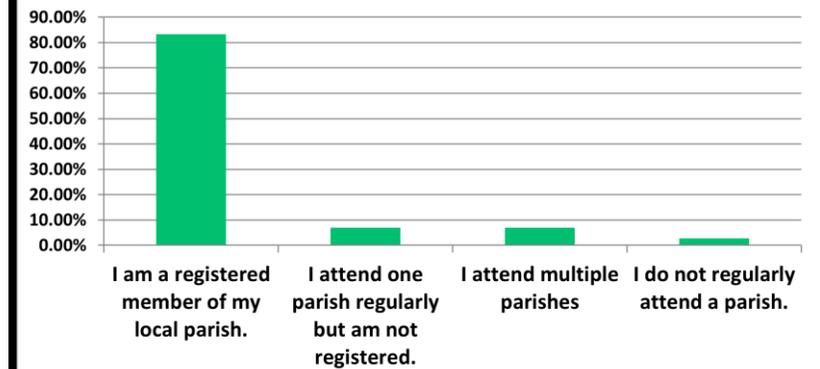
### Tell us more about your state in life. (Select all that apply)



### How often do you attend Mass?



### Which best describes your relationship to a local parish?



**Please review the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with each.**

