



November 2022

Archdiocese of Boston

Synod on Synodality – Archdiocesan Synthesis

In late July of 2022, the Archdiocese of Boston submitted the to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops the synthesis, found below, of the work of a number of Parishes, communities, and groups.

This Synod was a Synod on **Synodality**. Therefore the primary aim of the synod was to help us to talk about and to develop better skills in listening deeply to one another.

In the course of such discussions, many issues arose, and many parishes and groups chose to include the various concerns raised in their discussions as a part of their own local Synod report submitted to the Archdiocese. We have tried to be faithful in representing those concerns in the synthesis we ourselves submitted to the USCCB, without forgetting that the Synod was more about the process of listening itself rather than about the issues that inevitably get raised when we listen to one another.

The USCCB itself has now presented its own document, entitled the *National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023 Synod: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*, to the Holy See. Links to that document, in English and Spanish, can be found here: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/us-national-synthesis-2021-2023-synod>

Archdiocese of Boston – Synod on Synodality Synthesis

The Archdiocese of Boston conducted the pre-Synod phase from August of 2021 through July of 2022 although because of COVID most parish meetings happened in April, May, and June of 2022. Twelve training and information sessions for parish leaders were held, in person and online, during February, March, and April. Some thirty Parishes and other institutions participated in local Synod meetings and contributed to this document.

Because of Boston's significant experience in working with the survivors of clergy sexual abuse over these last twenty years, and because we have a large and well-formed community of survivors, many of whom are accustomed to being asked for input on issues, we have decided to devote about half of this document to their feedback, which is in Section Three.

As an overall comment, it should be noted that most parishioners who participated in the Synod sessions were pleased to have the opportunity to do so, and were hopeful, even though many were not optimistic that great change would come about as a result of the Synod.

Section One – What gives you joy in the life of the Church, and what causes you concern?

Joy comes from the Sacraments, from well celebrated Liturgy, from good music and good homilies at Mass, from the participation of families in parish life including in Family Masses, from having one's children receive the sacraments, from Liturgies that form personal prayer (both individually and in group settings), from relationships formed in parish life and especially in small groups, from the Archdiocese's ongoing and public commitment to protect children, from excellence in pastoral care and leadership, from an experience of the church as one's home, from ethnic and cultural and linguistic diversity within the church, from the church's ongoing work in areas of social justice and support for the poor, the hungry, the marginalized, immigrants, and the unborn, from the bold use of technology in forming alternative venues for experiencing the life of the Church and even its liturgies, especially during COVID, from support for families, from cooperation with other communities of faith, including other Christian communities, Jewish communities, and Muslim communities, from parishes that are making an attempt to make all people feel welcome in their communities, including LGBTQ persons.

The lack of young people in church is a cause of significant concern. Some people think that young people have no interest in being a part of the church because of its weaknesses and blunders (and, for some respondents, the lack of inclusivity). There is lots of concern that many church leaders, although obviously aware of the lack of young people and the dangerous implications that has for our future seem paralyzed and unable to do anything effective to address this issue.

Additionally, people are worried about the various scandals that rock the church, the abuse of power by the hierarchy, and the financial scandals at the Vatican. While many recognize that the Archdiocese is working hard at the protection of children, some wonder whether the commitment to that goes as high as the Vatican (and they point to the issues with Theodore McCarrick in 2018), and some question the commitment of their local parishes, especially since there was a low number of parishes that engaged the Cardinal's request in April of 2022 that parishes set aside a particular weekend for prayer for survivors.

The difficult questions around staffing parishes now are a source of concern and anxiety to many. We don't have enough priests to staff our parishes well, and we don't have an increase in vocations that would alleviate those problems in the future. Some parishes identify that their priests are very overworked.

There are worries about the many things that divide us as a church, and that make listening to one another difficult. Those divides include:

- Clergy and laity
- Those who want to strengthen the church by strengthening traditions and those who want to strengthen the church by embracing new ideas

- Those who want to withdraw from the current culture and those who want to embrace the current culture
- Those who want to challenge the magisterium constantly and those who want to embrace the magisterium no matter what
- Political conservatives and political liberals
- The young and the old

One parish reports that a sentiment expressed almost universally, by both more traditionally minded parishioners and those with a more liberal perspective of Catholicism, is a feeling of confusion and/or frustration caused by inconsistent, ambiguous, and at times contradictory messaging coming from clergy, bishops, cardinals and the Holy See. Catholics from all viewpoints and perspectives are struggling, frustrated and in many cases angry. It is very difficult for Catholics today to know what makes a Catholic a Catholic. Are there things one must do, or NOT do, to be able to identify as a member of the Catholic faith community?

One parish reports: A strong sentiment of lack of transparency and accountability emerged throughout our preparation for and execution of the local Synod consultation. Many of the lay faithful voiced suspicion that the clergy were not open to hearing the views of the laity. The erosion of trust was primarily rooted in the clergy sexual abuse crisis, but that was not the only source of their uncertainty. While the Synodal Committee and many participants expressed satisfaction and even optimism at the opportunity to come together for synodal listening, and a desire for it to continue, many expressed concern that their thoughts would ultimately not be read or received by local bishops, nor shared with the Synod of Bishops.

There is significant concern about the role of women in the church, and the treatment of women. Many groups reflected that they would like to see women have a stronger voice in many levels, or even every level of the life of the church. Some call for an increased role for women in the liturgy. Some call for the ordination of women to the diaconate. Some call for the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopacy.

There are many people who are in the church but who have a stunted voice because they are marginalized in some way. Those include the poor, immigrants, LGBTQ, parents of gay or transgender children, the divorced, the uneducated, survivors of clergy sexual abuse, people who prefer the traditional Latin Mass, the homebound, prisoners, the homeless, people who are excluded from the Sacraments, people who have left the Church, people who are angry with the Church, people with disabilities, people whose parishes have closed, youth, the elderly, and the unborn. Many say that our future depends upon inclusivity, and that we are failing in many areas.

There is a particular concern about anti-black racism in the Archdiocese. Some say that the archdiocese has a lack of understanding of the situation of Black children, women, men, and elders, and that the Black Catholic Community is not well recognized. They point to the closing of the Office of Black Catholics some years ago.

There is concern among the community of Catholics who worship at the Traditional Latin Mass in the Archdiocese of Boston. They say the Ancient Mass is sacred, true, good, beautiful, reverent, solemn, and serious. They see the love and effects of the Traditional Mass reflected in their children. People seem to be willing to travel great distances to be able to attend the traditional Mass. They say that the Traditional Latin Mass is particularly valued by young people and young families, and that it has the power to draw in unbelievers and the lapsed, that it contributes to the liturgical life of the Archdiocese by fulfilling the call of the Second Vatican Council for the retention and use of Latin in the liturgy, and that the holiness

and reverence of the priest offering the Mass can be infectious. They have concern that their celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass will be curtailed.

Finally, there is a concern that the Synod itself is not authentic, that no one will actually hear our voices.

Section Two – How can we do a better job of listening to one another?

The question of listening to one another was a central topic in the various synodal sessions held around the archdiocese. There was general agreement that listening to one another is both very fruitful and very difficult. It has always been difficult to listen, but with the increase in strife and division within families, within our local communities, within our parishes, within our nation, and within our church, listening becomes more and more difficult. This difficulty spills over into family life, into parish life, into our municipalities, into our political discourse, and into our conversations on almost any topic at almost any level. It is difficult to listen to someone with whom one does not agree, and there is a full measure of disagreement on almost every topic in our current antagonistic culture.

Real, substantial listening is described in many ways in the synod feedback. Some call it contemplative listening, or deep listening, or serene listening. It almost certainly involves setting aside one's own desire to be heard in order to hear another's voice.

Honest collaboration through good listening is key to resolution of issues and moving forward.

While strategies for listening have to seep through all levels of our interactions, there is a sense that sessions dedicated to listening are key. For instance, in parish council meetings, it is obvious that in most meetings the council has to have an agenda in which they conduct some necessary business. But many respondents spoke about the advantage of occasional council meetings in which there might be no agenda, but rather just listening to one another.

A strategy that can work for such listening is that each member speak, and while that member is speaking, everyone else just listens. There is no need to respond, and therefore while the person is speaking, the other members don't have to be crafting a response in their heads. They can simply listen. Then, after an appropriate period of silence, the next member can speak.

Some parishes had synod sessions in which they simply practiced listening to one another, rather than raising issues.

There is a recognition that in general conversations there are barriers to listening, and an awareness of those barriers can help. There can be inertia in conversations – an idea is presented, and the first response is to not say anything, so the idea goes undiscussed. This happens often at council meetings. Cultural and language barriers can be an obstacle to listening. Technology can be an assistance, but it can also diminish the attention being given to the conversation.

Silence is a critical component to listening. It is necessary to begin with one's own inner listening to God's voice and then sharing it with others. Listening and prayer flow into one another. More silent time at Mass helps us to learn to be better listeners, as does the practice of Holy Hours and saying the Rosary.

Lay people have something to say to the whole community, and even lay people who are not marginalized but are in the center of parish life can have voices that are never heard, because the structure of the parish does not allow for it to happen.

Sometimes even communities that have a sense of themselves as being welcoming can fail at listening. Sometimes an inner, core group, which can be very necessary to get things done in the parish, can also be an obstacle to a multiplicity of voices being heard.

Listening happens better when we all acknowledge that we are sinners.

People have different presumptions and styles of communication – this requires patience to listen and absorb the message. We should avoid prejudicial or trigger language.

We should practice specifically listening, in a group, to people who have opinions that are different from our own. But we should also recognize that listening is best when it is one on one.

We have to have an openness in our communities to those who “just want to be left alone.”

Listening is an art that needs to be preceded by love and respect. Eye contact and awareness of one’s own body language is vital as is a non-confrontational attitude when listening to the other.

Listening requires real humility. The power of the person doing the listening can be an obstacle to listening.

We should be studying what other Christian churches do in order to listen.

There are many things our parishes could do to listen better. It is important that names be known, so something like once a month we could all wear name tags at Mass. Parish Councils could hold opening listening sessions, using a town hall format, several times each year. A group could be assigned to manage communication, in both directions, so that people have better access to the pastor. Shorter term limits for Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Councils might help, as would regularly publishing the names of council members. Elected Parish Council membership would be helpful. The Parish Council could maintain a suggestion box. When possible, interviews should be held with people who are leaving the parish. Surveys, both paper and online, can be a big help. Listening will happen better if there is a defined process and commitment to listening.

Food brings people together and can foster conversation, so coffee and donuts and spaghetti suppers and the like help parishioners to talk with one another. Encouragement at those events to sit and talk with people one might not know can help to keep them from fostering a sense of exclusivity.

Listening sessions do not always need to be held in the parish facilities. Local neighborhood meetings in the homes of the families of parishioners can be a good, non-threatening way to listen.

Sometimes listening can be a targeted form of pastoral care, especially in bereavement ministry and other kinds of support groups.

Parishioners should be encouraged to find their voice in faith sharing and giving witness as well, including during (or perhaps before or after) Mass, and at other parish gatherings.

We have to be mindful that major decisions about parish life are often made with little or no explanation.

Parishes would be well served by the practice of listening across borders, to other Catholic Parishes.

Two parishes held sessions specifically with teens. They were pleased when there were acknowledgements that anyone was listening to them, and uncertain that it would make a difference. They were realistic about the limits of online communication.

Because “being heard” is not the same as “getting your own way,” there at least has to be a better way of letting people know that they have been heard.

It is harder to listen to someone than to invite them to volunteer on some committee or for some event.

The Archdiocese of Boston can also do a better job of listening. Regular visits by bishops and other archdiocesan officials to open meetings at parishes would help. Clericalism stifles personal growth, and therefore the seminaries need to be more integrated into mainstream educational institutions so that the seminarians learn to interact with others. Tension around the closing of parishes and the moving of priests has eroded the level of trust between parishioners in some places and the archdiocese.

Perhaps an ombudsman committee of lay people that has regular access to the Cardinal and the Vicar General should be established to review parish concerns on a regular basis.

There should be a more rapid turnover of diocesan leadership.

Sometimes the archdiocese tries to assist with a community without having substantially listened to the parishioners and their perception of their needs.

We continue to have second class Catholics. Wealthy parishes have “more seats at the table” than do poor parishes.

Regional Bishops and Episcopal Vicars could find ways, through email and social media perhaps, of having more regular communication with the parishioners at the parishes in their region. A monthly email from the Bishop or Episcopal Vicar could go a long way towards building a sense of connection.

Many parishes included a statement that the archdiocese needs more women in leadership roles.

The universal church also needs to listen better to the needs of the faithful.

Section Three – What are the survivors of clergy sexual abuse saying in the Synod?

On March 5, 2022, Bishop Reed met with a group of survivors who shared with him the following reflections on how survivors are heard and are feeling about the Church.

- Survivors are here so that the voices of all survivors stay present, acknowledge successes and failures
- Communication within the Church is important
- June 2022 is the 20-year mark of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (sometimes referred to as Dallas Charter) - this group continues to focus on/promote 'why we are still talking about it'
 - because we are still here
 - because a history forgotten is a history repeated
 - because many people are still struggling
 - because re-injuries continue to occur
 - When survivors talked to the Cardinal about what twenty years out means to us ... We are still here!
 - For one survivor, the experience was in the 90's. When this survivor initially came forward to the Archdiocese, they thought the accountability was done. The Church was pretty much “Ok, you've been acknowledged, compensated, healing is done and so is the relationship.” But this survivor group experience is that we are witnesses to reconciliation for survivors and for the community; it is not just about us as individuals but also for those not present and for those not wanting/able to communicate with the Office of Pastoral Support & Outreach.

- It is how our experience relates to reconciliation in the wider sense
- They agreed with statements that the Synod process is to allow people to speak and express how they think the Church can grow, become more Christian, and for leaders [to be connected and understand]
- One survivor spoke about how they came back through a priest that they had known, and joined a *Why Catholic* prayer group
 - a lot of people in the pews are hurting.
 - Some people thought it was all over, then came the 2018 revelations (McCarrick, the Seminaries, Pope making bad comments about survivors speaking up, El Salvador, Pennsylvania)
 - Some priests decided to speak about it and some would not.
 - There are still a lot of feelings about it even if some people would rather not talk about or address it.
 - In 2017, the Archdiocese conducted a survey which indicated that the sexual abuse crisis is a top reason for some people not coming to Church. Some are still reeling from it, yet when one looks at bulletins and priests' writings on that question, there is often no mention of sex abuse.
 - They can suffer guilt as survivors, in terms of feeling like they are betraying other survivors by supporting the church, working with the church [on survivor advocacy] and attending church.
 - They want to hear from other survivors who are not in church, from those who are disgruntled.
 - [Clergy sexual abuse and that it has happened] is the elephant in the room.
 - But don't forget us!
 - The Church needs to keep praying and talking about clergy sex abuse, and about us (survivors).
 - Some people are disgruntled that their priests aren't talking about it, and some people say, "Why is it still being talked about?"
 - There is a lot of anger and lack of trust.
- Silence for a survivor can hurt and be very loud.
 - The worst thing to say is nothing.
 - We are here to be part of this family, to be with Jesus, with God - this is what keeps us here.
- We don't want to live in the past, but to move forward you must acknowledge and recognize the past. You have to understand what happened.
 - We need to try to help people who can't pull out of it, as much as possible.
 - We understand and recognize that faith and God are still there, but at the same time this still happened.
 - [This survivor, when giving talks] only spends one minute on their personal story because it's all about the comeback (that's what the groups want to hear).
 - People will listen [to survivors] because they want to hear how you crushed it - through faith, prayer, and all that we believe in.
 - [The survivor in the talks they give] gives examples of how my life hurt/sucked, how horrible things happened - but "then I looked up and He was still there."
 - It's all about pulling people out of the darkness.
- A lot of work has been done in the Church, more eyes are on our children than ever before and that **MUST NOT STOP**, the child protection, classes, and all.
 - There are things to help come out of the 'badness' and into the 'goodness.'
 - The Church has had SO much hurt but has to come through it - trust, communication, and willingness has to be there by the church.

- The Church has had the courage for the things that have worked and needs to continue with courage to go through the things that still have to be done.
 - The Church needs to support survivors - needs to be a model and translate across the board to more people. Things are available [to help] and we need feedback from people.
 - We need to be able to protect and still be vulnerable.
 - It is a good time for the Church to say these things have worked and/but we keep moving forward to do more.
- It is an ongoing struggle.
 - We need to have reverence for our kids.
 - Survivors have gone to parishes and groups (seminarians, deacons, etc.) for discussions.
 - There was a lot of anger after the 2018 revelations, some parishes asked for staff or survivors with staff to come.
 - There would be listening, questions and discussion, and participants talking about what their hope for the Church is.
 - People were willing to be vulnerable to share how they feel, what they wanted and hoped.
 - Shortly after one of the very well attended parish meetings a priest was approached by a survivor and able to help save the person's life.
 - People have come up after a Healing Rosary or group discussion to reach out for help. Sometimes people just want to talk, express gratitude to hear what the Church has been doing and seeing survivors still able to be connected/supported or to talk about something that has happened to someone they know.
- God works in amazing ways, there is a lot of grace - the grace of the Church to admit it has done wrong and grace to move on for the people of God.
- Priests have also been disgusted and hurt. There have been good actions taken in response to that (such as a Twenty-Four Hour Fast and Prayer). This has been good for the hosting parish and for the people who attend, and has touched people even beyond the places where those events occur. Events like this have been an opportunity to express the disgust and horror and turn it over to God.
- People/survivors still want to hear the priests say that that they are disgusted and that this is affecting them. It is okay that priests don't have all of the answers but they acknowledge it still. We are in pain together.
- One survivor's dream is to have something bigger.
 - How do we evangelize?
 - How to evangelize to those not here in the Church, to families who have been hurt?
 - At some point the survivor who was hurt had a connection with the Church and that fact is profound.
 - If even one person is missing from the Eucharist, then we all lose.
- For some survivors (and family, loved ones, friends) walking away represented a loss but they just could not stay connected.
- It's like a lamp in the window. There are those that don't see the lamp - don't see the entry point to come back
 - [The survivor] would like to hear more at the local level of what is being done at the Commission from Rome instead of having to go look for things.
 - In what ways can the work of the Church be more broadly shared? It gives the opportunity for some to see a glimmer of things being done.
 - Some beautiful statements that one survivor heard helped
 - The Cardinal initially saying that 'as a bishop I am your shepherd, and as a friar I am your brother.'
 - Now Pope Francis saying 'go to the peripheries.'

- From those messages this survivor felt safe to come to the church with dignity which was not the experience when they first came forward in the 90's
- Keep it front and center, speak about it in parishes, come together.
- One survivor reads various parish bulletins to see what is happening in relation to survivors, mention of clergy sexual abuse.
 - One pastor wrote about what is keeping people away and did not acknowledge at all the sexual abuse crisis!!
 - We know it is not comfortable to talk about but sometimes you have to be a little uncomfortable and push through it.
- It is important to hear again and again as a priest and a Catholic.
- It can be included in pastor's message at beginning of Mass welcoming people.
- We have to reach parishioners too who are hurt and angry
 - [The survivor] saw fear in the seminarians' eyes before the group discussion started and then when survivors started sharing + entered discussion there was more comfort in the room, and all engaged. The seminarians and young priests are important group to help rebuild the Church.
 - Survivors are meeting with seminarians and deacons regularly now so that clergy can be more comfortable dealing with this, with what to do/how to react when they are approached.
 - [The survivor] wants every priest and nun to be part of a group sitting down with survivors.

On April 5, Bishop Reed met with another group of survivors, who shared the following reflections:

- There is lack of empathy and compassion
- People are afraid of suffering and run away
- There is a lot of anger, hurt and pain that survivors have – are we/the Church willing to deal with the pain and forgiveness needed?
- We have had bad marriages. The messes we've gotten into through life is because of the clergy abuse.
- It is hard to train priests to be able to deal with all of this – sometimes a survivor can't breathe or their triggers from being at church is too much for the priests who take it personally.
- A lot of people do not understand that when the abuse is at the hand of a person who represents Christ, it is so horrible. Even for those without faith – priests violate that – what do you then have to turn to? You blame God, and it can be hard to see other priests as not abusers/related to what has been done. It is physical and emotional abuse but also the spiritual is taken from you, the damage through faith is unimaginable.
- Just walking by a church can be triggering, there can be triggers in Scripture and in the Pope's teachings.
- One survivor slowly came back to the church but still questions everything.
- It is hard for priests out there, but more must be done.
- The church can do more to help priests in the parishes understand; it is hard for them to hear the suffering; how hard it is on the survivors and the rippling effects on family and everyone. But priests need increased awareness and ability to deal with that.
- A survivor attended a Mass in Pennsylvania soon after the report of abuses were made public and the presiding priest said, 'pray for all priests and bishops' related to the PA report – so after the Mass the survivor pointed out to the priest that he did not say a prayer for those who have been hurt, and the priest's response: 'Wow, it never occurred to me!'
- A lot of people in general do not understand the importance of abuse in general, don't understand the grooming process. Many just say it was all so long ago, 'Let's just move on.' There is always hope and healing, but we still must deal with the junk, and understand why and how it happened.

- We need to find ways to listen more. This past weekend in the Boston Archdiocese was a golden opportunity. [The Cardinal asked that all 4/3/2022 Masses be offered for the Healing of Victims and Commitment to Child Protection.] It was such a disappointment that many pastors/priests/parishes refused to acknowledge in any part, not even one prayer intention (despite much communication on the weekend and being given very helpful info/suggestions for bulletin announcements, homily, prayers of the faithful, music and even a personal note directly from a survivor). It was disappointing for this survivor whose pastor said 'No' to all and would not mention anything related to clergy abuse, or pray for the victims, etc.
 - You have to talk about it.
 - There is no accountability of the priests
- Every time the church does not do something, the Church should be embarrassed. It only indicates more that the church is just giving lip service
- When the USCCB had survivors speak with them some years back, one survivor said then that 'what was done was the closest thing to murder' [and this is felt by survivors].
- Survivors here in the room today and beyond have been addicted to drugs and alcohol because of the abuse, and not had good family/mentor supports in their lives.
- One survivor here today has found a spiritual father in their local parish priest; for the longest time they did not believe in God, it took years to let it out/speak about the abuse and when they did tell their priest they could see his heart and his eyes fill up with tears - - - and hearing him say the Prayers of the Faithful this past weekend for Survivors is the first time it felt good to finally hear that in church. But that is not enough, and once a year is not enough!
- The voices of the abuse victims have been heard on some level, but they also haven't been. 'They just want to push us under the rug and forget about us.' I am frustrated to be pushed in the corner. It's not talked about! They talk about all of the world's problems but don't ask 'How can we help those abused come back?' This leaves us feeling less important, but we are just as important as everyone else! They are welcoming to everyone but us. If Jesus were here, He would be loving us all the time. He would be welcoming us. We need to be heard, otherwise wounds are reopened.
 - The survivor wrote to the Secretary of the Pope and did not receive one response!
 - The survivor knows it was received by them because they have a signed acknowledgment – all of this hurts more with the trust issues, a trust already damaged by the church.
- A lot needs to be done/fixed. It is normal to see the hierarchy's bad behavior. They/the church get power and think they can do whatever they want but this is not what God wanted. There are Cardinals, bishops, and priests with illegitimate children, girlfriends, boyfriends, having sexual relations, etc.
- Our hearts break for those victims of clergy abuse who committed suicide, overdosed, their lives messed up.
- The Church needs to reach out more to understand where the victims are – the basics for what happened in the Gospels, Jesus went to the people in the peripheries. 'They [the leaders] need to smell like the sheep.'
- Talking about 'Higher Power' – One survivor lost their faith 100%, and they have spent the last three years trying to get it back now because they know they need God, but there is not enough being said by the church. They are still trying to cover it up. The survivor blamed a drug relapse after eighteen years of sobriety on God. Who can I turn to??? I don't feel safe in the Church. I try to go to Mass and walk out half-way because it is too hard, the triggers are too much. The survivor fights every day to get out[side]. Anything they see that is related to anything abuse (TV, articles, etc.) triggers them. The impact goes far beyond just the survivor. When they finally let family know of the abuse, they also suffered a loss of their faith. and friends walked away because they didn't want to believe the abuse happened. The survivor doesn't know if they'll ever be able to stay for Communion because not enough is being said.
- We are suffering every single day.

- The memories will never leave, we will have depression in some form for the rest of our life and people say, 'How come you're not better yet...get over it'
- What is the Church going to do to bring us back???
- There need to be changes from the Pope, the Cardinals, and bishops.
- Priests, higher ups, and lay people do not understand – individuals have supported the abusers all those years and that is tough – even people in one survivor's own community now after 20 years later still don't like them or believe them, , and they supported the abuser.
- One person once said, 'I went to that parish with that priest and wasn't abused – what makes you so special?' We are outcasts. We have been told "You are going to cost me my job – why are you so angry, get over it!" I was told by Cardinal Law that I was better off dead. Why are some of these priests actually priests if they are so cold and unsympathetic?
- Because of the trauma from the clergy abuse we can have out-of-body experience when triggered, with labored breathing. All I wanted was someone to acknowledge and recognize me. I never went to the church for money. I'm broken and want to be healed but we won't be healed until the day we pass away. I'm always asking Jesus 'when are you coming?'
- It's all worth it though, to speak up and the work being done improving the processes with cases reported to the church – even though can't take it away [the abuse and pain] the church can ease some of the suffering. It can take steps to ease some of the burden.
- We need to have meetings with priests on the micro (vicariate, regional) levels and then grow from there, also with more macro like presbyteral council, etc. There are plans in works to have survivors meet with groups of priests. This is an obvious priority here after poor participation from many Archdiocese priests this past weekend (the weekend of prayer for survivors).
- Individual conversations can be super helpful for those survivors who are able – discuss 'where was God in all of this?' and applying Scripture teachings.
- From the spiritual perspective – more focus on healing, prayer and healing ministries, hearing frequent recognitions of what survivors carry their whole lives.
- People have come forward when hearing from courageous survivors. Every time survivors have talked it opens the door for someone else to come forward.
- The US has better systems/safe supports/communication in place than a lot of other countries/areas of the world but even with that environment the opportunities are still missed and not enough is being done.
- 'I (as a survivor) have encountered many survivors who have unfortunately encountered a lack of support by good, Catholic resources. By this, I mean resources that are truly Catholic (aka HOLY)! When these good, holy resources are lacking, victims are more likely to be won over by anyone who gives them what they need - to feel believed, to experience empathy, and to feel loved and supported. As a result, I see many victims being preyed on by certain people and/or groups that either don't accurately represent the Catholic Church (and yet claim to be "Catholic") or by groups outside of the Church that go completely against the faith. If the Church truly wishes to live out its mission of saving souls and leading them to Heaven, we all need to be aware of this. If good Catholics don't "get to" victims first, someone else will and the end results might not be good.'
- 'Good, holy priests absolutely need to be more recognized and applauded. There are so many good, holy, supportive priests out there. At the same time, the priests that are not displaying good, holy virtue or who are going against Church teaching need to be admonished. Too many priests are being allowed to continue unchecked and unchallenged as they spread their less than Catholic, less than holy agendas.'
- 'Survivors have not only endured the abuse itself (which includes physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse) but we are being revictimized all over again by poor leadership. There is a severe lack of catechesis (most Catholics don't truly understand their faith and have false perceptions of certain issues) and this affects all Catholics, victims and non-victims, but I feel it especially hurts survivors who are trying to come back into the Church. They are being met with mixed messages. For example, you can go to five different churches and find that the majority of parishioners at each church believe something different when it comes to an issue such as, say, homosexuality.

There is no uniformity. Just look at what is going on in Germany or even in some of the Catholics involved in politics or in other positions of authority. They say they are devout and faithful and yet their actions show something very different. This damages the church as a whole but especially damages the most vulnerable. It's hard enough that survivors have a hard time trusting priests from a physical standpoint. But now it's reached a point where we can't even trust them with our spiritual well-being because there is so much corruption! Isn't that what spiritual leaders are supposed to be for? For caring for our spiritual well-being?? Sadly, that is so often not happening!

- 'The church should be about saving souls, about sharing the light and love of Christ, and about doing what is right. It should not be about conforming to the rest of the world. Unfortunately, we are seeing this all too often. I think many of our leaders recognize (rightly) that they have lost much of their credibility due to the scandal and subsequent cover-up. Leaders now feel the need to tip-toe around certain hot button issues and clerical abuse is one of them. It's "funny" though that they can speak boldly when their stance happens to align with the outside world, particularly with more "progressive" beliefs. The silence needs to end. The fear needs to end. All Catholics need to be comfortable knowing that it really is okay to disagree with people on certain issues (love the sinner, hate the sin). We are being sucked into thinking that we have to agree with everyone on everything because, if we don't, we will be negatively labeled as a this or that.'
- 'A lot of Catholics (priests and bishops included!) are forgetting what it means to be a member of the body of Christ and that it entails being the hands and feet of Christ on earth. Many individuals are caught up in thinking that if they weren't directly affected by sexual abuse, that they have nothing to do with it. They feel confident that they can go about on their merry way and do their own thing. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. This affects all of us and we all need to be a part of the solution. This is a spiritual battle of epic proportions, and we all play a part in it. We all need to figure out how we can best support our brothers and sisters who are suffering. No, we don't need to constantly be discussing the scandal, but it also cannot keep falling onto the backburner. All of us play a part in that.'
- Be mindful always of reinjuries done by the church even if unintentional. Some survivors have shared was the public displays of Cardinal O'Malley meeting with Cardinal Law in Rome especially before he died; and Cardinal participating at Bishop McCormack's funeral since many survivors see Bishop McCormack as part of the cover-ups that occurred here.

In conclusion, the Archdiocese of Boston is grateful to the Holy Father for calling this Synod, and we commit ourselves to praying for the process as it moves forward.