

**Archdiocese of Indianapolis**  
**Strategic Pastoral Planning Committee**  
**Executive Summary: 2024 Listening Sessions and Online Survey**

In the fall of 2024, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis conducted nine Listening Sessions in diverse regions of central and southern Indiana. At the same time, an Online Survey was made available to all via the [archindy.org](https://www.archindy.org) website. The purpose of these activities was to seek the opinions and experiences of Catholics in response to two overarching questions: 1) Where are we today? and 2) Where is God calling us to be?

Listening Sessions in English (7) and Spanish (2) were held in deaneries from August 24 — November 21, 2024. The Online Survey, available during October and early November 2024, gave participants the option of completing questions in either English or Spanish.

Participants were asked to assess strengths and areas of improvement in the following areas:

- ☐ Community Life
- ☐ Evangelization and Catechesis
- ☐ Parish Life
- ☐ Faith Formation and Education
- ☐ Catholic Social Teaching/Service

A total of 391 handwritten surveys were collected following the 9 Listening Sessions and 352 online surveys were submitted. Each survey was read and the results were tallied for the purposes of this Summary Report. The findings will be used by members of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Committee as input for pastoral planning.

Here are some **Key Themes** from the Listening Sessions and Online Survey:

**Community: Where are we today?**

- ☐ Many said they find their parishes to be generally welcoming and supportive, but most agree that much work still needs to be done, especially with “strangers” — immigrants and those who are culturally diverse or who think and act differently.
- ☐ Archdiocesan parishes experience the same kinds of political and cultural tensions and divisions that are evident in the wider community.
- ☐ Declining Mass attendance, reception of the sacraments, and parish membership are viewed as serious problems.



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**Community: Where is God calling us to go?**

- ❑ All members of the parish's community should be welcomed and encouraged to participate fully in the life of the Church as co-responsible leaders and decision-makers.
- ❑ Acts of kindness, patience, tolerance, and compassion are seen as essential to maintaining unity and harmony in the parish family.
- ❑ As members of the one family of God, all are called to see the face of Jesus in others. We are called to be missionary disciples of Jesus who 1) serve others by our words and actions and who 2) engage in respectful dialogue with those who disagree with us.

**Evangelization and Catechesis: Where are we today?**

- ❑ Archdiocesan and parish activities are respected and well-received. The Criterion, Fatima Retreat Center, and parish based catechetical programs for adults, youth, and children are seen as examples of effectiveness in evangelizing catechesis. The National Eucharistic Congress was an exceptional form of public witness.
- ❑ In general, Catholics are not taught how to share their faith with others. As a result, many express fear or a lack of confidence in their ability to proclaim and live the Gospel.
- ❑ Concerns are expressed about people of all ages, but especially youth, who are no longer practicing their faith. The Church too often seems to focus on dogma and rules rather on the personal encounter with Jesus that is (or should be) the heart of Catholic teaching and practice.

**Evangelization and Catechesis: Where is God calling us to be?**

- ❑ Many respondents reflect the consistent teaching of Pope Francis that Catholics are called to move beyond their "comfort zones" and go out to others to share with them their personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- ❑ Better, more intentional, programs are needed to teach Catholics in all regions of central and southern Indiana how to unapologetically give witness to the person of Jesus Christ and to live in ways that authentically reflect Gospel values.
- ❑ All archdiocesan and parish ministries (for example, youth, young adults, engaged couples, families, older adults) should include an element of evangelizing catechesis —



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first introducing people to the power of a personal encounter with Jesus and then helping them to grow in their understanding and practice of the faith.

**Parish Life: Where are we today?**

- ❑ Every parish is different and the experiences of parishioners range from small, close knit communities, on the one hand, to much larger, parishes where the members hardly know one another. Many respondents recognize the importance of having a vibrant faith community that is prayerful and inviting.
- ❑ Concerns are expressed about the number of registered parishioners who do not attend Mass regularly and about parents who don't bring their children to Mass. They point out that confusion about what the Church teaches on contemporary social and moral issues is compounded by the fact that Catholics are not fully engaged in parish life.
- ❑ The shortage of priests, and the resulting stress on clergy who serve in parishes, makes vibrancy and active engagement of parishioners more challenging. Many think that care for priests and pastoral staff should be given more priority.

**Parish Life: Where is God calling us to be?**

- ❑ Parishes should be welcoming communities that respect the dignity of all members with kindness and "friendly inclusion." Members should accept people of all ages and abilities and care for one another even as they reach beyond parish boundaries to minister to others.
- ❑ Individual faith communities should be growing, not stagnant, and they should serve the needs of all ages and circumstances. Ministries should invite and inspire members to be actively engaged, to collaborate with others, and to welcome everyone.
- ❑ Prayer and worship should be the heart of parish life. Sacraments should be lived fully, and liturgies should be vibrant and welcoming. Devotions should be encouraged in keeping with the cultural heritage of different groups within the parish family.

**Faith Formation and Education: Where are we today?**

- ❑ Parents are seen to be the primary religious educators of their children, but many feel ill-equipped to assume this responsibility. Concerns are expressed about the formation



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of youth and young adults who are exposed to the cultural influences of today's society, especially through social media.

- Catholic schools are thriving in some regions of central and southern Indiana, but struggling or unavailable in other areas. Parish faith formation/religious education programs do not receive the same funding or support as schools. Too often, there is a division between “school families” and the rest of the parish.
- Lifelong faith formation of adults, youth, and children is acknowledged to be the key to success in active participation and engagement in the life of the Church. Too often the Sacrament of Confirmation is seen as the end of religious formation instead of as an important milestone in the ongoing formation of young people that is meant to continue and mature through adulthood.

**Faith Formation and Education: Where is God calling us to be?**

- God calls His people to know, love, and serve Him in all stages of life. The need for formation in faith begins in the home where parents introduce their young children to Jesus and educate them in the basics of prayer, worship, and Christian life. This initial formation in faith should continue during adolescence, young adulthood, and throughout the years of adulthood into old age.
- All Catholics should see themselves as “co-responsible” for the Church’s ministry of education and faith formation. Parishioners’ willingness to contribute time, talent, and financial resources to support parish and school faith formation activities is essential to the success of these activities.
- Vibrant spiritual growth and enthusiasm for the truth should be characteristic of faith formation programs for children, youth, and adults. A dry, “academic” approach to faith formation fails to help individuals to encounter the person of Jesus Christ or to seek a better understanding of the difference faith makes in our lives and in our world.

**Catholic Social Teaching/Service: Where are we today?**

- Catholic Charities is recognized as doing outstanding work with limited human and financial resources. Especially today, the witness provided by the Church to a secular world that is dominated by consumerism and is politically divided reveals the presence of Jesus among us.



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- Parish ministries, including food pantries, clothing drives and programs sponsored by St. Vincent de Paul societies and the Knights of Columbus serve a broad spectrum of needs both within parish communities and beyond their geographic boundaries, including nationally and internationally.
- The greatest challenge today is to transcend politics and ideological approaches and concentrate on the Gospel imperative to feed the poor, clothe the naked, and give shelter to the homeless. We are doing a good job here, but more Catholics throughout the Archdiocese need to become engaged in the Church's social ministries through gifts of time, talent and treasure.

**Catholic Social Teaching/Service: Where Is God calling us to be?**

- Greater emphasis should be placed on the Church's mission to serve the poor. As individuals, families, parish communities, and as an archdiocese, we are called to be co-responsible for continuing Christ's work among those in greatest need among us.
- God is calling us to express our faith in action. Every baptized Catholic has a stewardship responsibility to share time, talent, and treasure, which are God's gifts to us, with our sisters and brothers in need. This requires "meeting people where they are" in nonjudgmental ways while also challenging them to encounter Jesus and accept his teaching. It also requires us to move beyond our "comfort zones" and go out to others rather than waiting for them to come to us.
- There are many social needs that are neglected today, and it is the Church's responsibility to call attention to the demands of human dignity and to insist on our protection of those who are most vulnerable, including children (born and unborn), migrants, the elderly, infirm, and victims of sexual abuse and human trafficking. We also have a special need today for be responsible stewards of the Earth, our common home.

**Other Areas of Focus and Hopes for the Church's Future**

Participants in the Listening Sessions and Online Survey were also given the opportunity to identify additional areas of focus and to express their personal hopes for the Church's future. It is not possible to list each of the responses to these questions because there are far too many, but here is a representative summary of the areas of focus and hopes for the future frequently mentioned:



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**Areas of Focus**

- ☐ Vocations and care for the spiritual and temporal needs of clergy. Recruitment and retention of lay ecclesial ministers.
- ☐ Increased communications in parishes and in the Archdiocese. Better use of technology and social media.
- ☐ Support for marriage and families. Expanded youth and young adult ministries.
- ☐ Assistance for persons with physical and mental health challenges.
- ☐ More consistent stewardship education and opportunities for engagement.

**Hopes for the Church's Future**

- ☐ An increase in faith, witness, and mission. Flourishing/thriving/vibrant parishes with the staff we need (bilingual) and financial stability.
- ☐ Growth in membership where all feel welcome and excited about our faith. No parishes closed
- ☐ At least one priest per parish (vocations focus)
- ☐ Faith is a priority; the center of the lives of all people
- ☐ Youth are more engaged and excited about the Catholic faith
- ☐ A serious look at married priests and the role of women in Church leadership
- ☐ Parishioners who step up and take ownership in the parish through stewardship. Remember that ministry happens within the parish and beyond.
- ☐ Programs for mental health / illness and substance abuse
- ☐ Liturgical life of our archdiocese brings all people together regardless of any differences or preferences. Full pews the Catholics come to Mass not for obligation but for the joy of Eucharist. Increased reverence and devotion to prayer. That my church is source of inspiration. To pour our hearts into prayer to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus. All Catholics come home. Be beauty, light, refreshment, and community were all can thrive as a result of closeness to our Lord Jesus Christ. Enough Masses for all the faithful: local and bilingual.
- ☐ Repeat the National Eucharistic Congress for our Archdiocese on a smaller scale as a whole, in deaneries, and/or in parishes. Offer Adoration at all parishes.
- ☐ Ministry/diocesan leaders feel inspired and supported not out of fear, but out of hope, creativity, and love. Grow in love, respect, and tolerance.
- ☐ Find a better direction and go there boldly. Don't be afraid to try new things. Live more by faith and less by judgment.

