

Synod On Synodality

(St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Kingston, Ontario)

In response to Pope Francis' call to the Church to re-discover its deeply synodal nature, St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Kingston held four sessions in person to, "Gather To Listen" throughout February and March 2022, with 55-60 participants.

The purpose of each "Gathering To Listen" session was to collect as many responses as possible to the fundamental synod question, "How Have You Experienced Walking Together As The Church?"

Each of the four sessions emphasized that it is healthy for the Church to pause and listen to the Holy Spirit and to one another. Participants were challenged to ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in expressing their hopes and dreams and concerns for the Church. What was it about the Church that gave them joy and what broke their heart?

Participants were reminded that they did not come to listen in order to respond; rather, they came to listen in order to understand.

Communion / Participation / Mission

The three vital pillars of the Synodal Church as each one enriches and orients the other two, are:

Communion: God gathers us together as diverse people of one faith;

Participation: A call for the involvement of all who belong to the "People of God";

Mission: The Church exists to evangelize.

If Listening is the method of the Synodal Process and Discerning is the aim, then Participation is the path. Fostering participation, leads us out of ourselves to involve others who hold different views from ours. Listening to those who have the same views as we do bears no fruit.

How Have You Experienced Walking Together As A Member Of St. Joseph's Catholic Church?

Synod Session Responses

Communion:

-there is a welcoming atmosphere within our parish, due largely to the peaceful influence that emanates from Monsignor Joseph Lynch and the kindness of Deacon Robert Wojcik. Both are gifted homilists who break the Word open, inspiring and relevant

-all are made to feel welcome- every gender, age, nationality, economic level

-one parishioner recalled that her relationship within the parish has evolved over time

-the parish annual Christmas Food Basket Project involves very generous (2) contributions of every kind and genuine joyful teamwork

-all are invited to participate in the collection and sorting process to assemble very abundant boxes for 55+ individuals and families both within the parish and the local community via the Salvation Army's knowledge of those in need

- regular parish collections of canned goods for the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Partners in Mission Food Bank demonstrates a sincere desire to help those in need within our community throughout the year
- Catholic Womens' League , Knights of Columbus, Hospitality Sundays after Mass (all aim to make everyone feel welcome and to meet fellow parishioners)
- weekly card playing involves many parishioners and non-parishioners coming together to socialize
- RCIA program provides a good opportunity for those wishing to join the faith to journey together
- seasonal musical concerts attract great attendance by parishioners and friends of the parish
- the spiritual nature and inclusive celebration of the Liturgy on a daily basis is treasured and well attended by many
- the geographical location of St. Joseph's Church (center of the city), on bus routes, walking distance to nearby neighbourhoods
- everyone if made to feel welcome at the door by the ushering committee
- accessibility for wheelchairs and walkers ensures everyone is included
- inviting outside grounds of the parish with statues of St. Mary & St. Joseph, benches, trees and flowers well maintained
- relationships grow and develop over time spent in the parish

Participation:

- important to consider & include the excluded, specifically those on the margins (sexual orientation, economic, mental, psychological, physical challenges)
- important to take the time and make the effort to learn fellow parishioner's names to make connections and develop a sense of belonging & journeying together
- perhaps there is a need for a parish Prayer Line?
- evidence of the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit within the parish through music, Holy Hour, Legion of Mary, Catholic Womens' League providing an Honour Guard for parish funerals, Knights of Columbus providing assistance to families when death is experienced
- regular visits by parish priest and deacon to parish schools, monthly school (3)Mass for parish schools
- Sunday 11 a.m. Mass on-line during the pandemic was organized with technical support provided by several parish volunteers (It is hoped that the many on-line Mass options do not replace regular in person attendance where community is fostered and receiving the Holy Eucharist is vital)
- the pandemic helped us all to develop a greater appreciation of human contact and we don't want to lose it
- important to identify gifts within the parish population and seek out those willing to share and make a commitment through regular Ministry Fairs highlighting parish needs
- perhaps a need for a parish Suggestion Box that is regularly considered and reported on at Parish Council Meetings
- consider "Alpha Program" initiated in other Catholic parishes to continue to enhance our faith as a parish community
- the Holy Eucharist is the focus of the Church, central to its purpose and reason for its existence
- the Eucharist is unique to our identity as Catholics, it sets us apart from other Christian denominations

- the Eucharist is actually the Body of Christ, which many Catholics today do not believe or fully comprehend**
- on-line Mass is a wonderful chance for house bound believers to receive spiritual blessing, but it is important to emphasize that the on-line celebration of the Mass is not the same as being there in person**
- today's world questions all authority**
- the Church needs to find a middle ground where traditions need to evolve to meet the needs of youth living in the current world, but traditions cannot be tossed aside**
- realities of divorce, sexual orientation, abortion, female roles in the Church need to be considered with more than just words, but actions**
- all families need to be supported, even if they don't fit the standard profile, barriers need to be knocked down and exclusion banished from the Church as Jesus demonstrated by his words and actions**
- Church teachings are often a struggle to know and understand, often conflicting messages exist**
- the Pope's Encyclicals need to be presented, explained and considered by (4) study groups with the true story revealed to the people so everyone shares the same message and understanding**
- importance of including and listening to the laity, specifically women and youth by inviting varying opinions and involve them in numerous ministries**
- the "closed", "limited" nature of discussions within the Church is frustrating for many**
- new faces should be encouraged and invited to participate in all facets of the Mass (music with guitar, piano accompaniment as opposed to the sound of the organ constantly), lectors of all ages (children's Bible version could be used for young lectors), (altar servers of all ages serving together youth/teen/adult), greeting & ushering done by youth, teens and adults**
- one Mass on Sunday should be centered on teens and young adults , with the Gospel message that actually speaks to youth in today's complicated world**
- music, Mass roles (readers, Eucharistic ministers, greeters/ushers) should be reserved for youth**
- many youth have an interest in social justice issues which the Church has always highlighted and thus the two groups need to come together and the Catholic secondary school needs to help bridge the gap**
- must find ways to make children and parents feel welcome and valued as important links in the faith family at St. Joseph's Church**
- introduce a guide to Church teachings aimed at youth & teens, written and illustrated in a fashion that grabs their interest and attention**
- perhaps a technology "App" that could be accessed by all youth with a high youth component involved in its creation, perhaps an upper elementary and secondary school technology project that puts words into action with a collaboration of Religious Education, Technology and Visual Arts departments at the secondary school**
- the secular world's influence has convinced both youth and often their parent's generation that the Church's role in their lives is unimportant**
- young women see the patriarchal Church that under values the roles they play and could play in a restored Church of the 21st century**
- big obstacle overcoming resistance to change and inclusion by the clergy at all levels**
- why can't the diaconal ministry be opened to women, perhaps the definition needs to be changed to make it possible so a woman can also deliver a homily from a female viewpoint, other Christian denominations allow both male and female deacons**

- the Church is in need, as the Archbishop highlighted in a recent communication (5) with the people of the archdiocese, but half the population seems to be rejected all due to gender
- many ministries with the Church are less visible, but very necessary
- when young women do not see their own gender have key roles in the Church they are made to feel less valued
- for many churches, women are the glue that keeps the church alive and viable much like her role in the family unit
- is it better to close a church than to welcome women in to help maintain it?
- what conditions within the Church perpetuate patriarchy?
- does the Church encircle women with the same love as men?
- support groups needed so all are included, no exclusion as Jesus demonstrated
- hope abounds that the Synod on Synodality will help bring needed & necessary change to the Church under Pope Francis' guidance as successor to Peter

Mission:

- concerns about our Catholic school system, is it teaching the faith or is it simply Catholic in name?
- Catholic students are often not visible in the church throughout their secondary school years and beyond
- why is the Catholic school not able to instill the faith and commitment in the next generation, what changes need to occur?
- too many issues are not addressed in the Church and swept under the rug
- why does the Archdiocesan Lenten Collection no longer support the Development & Peace project (Share Lent)? Where does the collection money actually go? Inform us!
- church bulletin notices need to be clear about traditional avenues of donating to important Catholic supported causes
- lack of openness creates doubt and skepticism, full disclosure is necessary for transparency in the Church
- we don't hear enough about Catholic missions within Canada
- the Church and its faithful need to talk and walk (journey) a different way to restore trust and faith
- the Church's mission needs to show respect and dignity to all, truly showing (6) the Face of Christ
- each of us needs to share/witness our faith more often, but Catholics are often not comfortable doing this, as other Christian denominations do. These are missed opportunities to evangelize
- we need to reach out to fellow Christian churches in the neighbourhood with an invitation to participate in social activities to develop a faith friendship, trust and commonality to share in Christ's mission in the world
- we need to be truly welcoming and be consistent in living our faith outside our Sunday Church attendance, others are watching us
- we are seeing other Christian faiths interacting by sharing a daily scripture reflection, or thought for the day, important to keep the message of Jesus alive for it is as relevant today as it was in Jesus' time
- we need to find the Church outside the physical building with a focus on social justice which in turn brings people of similar and different faith experiences together working for a common goal

- Pope Francis is reacting and stressing the need for evangelization by everyone in the Church, it can't just be left to a shrinking clergy and dwindling orders of religious sisters
- introspection needed by the Church to bring about the changes needed for the Church to thrive well into the future
- the aging Catholic population around the world can't be expected to revive the Church, rather young people need to step up, but the aging Church hierarchy needs to listen because they fear change and the loss of their power and influence
- being a parishioner should not be a passive experience, each and every parishioner is busy, but must consider, "What can I bring to the Church?" This way, those on the sidelines are made to feel included and a valued contributor in building up the Church's mission in the world
- responsibility must be taken for the Church's dominate role during Canada's Residential School years and harmful practices to "Christianize" indigenous youth
- physical, sexual, psychological abuse by some clergy and religious sisters destroyed trust in the Church and its institutions that should be places of refuge
- Encourage all Canadian Catholics to take time to read and contemplate the very long and detailed Truth and Reconciliation Report on-line to discover the real story, not just the sensational news headlines. It is time to acknowledge the major role and faults of the Catholic Church and other Christian churches involved. Catholics need to learn about historical negligent behaviour by past Canadian governments and the shocking but real thoughts, attitudes and beliefs of all parties involved in the late (7) 19th and early 20th century towards Canada's indigenous people. The complete truth about the historical Residential School issue needs to be known, acknowledged and acted upon by today's generations, who must clean up after the past generations. Until everyone knows the real truth, found in the T & R Report, then misconceptions and half truths will persist and cannot result in true reconciliation with the Catholic Church, the Canadian people as a whole and the indigenous people of this land.

Closing Thoughts:

- the Church is bigger than the bishops, priests and deacons
- the parishioners need to learn to re-discover & re-claim the Church as their own

There was a strong wish from participants of the Listening to Gather sessions that both parish collated responses and the Archdiocesan collated responses be made available to all members of the archdiocese. Feedback is desired and necessary!

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