



THEMES FROM THE SYNOD LISTENING SESSIONS
WINDSOR HERITAGE CATHOLIC FAMILY OF PARISHES
JUNE 2022

SYNOD LISTENING SESSION THEMES

We, as a family of parishes, responded to a call to reflect together on our experience of communion, participation, and mission in and with the church. The outcome of this process is a picture of a beloved church in need of some reforms to enable the communion, participation and mission to go on into the future.

The following are the themes which emerged from the small group scribe reports from the various listening sessions. Comments from the scribe reports, which are related to the theme and theme elements, have been included in the comprehensive report which is available on the website..

THEME ONE

PROFOUND LOVE FOR AND APPRECIATION OF THE CHURCH

One of the powerful messages sent by the participants from our family of parishes was their deep commitment to, and concern and love for, the faith and the church. The synodal process made it clear that there is an appreciation for much that is good and hopeful in the church today. A depth of faith was shown in their responses and in the value that participants placed in their ongoing faith journeys. Responses were heartfelt and moving as people described their faith as "the centre of my life". For many, faith provides a foundation of guidance, of steadfastness, a moral compass. There is joy discovered in times of sharing faith and building relationships with others. People expressed joy in diversity across the family of parishes. Many communicated a feeling of oneness, of unity and community and belonging. Others do not see themselves valued or represented in the church.

(This theme was present or implied in every small group scribe report.)

- **Great love for the church and being rooted in the Catholic faith**
- **Importance of faith filled families and the presence of church in childhood and teen years for strong adult faith**
- **Some reflections on Catholic Schools**
- **Church as source of strength, stability and support**
- **Joy found in church prayer, devotions and faith experiences**
- **The gift of active involvement in the church**

THEME TWO

COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY: AN INCLUSIVE, WELCOMING CHURCH COMMUNITY

This theme reflected the desire to be an outward looking, inclusive community, welcoming others in and helping those in need. Participants called for our family of parishes to be a vibrant community, beyond those gathered at Mass; being more connected to each other and offering social events to build relationships. While parishes are

generally welcoming communities, participants felt that they can become more so and are not always perceived as such by those outside or on the edge of them.

Various aspects of the church as a community were highlighted: the desire to be welcomed in the church; the importance of hospitality, belonging and participation; the need to accompany each person wherever they might be in their life journey; the call to be compassionate and understanding towards the marginalized. One reported comment seemed to sum it up - "I hope the church becomes a vibrant, welcoming, inclusive, faith sharing community that is accepting of all people."

- **An inclusive church community**
- **A welcoming church community**
- **The church community**
- **Closure of churches and change of church sites - seen as an obstacle**
- **Outreach to the greater community**

THEME THREE

REACH OUT TO PEOPLE ON THE MARGINS AND AN AWARENESS OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HURT BY THE CHURCH

The need for everyone in the church, lay and ordained, to reach out to those who feel themselves at the margins of the church's life was frequently mentioned in the small group scribe reports. Parishes are not always perceived as welcoming by those outside or on the edges of them. Responses reflected that many have experience of family members and friends who have left the church or find themselves on the margins. It was noted that it is important for those who practice their faith to know how to "meet people where they are" without judgment or condemnation. The language of "inclusivity" can mask the underlying pain, sadness and deep feelings caused by restrictions.

There is an awareness that people have been wounded by the church and that there is a lot of personal hurt among our parishioners.

- **Need to reach out to the suffering and marginalized in parish and community and an awareness of those who feel excluded**
- **Personal hurt mentioned in small group scribe reports**

THEME FOUR

GROW THE CHURCH WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON YOUTH

Many participants asked the question "Why are people no longer attending Mass?" and expressed concern and sadness at decreasing numbers of people involved in parish life. There was a consistent concern about the lack of youth attendance and involvement in church activities and calls for more targeted youth programming. Support for young people was seen as crucial to the growth of the church and that investment in youth work and peer evangelization would be important to this growth. Senior members often felt

connected but felt youth see the parish as irrelevant and that church is unappealing to young people,

It was indicated that young people need to be involved in liturgical experiences and must be given adequate catechesis, in schools and in parish communities, if their faith is to be an encounter with Jesus.

Many participants are asking for advice on outreach and engagement with young people as a solution for diminishing Mass attendance, as they do not know how to attract them. They are also asking for advice on how to reach out to fallen away friends and family who are distanced from the church. Mention was made that we also need to understand why people are leaving the church in such large numbers.

- **Desire for the church to grow and sadness at diminishing numbers**
- **Realization of need for evangelization but do not know how to hand on faith**
- **Great concern about absence of youth in the mass and parish life and desire to bring them back**
- **Some suggestions to help bring youth back to church and parish life**

THEME FIVE

IMPORTANCE OF THE SACRAMENTS ESPECIALLY THE EUCHARIST

A great love of the sacraments as well as the joy of celebrating the sacraments with children and grandchildren, alongside a community of like - minded believers, was mentioned. Access to sacraments was a concern, particularly in relation to the loss of sacramental opportunities during COVID and the looming shortage of priests. COVID - 19 and the Church's response to it have left wounds from which individuals and the greater Catholic community are still trying to recover.

Eucharist is clearly central to the lives of many participants. The liturgical life of the parish is a place of encounter with the person of Christ. There is a need for good liturgy, music that invites participation, good proclamation of the Word and well prepared, well - delivered, effective and relevant homilies.

There was acknowledgement that different people appreciate the liturgy differently and that there is room for different ways of worshiping. For some, a significant minority of participants, 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. Sadness and concern were expressed, by some participants, that the provision of Mass according to the 1962 Missal would be lost.

- **Love for the sacraments**
- **Importance of the Eucharist**
- **Hope that the Latin Mass continues**
- **Impact of COVID - 19**
- **Liturgy**

THEME SIX

SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

There is a need for everyone, the whole Body of Christ, to be responsible for the mission of the church. We need to examine the exercise of leadership to enable all to respond to their baptismal vocation and discern, form and use their gifts and talents to the service of the Gospel. The church needs to draw on the talents and gifts of all in the community, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, or ethnicity. People are seeking a greater understanding of the role of the laity in church leadership and parish life, particularly for women and young people and seek greater collaboration between lay and ordained. Discernment in the life of the church requires the exercise of gifts we have received from God. While many feel that they are free to exercise these gifts, the synod listening sessions indicate a great number felt themselves with limited ability to use their gifts.

Numerous participants expressed appreciation for priests and their ministry, while others shared stories of pastoral disasters and poor pastoral practices.

A concern about the decreasing number of priests and the low number entering seminary led some to call for a re-imagining of priesthood by the inclusion of married men and the ordination of women. There was some concern about priests being disconnected from their parishioners.

- **We are all church**
- **Empowerment of laity**
- **Ministry of priests**
- **Involvement of women**

THEME SEVEN

CALLS FOR NECESSARY CHANGE IN CHURCH

Our family of parishes is quite diverse. There are those who seek reform, co-responsible leadership, and adaptation to contemporary society. They asked for a more pastoral perspective, an openness to the Spirit and the inclusion of groups typically on the margins. They spoke of the struggles Catholic families have in living within complex and imperfect relationships and realities. There are others who would like to see the church return to a pre-conciliar time in matters of doctrine, culture and morality and asked for more tradition, orthodoxy and similar ways of adhering to the faith. There is some tension between, on the one hand, a longing for the church to not dilute its teachings, and, on the other hand, a sadness that the church appears not to move with the times and is not relevant for many today. And then there are those who like things the way they are and have little or no desire to increase their participation or to see great changes.

Many agree that these are challenging times for the church and that the church needs to change and mentioned they are staying in the church while this change happens.

Our challenge is recognizing that these need not be opposing values but can be creatively expressed within the Catholic imagination.

People expect and want clear teaching from the church. However, there was not one clear answer as to what this teaching should be and a notable difference is present. Some reflect that it is difficult for the average Catholic to understand and stay true to the teachings of the church when members of the clergy seem to be proclaiming different messages regarding theological and moral issues. At the same time, this desire of some Catholics presents concerns for others who believe a stance in upholding the teachings of the Church, without sufficient catechesis or pastoral care, can alienate members who are struggling with issues of sexuality and gender, abortion, birth control, and divorce and remarriage, among others.

- **Need for change in the church**
- **Need consistency of message preached about church teachings**
- **Call for change and modernization in the church**
- **Call to embrace church traditions and orthodoxy**
- **Focus on God's truth**

THEME EIGHT FORMATION IN ADULT FAITH

As participants spoke about their faith, there was an underlying request to be built up through appropriate learning, training and catechesis. Those who responded were aware of the need to continue their own spiritual and faith journey, nurtured by the sacraments and guided by the Holy Spirit. Many expressed a deep longing for on - going faith formation and spiritual guidance. Many asked for programs, resources and learning opportunities to be provided. They suggested a variety of adult faith formation possibilities: catechetical programs, scripture study, theological education, spiritual guidance, and sacramental preparation programmes.

- **Need for catechesis and adult faith formation**
- **Spiritual guidance and formation**
- **Suggestions**

THEME NINE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Numerous participants want more transparency in all areas of the church: financial matters, residential schools, handling of the clergy sexual abuse, changes in liturgical practice, parish configuration and any other areas where the laity can contribute before any decisions are made. The experiences of lack of accountability and transparency in the life of the church can be stumbling blocks in people's involvement and commitment. There is a pain, shame, sadness and anger due to the clerical abuse and residential schools scandals. The church must listen to the survivors of abuse. Ongoing reconciliation and reparation

were seen as necessary now and into the future. Pope Francis' apology is a promising first step but more needs to be done. Many participants touched on the wounds of the people, often so publicly displayed, as well as the diminishment of power and prestige of both priests and the church and the pastoral care affected by this.

- **Need for accountability and transparency in the church**
- **Clergy sexual abuse and residential schools**

THEME TEN

FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

The synodal journey was seen as a valued experience of listening to others and being heard and highlighted a desirability for better means for listening in our family of parishes in the future. The participants indicated, not only satisfaction at the opportunity to come together for the synod listening sessions, but also a desire to make them a recurring event. Many felt encouraged by the opportunity to speak, although some lacked the confidence in the hierarchy to follow through.

- **This is a new way of communicating with one another and needs to continue**
- **Experience of unity and oneness in shared stories**