



HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC CHURCH

Synod 2021-2023
Parish Report



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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Pope Francis called for a Synod entitled “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” The word Synod is an ancient word meaning “journeying together.” So, Pope Francis called for a Synod on the practice of synodality itself. What made this Synod different than others in recent Church history is that he invited ALL to participate.

“In the first millennium, “journeying together” – that is practicing synodality – was the ordinary way in which the Church, understood as “People united in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” acted. Synodality, is much more than ecclesial meetings and Bishops’ assemblies, or simple administration of the Church. Through Synodality – through Journeying Together – the Church (the People of God) reveals and gives substance to her being in communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission.” (Preparatory Document from Pope Francis)

In the first phase of the synod journey, the listening to and consulting the People of God in the local church (diocese and parishes), Pope Francis asked each diocese to hold listening sessions. The pope stressed the need to include those on the peripheries, or outskirts of the Church. These listening sessions were to be guided by the fundamental questions:

“How is this ‘journeying together’ happening in your local Church?”



INTRODUCTION

“What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’?”

Pope Francis also gave ten themes to use in the listening sessions, and our diocese asked us to choose three themes to focus on at the parish level.

Below is a rough outline of the process of how the Synod was held at Holy Family:

February 2 – 19

Educated the parish about the Synod and ways to participate.

February 19

Parishioners voted for the top three themes for our Listening Sessions and registration for the Synod experiences began.

March 19

In-person Synod event.

March 22 – 23

Zoom opportunities to participate in the Synod process.

March 23 – 30

Parish-wide survey gathering feedback on the parish's three themes for those who could not participate in other ways.

March 27

Youth Synod Listening Session



INTRODUCTION

The following pages are a summary of the Listening Sessions hosted by Holy Family, March 19th – 30th...



LISTENING

It is important that we recognize everyone in our parish boundaries are our responsibility.

- A parishioner was called to have our parish help someone who was not in the Parish Homebound Ministry. The parishioner was told that we only help people in our Parish. The Holy Spirit spoke to the parishioner and the parish did end up helping by going and trimming the individual's bushes.

It is critical to listen to the voices on the peripheries.

- "The voices of the minority can be prophetic." This quote from Pope Francis summarizes the entire thought; he was one of them, he lived it.
- We need to become the Church of Extravagant Welcome, where we are welcoming to the peripherals. We need to become a place where ALL are truly welcome.
- Outreach to non-Catholics is paramount.
- Jesus listened to the woman at the well – really listened.
- The marginalized are not part of this discussion because they don't feel welcome.
- What can we individually do to help these marginalized groups one person at a time?
- We have to talk about equality for women in this church!
- Priesthood has got to be open to all! All are welcome... but only if you're a celibate male? Women have gifts to share too.
- Remember who Jesus walked with; He didn't walk out with the Pharisees, He walked with the prostitutes and the sinners.
- As a whole, we are not listening to the peripheries.



LISTENING

- Our bishops need to listen more. I don't think they want to listen to us, or the marginalized groups. They don't realize that we are excluding people rather than including them.

How do we listen?

- Listening is so important, and in society we tend to shout, not listen. Politics as an example – the Gospel trumps all political ideologies.
- We have a sense of “busyness” in our parishes – do we need to simplify – do we make time to listen to one another?
- Listening is a process: listen, adapt, and modify. Are we asking why the youth are not coming back to church? Are we listening to what they are saying? Are you willing to listen to what you don't want to hear? Life is messy. Being able to listen and go back to who had talked with you after prayer and to understand what they were saying is very important to the future of our Church.
- Will the marginalized engage, even if we reach out? They've been turned off by the Church over the last 20–30 years. Especially youth, women, and the LGBT community.
- We need to follow the Benedictine principle of listening with the ear of your heart.
- God will still talk to us even if we ignore it. He'll speak in other ways.
- The world is full of hate, how do we find common ground?
- It is not our job to “fix” people, it is our job to accept them where they are.
- Social media and news can reinforce negative thoughts and take space from the Holy Spirit.



LISTENING

The youth are a critical demographic to listen to.

- The “youth” don’t feel they need the “church” community and the Mass.
- Do we need to redefine “what is church?” if our youth are not coming to Mass?
- Some churches speak in absolutes; this might affect young people being involved.
- There are two things that overwhelmingly matter to youth: homily and service to others.
- We need to change youth’s mindsets about joining the church because they want to, not because they feel like they have to.

Does the Church evolve with the times or does the Church elevate people to the Church’s standard?

It is important you take time in the moment to pray with someone rather than just saying I’ll pray for you.

How can we be sure the voices we are hearing aren’t the voices of the heretics.

It seems there is no forum for discussion or resolution for many topics that need to be discussed. So many issues need to be discussed: Church abuse, role of women in the church, married priests, LGBTQ, violence in the world, youth in the church (or lack thereof), authenticity and transparency in the church.

We see too often that people are on the Left or Right, but what is in the middle? There needs to be something/someone in the middle to be able to move forward.



LISTENING

Pro Life vs. Pro Choice really divides people and can be a very difficult conversation. We have to listen and seek to understand.



AUTHORITY + PARTICIPATION

What does being an effective witness look like?

- Father is always asking us to go out each week. Being a witness can simply be a smile, having a heart for the homeless, being nice to people.
- Journeying with them ~ we are not pointing the finger, but we are with them in the journey.
- One of our calls is to comfort the afflicted but often we afflict the confused!
- What about the “poor in spirit”? Who cares for them?
- Reflect on St. Francis’ words: “preach the gospel always, if necessary, use words.”

Communion being closed to only baptized members is a problem.

- Are we a closed church or are we inclusive to others who are not Catholic?
- What is the mindset of the whole church? We need to be inclusive of others.
- It should be that if you believe in the real presence of Jesus in communion you can receive it.
- Why do they need to be baptized to be able to participate in the Church?
- The ability to receive communion is the conversation between them and God.
- To priests withholding communion: you cannot judge them, you do not know their relationship with God.

Clergy must be willing to listen to the laity.

- Our leadership – Pastor and staff – are open to listen to communication.
- I am the Body of Christ, just because you are a priest doesn’t mean you are “higher”.



AUTHORITY + PARTICIPATION

- Our leadership listens, has an open mind (even when there is a difference of opinion), and is very open to conversations.
- Authority/governance really depends on the pastor – when you’ve met one pastor you’ve met one pastor.
- The early church was synodal – people gathering and giving their opinions and being involved in decision making.
- We need to rediscover the apostolic church, before people get in the way. The human condition is what we love and what we have to work with.
- The “lay apostolate” began in Vatican II and is working today because of Pope Francis.
- There needs to be a separation of the business of running a church from spiritual leadership.
- Women should be allowed to give the homily once in a while because there is a shortage of priests.
- Not all priests are humble.
- We were taught as children that there was a huge difference between the laity and the leadership of the church. This caused us to not feel a closeness to our parish priests.

How do we combine the enthusiasm and dynamic nature of the richness of the Catholic church tradition and ritual with the way people want to worship today?

The leadership of the Church today must take responsibility and make retribution for what they have done to children, and the indigenous children in the United States and Canada!



AUTHORITY + PARTICIPATION

You have to bring yourself to the ministry to fully participate.

Many parents feel inadequate to teach their families.

Personal requests for help are important. One person at our table said she is hungry for that; for someone to ask for her help/assistance/opinion.



DIALOGUE IN CHURCH + SOCIETY

We need to be inclusive of others.

- Our parish does a good job of participating with other churches to do services together.
- Churches in our community did 'Soup, Salad and Services' in a small community.
- We reached out to Muslim community and offered groups to use our rooms for their service.
- Love one another as I have loved you. – John 13:34. It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter if you're Catholic or what color you are or if you are LGBTQ.
- The Church needs to be open, and needs to equip us to outreach to others in the marginalized groups.
- We are all governed by love, do the specifics of what we believe matter if we all act with love?
- How do we work to bring Christian churches together? How do we honor the Jewish heritage we have?
- There are so many commonalities among the Christian churches.
- God comes to us in different ways.
- What is our mission to all marginalized groups – not just the poor, but the divorced, widowed, single, gay, lesbian, transgender, etc.?
- Families today look different than they used to; we need to consider how we interact with them.
- I think we need to pay attention to a lot of issues, abortion, LGBT. We need to start getting in touch with a lot of people by their groups, and provide them a place to gather.



DIALOGUE IN CHURCH + SOCIETY

- Teenagers facing gender and racial issues have to be met with a particularly understanding Church.

We don't address conflicts and difficulties.

- We don't talk about addictions, pornography, depression, anxiety, mental illness, LGBTQ, neo-Nazism, and other social issues.
- We need to love one another as Christ has loved us.
- As a parish we had a collection for the people of Ukraine. Why have we not seen anything from the Diocese about Ukraine? Our response to the Ukraine collection was the biggest we had ever seen.
- We have not been a people of discussion and we do not dialogue.
- Why can't LGBT unions be blessed? It feels like the Church gives conditional love.
- We tend to go where we feel comfortable—where we feel connected.
- Hopefully the Church does listen with an open mind. Just because you listen to someone with a different viewpoint doesn't mean you agree.
- We need to work more diligently to mend the wounds of the sexual abuse crisis.
- We are supposed to hold each other accountable – but not to judge. I think actions speak louder than words and it turns people away when we punish people.

People outside the Church don't understand Catholic teachings.

- A lot of Catholics don't understand Catholic teachings.



DIALOGUE IN CHURCH + SOCIETY

The Catholic Church is seen as a source of solace, comfort; they are the “go to ” in crisis.

We have a duty and responsibility as Christians to unite through prayer.

“Vatican II stripped away things Nuns felt deeply about, like habits. Nuns were not included in Vatican II.”

We need a universal prayer for peace!



PERSPECTIVES

"I was told 'you are Catholic and are not supposed to be nice'."

"Our Pastor listens to his staff. This is a HUGE gift!"

"We have been very fortunate to have the last two pastors being collaborative and open minded."

"We are with this parish because our last parish listened to what we did with our youth, but then shut down the program..."

"At a different parish, our Pastor was a member of the parish council, and was definitely subordinate to his parishioners. This was a refreshing change of pace."

As a kid, I was taught that we weren't supposed to go to other churches or other Christian denominations.

"My daughters don't feel welcomed because of the limits on what they can do."

"We need to explain what marriage is better so that there isn't as much divorce."

"I shouldn't feel excluded because I don't have a husband as a mother of three children."

I do a lot of talking in my prayer and not so much listening. I tell God what I need, but do I stop to listen?

"I think the church has lost some credibility with society by the things we say, the things we do."



PERSPECTIVES

"As a youth, I feel looked down upon by the Church. I feel like we are perceived as lazy or too into technology."

Make Mass appealing to young people with a different structure. Young people need a reason to come in.

"As a youth, I feel like our age is underrepresented."

"I don't want my son to be a priest – it's a lonely lifestyle."

"I received from my mom the basics of the faith. I received from the Holy Spirit the ability to question."

RCIA Catholics are stronger than many cradle Catholics.

"The widowed and divorced fall between the cracks. They are not getting the attention they need. I come from a mixed marriage (married a non-catholic christian). We felt alienated, and didn't come to church together. After the divorce, I felt alienated, and had to look outside church to find support. Walking into church by yourself is uncomfortable; I felt judged.

The requirement for certain things like annulments and tithing seems to be more of man-made rules rather than God's rules.

"My divorced daughter was told that she could not receive the sacraments. My daughter left the church."



PERSPECTIVES

I was a cradle Catholic, raised by priests, and social justice and taking care of others was something that was ingrained in me. There are parishes that I've experienced that if you don't think a certain way you are cast out or told that you're not a good Catholic.

"I have had to answer why being baptized is so important. I think that's something the younger generation has lost."



TAKE-AWAYS

We should reach out to hear other people, not pat ourselves on back for welcoming people within our parish.

We are collaborating with leadership from area churches: King of Kings, United Methodist, North Oak Christian, Northland Cathedral. How do we reach out to the new neighborhoods to educate them of our Christian opportunities?

We need to provide ministries to those in prison or suffering from addiction.

We need tools or workshops to be able to expand how we help the marginalized in our communities.

Are we working in silos? Each staff member is a part of committees (liaison).

We have adapted so that the committees will work together.

We, as a parish, aren't serving the community beyond our walls.

We need to involve laity at our parish to discuss a bigger mission. This should not be a staff decision alone.

Parish Council, Finance Council seem to be in the background, parishioners don't know what they do.



TAKE-AWAYS

Part of the registration at our parish should be getting a list of ministries to sign up to participate in.

We do not have visibility to how the parish council or other leadership groups are selected.

I do not feel that in our parish we are sharing feedback from our leadership groups.

We need a process for discernment of our gifts, and helping others discern theirs.



THANK YOU

On behalf of the staff and leadership of Holy Family Catholic Church,

We wish to thank everyone who participated in the listening sessions at Holy Family. Your presence, honesty, and openness were inspirational to us.

We thank the parishioners and staff that assisted in any way; our family at Holy Family was enriched by your help and leadership.

We thank Pope Francis for inspiring such a Synod and inviting EVERYONE to participate.

We continue to pray for the fruitful success of the Synod process world-wide and the bishops' gathering in October 2023.

Sincerely,

Father Philip Egan, Pastor

Christen Cota, Pastoral Associate

Alec Fox, Communications Coordinator

