

2022 Synod Synopsis by Rich Warcholik

We had 19 circles over three sessions with a total of 117 participants, a few of which were note takers and facilitators that did 2 or 3 sessions, so we probably had around 100 participants. Although we have over 1100 registered families, considering the usual participation, I think this was really a good response, and I believe probably representative of the parish mindset.

A lot of what was expressed showed perceptions that didn't meet reality, or a lack of understanding of faith and reasons for different doctrines and teachings of the church. We are given the "rules and dictates of the church" but seldom the reasoning, mentality, or scriptural basis behind them.

Question One – Disappointments:

Although all circles did not bring this up, over half brought up disappointment in the handling of the sexual abuse scandal. Some have moved past this, but many haven't. Friends and family have left the church over this, and several families were personally impacted either as victims or they have children that were victims. It has shaken people's faith to the core.

The second most theme brought up by most circles were the issue of lack of youth involvement in the church. Several saw the church dying if the younger generation continues to dwindle from lack of interest and involvement. Others feel we don't provide enough opportunities for youth involvement and some expressed disillusionment and abandonment of church when youth attempted to get involved in church ministries and told it was not their place or they were not needed.

The third most mentioned theme was the lack of opportunities for women to participate in church in bigger roles. Over half of the circles, concerned about the dwindling number of priests, advocated for women deacons and priests, citing the success of this in other denominations and mega churches.

Several circles brought up disappointment of the church's direction taken on Covid issues, church closings, vaccines, masks. Many felt their religious rights violated and saw secular society dictating to the church and the church caving in. This is a hot topic in society in general, causing a ton of hostility and division, and it is not surprising this was brought up in the circles.

A number of circles mentioned the church's involvement in Politics from advising people how to vote from the pulpit to siding with various political views.

Many felt that the church is not welcoming. This ran the gambit from personally not feeling welcomed, no one knowing their name, cliques after mass, to the church not being inclusive of groups like LGBTQ, accepting Gay marriage, etc. Much of this came from those who have children that have changed their gender identity or come out as gay and have left the church as a result. Another mentioned bringing Muslim friends to church and having a parishioner threaten violence toward them.

Several expressed disappointments in support and/or treatment when a loved one died. This ranged from inability to get a priest for last rights, refusal of last rights because they or their loved one were not practicing, to response from the office when called, to lack of bereavement support afterward.

The following were also brought up although not frequently enough to be considered overall themes. But if it was brought up even by one or two of the 10% gathering of parishioners, many more in the parish are probably feeling it:

Lack of opportunities for fostering fellowship and community

Lack of Adult Education and meaningful bible study

Thoughts and ideas rejected by parish

Non catholic visitors not being allowed to receive communion

No connection with what kids are really thinking and feeling

Gay bishops promoting same sex marriage

Differing views on abortion and pro life

Bishop's comments on George Floyd, BLM, Police Actions

Lack of feedback from prior synods and gatherings

Diocese lack of interest in our thoughts and input

Church viewed as cold and dismissive

Marriage and support in church in cases of mixed marriages

Groups made to feel shame, excluded, unwanted, door slammed in face

Doors of church locked when come to visit

Refusal to baptize child

Lack of help in personal faith journey

Unwelcomed when not following all the rules

Church embezzling money from parishioners

Church can do no wrong

Church handling of problems

No support for children born out of wedlock

No support for choosing not to abort

Disingenuous homilies

Even after catholic school, unprepared and unsupported to live and nourish faith

Church leadership not in agreement

Wedding not allowed outside church building

Personal opinions of priests differing from church teaching

Masculinity in and of Patriarchal church

Church's lack of compassion

Loss of Latin mass and old ways

Divorce limiting participation in church and Eucharist
Children not being taught traditional church
Lack of outreach to parishioners
Not enough reverence in church and for the Eucharist
We are to evangelize but not told how
Variation of annulment process between churches and diocese
Burden of faith journey is individuals instead of communities
Lack of understanding of our faith by youth and adults
Pope affirming Biden as good catholic even though he supports abortion
Church swayed by public opinion over doctrine – no consistency
Not enough opportunities or functions to gather for those who work
Church doors locked
Priest refusing to hear confession
Inopportune times for reconciliation
Refusal to marry because living together
Last rites refused because not parishioner
Unwillingness to address domestic violence
Roadblocks to parents wanting to have kids in public schools

Question two – Joys:

By far the thing that brought most joy was the sacraments-receiving the sacraments or seeing their children and grandchildren receive sacraments.
8 circles expressed joy over the RCIA process, some 20 years afterward
Several circles expressed joy over Community and Conversion of family members, returning to church
Participating in the Sunday mass was another joy expressed by several.
A number also expressed joy in Catholic rituals and bible study

Though not as universally, the following were also noted as giving joy:

Family

Universality of church

Sharing experience with friends
Seeing familiar faces
Small Groups
Adoration
Homilies with Father Don
Support and love of staff in planning funeral for loved ones
Instructor of Religious Ed at another parish
Blessing of marriage
Book read leading to involvement in ministry
Welcome of other churches
Depth of church over time and its beauty
Catholic School
Bringing grandchildren to mass
Sharing faith
People speaking to my needs after crisis
Me and God time
Variety in music-trumpets, horns, harp flute
Latin Mass
Annulment
Rosary
Participating in ministries
Witnessing people finding Christ

Question 3 – Hopes:

The top hopes for the church included

- The church being more inclusive
- Involvement of women at all levels
- Increased interest in and value of youth

Address celibacy and shortage of priests

Return of Latin Mass and old ways

Better utilization of people resources

More family centric events

More welcoming atmosphere

Synod bringing unity and revitalization

More outreach opportunities

Mentioned but by fewer circles

Removal of antiquated rules

More welcoming

Stronger sense of community

More vocations

More age-appropriate activities

Church continues to learn from mistakes

People stay involved

Holy Spirit and not politics guide church

Church leaders stay strong

Better feedback

Positive change

Vibrant exciting church

Better marketing of church in community

Catholics searching be guided to good standing instead of having door shut in face

Better use of technology

Barriers to participation removed

Better meeting people where they are at

Communion available to all

Renewal for fallen away Catholics

More interchange with other religions

Address isolation after death and better support

More people in pews

Find ways to draw back non practicing Catholics
More intimate gatherings
More opportunities to gather outside of church
Continued listening
More joyful music
Church re-establish self as moral authority
Not so hyper focused on being politically correct and positioning
More social and spiritual activities in evening for working people
Continuation of synods

Initial thoughts and Recommendations

Follow up with input from parish in form of town halls, brainstorming, discussions, and surveys
Better communication to parishioners – Better feedback
Increased presence on media
More opportunities to listen and discuss – keep momentum going – parish council after masses
Periodic fireside chats after Sunday masses
More personal invitations
Reintroduce small faith communities
Address timing of events – daytime events exclude working parishioners
Monthly name tag Sunday with hall gathering afterward even if just coffee and donuts
Greeters outside
More publicizing of Outreach opportunities
Plan more family events not just annual
Increase opportunities for youth involvement

