



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

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

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, Pope Francis announced that the theme for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 would be **"For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission."** He invited the whole world to participate in the synod preparation by sharing their experiences of the church and listening to the experiences of others. This theme and experience of journeying together in synodality will be decisive for the life of the church today and tomorrow. As noted in the Synod preparatory document: "It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's people". Pope Francis has also said, "Synodality is more than just a word or a slogan. Synodality is an expression of the very nature of the Church - the process of discerning how the Spirit is moving us, so that we may continue to fulfill our mission to evangelize the world." Ultimately, this path of walking together is the most effective way of manifesting and putting into practice the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God

The purpose of our synod process was to consider what the Holy Spirit was saying to us in this time and in this place as we shared our stories, insights, hopes and dreams for the church. It was our opportunity to dream about the church we are called to be and to give prayerful input on the needs of the church today. By the end of our time together, we began to respond to the basic question: "What is the Holy Spirit asking of the Church in the 21st century?"

The synod is not to be a one-time event. It will be an ongoing process that changes how the Church engages with the faithful, and others, forever. One part of the synod was to gather people's thoughts, hopes, dreams and struggles to be synthesized and submitted to our local family of parishes, the diocese and Rome, but the other, bigger, part of the synod was the start of a new way of 'being Church', of walking and journeying together.

THE PROCESS

The coordinating committee

In January, Jean Beneteau, on behalf of the pastoral team, invited parishioners and members of our communities to consider sharing their gifts as part of the family of parishes' synod committee. Eight people responded: Gabe D'Amore of Assumption Parish; Ed Czilli, Jennifer St. Pierre, Mary Claire St. Pierre and Filomena Yamashita of St. Alphonsus Parish; Marisa Nabbout of St. Angela Parish; Matthew Charbonneau of St. Benedict community, and Anne Shore of Assumption Parish, who became the synod coordinator. Jean Beneteau, of the Windsor Heritage Catholic Family of Parishes' pastoral team, was on the committee as well. Our synod committee began meeting on Zoom at the end of January and met every Thursday until May 5. The diocese provided training and resources for the coordinating committee.

Ways to participate

The diocese provided the framework for the synod process in our family of parishes. There were two ways for people to participate: the first and preferred means was through engaging in a gathering of members of our family of parishes. This in - person or zoom format allowed participants to pray together, as well as to listen to one another. A second means of participation was through an online individual reflection form which was available on the diocesan web site.

To be as inclusive and welcoming as possible, all information and materials related to the synod were translated into Italian for the parishioners of St. Angela Parish.

The synod listening sessions

The two - hour synod listening sessions were the heart of our synod process. They were rooted in meditation, prayer, Sacred Scripture (The Emmaus Story) and small group sharing and listening. Comprehensive notes and training videos and resources for session facilitators, table leaders and scribes were provided by the diocese. The session facilitators guided the whole process. The table leaders asked the key discussion questions and guided the conversations so that all had an opportunity to speak. The scribes took notes on the main ideas and insights presented and worked with the small group to develop the two key points which were shared with the other small groups. The two questions for sharing were:

1. What have been your experiences of journeying together with the Catholic Church?
 - What joys did these experiences bring?
 - What difficulties and obstacles have you encountered?
2. As we journey forward together, what are your hopes and dreams for the Church?

Table leaders and scribes

A list of people from the three parishes and two communities was generated and members of the committee personally invited them to consider sharing their gifts as a table leader or scribe for the synod listening sessions. Many said that they were pleased and surprised to be invited to have the opportunity to help us gather as church and share our stories. The response was immediate, and, in all, 59 people responded yes to the invitation. Training and resources were provided for them from both the diocese and our synod coordinator.

Registration

Registration was mostly online and easily accessed. Those without internet access could register by phone. To those who registered through the website, a participant's guide was emailed to them. To the phone registrants, a copy of the guide was left for them at the back of their parish church.

COMMUNICATIONS

There was an attempt to use as many means as possible to reach out to people and invite them to participate. Even before our Launch Weekend, resources about the synod were on our website and information was in the bulletin.

The following are the ways we communicated about the synod to our parishes and communities:

- **Launch Weekend March 5 – 6** A poster was developed and available at every access door at each parish and community. A handout, listing the listening sessions and a little information about the synod, was included in the bulletin and handed out at all Masses.
- **Launch weekend March 5 – 6** At every Mass in every parish and community, the presider preached on the synod and someone from our committee (except at St. Angela's Italian Masses where we needed someone who spoke Italian) presented information on the synod listening sessions and invited everyone to participate. We began the process we would follow until May 15 when the synod process ended.
 - A prayer card with the synod prayer was printed and available in all the pews. The cards at St. Angela Parish were in Italian and in English. The synod prayer was said after the announcements at every Sunday Mass throughout
 - The commentator reminded everyone that we were in the synod process at the beginning of Mass each week
 - The weekly bulletin had information on the synod, the listening sessions and the questions that were to be answered
 - There was a weekly prayer of the faithful connected to the synod
 - There was a weekly announcement connected to the synod.
- **Website and social media:** An introductory video on the synod and some resources from both the diocese and the Vatican were available. After the March 19th session, several personal testimony videos from people who had attended the listening session were available.
- **Emails were sent to leaders of parish groups** asking them to invite their members to participate in one of the sessions
- **Personal emails were sent to everyone in the three parish listings** with an email address inviting them to attend a session.
- **Easter Vigil / Easter Sunday** A second handout was given out at all Masses at all parishes and communities at both the Vigil and Easter Sunday morning. At the announcement time, the presider spoke about the synod and invited everyone to consider participating.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Facilitators for the listening sessions were either Jean Beneteau or Anne Shore. The exception was the March 26th meeting at St. Angela Parish where a parishioner facilitated, as Italian was a requirement. Each small group had a table leader and a scribe. Normally the table leader and scribe did not participate outside their role. Unless noted as zoom, all were in – person sessions.

DATE	WHO	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS	SMALL GROUPS
March 11	Pastoral team & Pastoral council	Assumption Parish	12	2
March 19	Table leaders & scribes listening training session	Holy Name of Mary site Assumption Parish	33	5
March 26	Italian speaking parishioners St. Angela Parish	St. Angela Parish	6	1
March 28	General session open to all	St. Angela Parish	15	2
April 2	Zoom session Open to all	Zoom	13 A number who registered did not attend	3
April 3	General session Open to all	Holy Name of Mary site Assumption Parish	38	7
April 9	General session Open to all	St. Alphonsus	26 A number who registered did not attend	5
April 27	Zoom session Open to all	Zoom	Cancelled Not enough registered	0
April 28	Assumption Cares	Holy Name of Mary site Assumption Parish	42 Met one on one with people there for food, clothes, income tax help	5 people asked the 4 questions one on one
May 2	General session Open to all	Holy Name of Mary site Assumption Parish	9	2
May 5	Synod coordinating committee	St. Alphonsus Parish	8 all were participants including table leader and scribe	1
10 meetings		Each parish hosted one of the sessions &	202	28

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LIMITATIONS

The information found in this report does not reflect the broadness and richness of our family of parishes and local community. There was minimal participation from some communities in our family of parishes. Most who responded to listening session invitations were parishioners, many of these active and involved already in our communities. There was little young adult engagement, no youth, no First Nations, and little contact with the poor outside of Assumption Cares. Many were older adults with a few non - Catholics.

There were some limitations that made it more difficult to get a large turnout for the listening sessions. Covid - 19 kept some people home and zoom fatigue kept others away. The relatively short time available, from the end of January until May 15, provided limited opportunity for publicity and reaching out. Even in all our communication about the synod, many parishioners had no idea what a synod was or that there were listening sessions available to them. Those who attended the listening sessions had high praise and gratitude for having the synod and providing opportunities for them to share their stories. Some who did not attend expressed a cynicism and doubt that anything would change.

THANK YOU

There are many people who contributed to our synod process. Without them, the listening sessions would never have happened. Thanks to the coordinating committee who made this process a priority for four months and generously gave of their time and talent. For incredible dedication, time, energy and expertise, we thank Anne Shore for coordinating our Synod Committee efforts and drafting the report. Thank you to the pastoral team and the pastoral council who supported the synod and took every opportunity to invite people to participate. A special thanks to Jean Beneteau for everything.

Social media, registration, handouts, bulletin announcements and much more would not have been possible without Kevin McQuaid Jr, who tirelessly did the many things that needed doing. Owen Wolter helped with the poster and initial handout format. There would have been no Italian translations without Rosanna Moceri who never flinched when new pages appeared needing translation. Marisa Nabbout assisted in this as well. Thanks to Sally McQuaid for the parish lists.

Laura Soulliere and Tim McKinley helped with location setup and enabled our Assumption Cares April 29th morning conversations. Laura was instrumental in getting our prayer cards printed and even created a second larger font card for St. Angela. A special thanks to Leon Janisse, Erin Turner and Zoey Soulliere of Windsor Chapel who designed and printed all of our prayer cards. When we ran out of the first printing, they generously did a second one for us.

Our table leaders and scribes were the backbone of the listening sessions. They attended a training session, prepared to help us gather and share and were welcoming, inclusive, respectful and attentive to each one. They were willing to attend and be on call, not knowing if they would be needed or not.

The Basilian Lay Associates provided hospitality and refreshments for the April 3 meeting at Holy Name of Mary. They helped set up, welcomed people and kept us watered. Two, at the last minute when non - registered people arrived, became a scribe and table leader. Thank you to Frank Gualtieri for all his help with generating lists and hospitality for our meetings at St. Angela Parish. Thanks to Filomena Yamashita for paying for parking for the St. Alphonsus gathering and to Gerard Charette and Ed Czilli who helped with parking.

We give thanks to Pope Francis who invited us into this grace-filled experience and to the Diocesan leadership for the many resources and personal support provided. Finally, we are grateful to the Holy Spirit who guided our whole process and helped us to truly share our experiences of the church and to dream about the church we want to become.

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.

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 with 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 community 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 a number of 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**