

## Appendix

1. Synthesis of the Assembly of Western Catholic Bishops
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## **Assembly of Western Catholic Bishops**

### **Synod Synthesis, July 2022**

The Catholic Church in western and northern Canada consists of 18 Roman Catholic dioceses and four Ukrainian Catholic eparchies. These are the traditional territories of numerous Indigenous peoples with diverse cultural, linguistic, and spiritual identities. Missionaries and fur traders brought Catholicism to these territories in the 17th and 18th centuries. The history of relations with the Indigenous peoples of these territories has been complicated by colonialism and settlement beginning in the early 19th century. Even before large-scale European settlement, the Catholic Church had been established in numerous First Nation and Métis communities. Waves of immigration brought settlers from around the world, with large numbers from Britain, western Europe, Ukraine and Poland, China, South-east Asia, India and Pakistan, and more recently, Africa. Agricultural opportunities fueled settlement in western Canada, but there has been considerable urbanization. The diversity within the population of these four provinces and three territories is also reflected in the Catholic community, the largest religious group according to census data.

The Assembly of Western Catholic Bishops (AWCB) has appointed a writing team to receive Synod reports from these 22 local churches to synthesize into a single report for western Canada. The reports present a remarkable snapshot of the church in western Canada at this time. While the particular context of each report influenced the issues and perspectives they describe, a substantial consistency is found across these dioceses. In this synthesis, the team reports on what has been heard in these dioceses and is included in their Synod reports.

Various methods were used in the participating dioceses to collect responses to the Synod's fundamental question and sometimes to the detailed questions included in the ten themes of the Synod. Consultation groups were widely used, but there were also online surveys, individual responses, and one-on-one dialogues. Websites, social media, promotional materials, and personal invitations were used to a varying extent to increase participation. Synod responses were received from parishes, schools, religious orders, and various affinity groups such as CWL, Knights of Columbus, Bible studies, youth groups, etc... Some dioceses were ambitious in reaching out to groups and individuals on the periphery, but this remains a challenge that was only partially successful. Some dioceses expressed concern about the difficulties of engaging in a



synodal consultation during the COVID pandemic. Other responses indicated a lack of interest on the parish or the priest's part, limiting involvement in the synod consultations.

Three common points emerged among the many issues and concerns included in the reports: a need for increased catechesis, the importance of leadership, and a sensitivity to Indigenous concerns. Other concerns included secularism, a mainstream media hostile to the church, criticism of church responses to clergy sexual abuse, the role of women, traditional liturgy, inclusive and accessible language, and misunderstanding of the church's moral teaching.

The diocesan reports call for more catechesis at all levels of the church. Catechesis, in this regard, should be understood to include faith education and formation for all ages, including the formation of lay and ordained ministers. It was noted that for many Catholics, faith formation seems to end with Confirmation. Access to Catholic schools is varied from province to province, but where schools exist, they are generally expected to be responsible for catechesis. Greater collaboration between parish and school is needed to assist parents in assuming this role. The church is invited to consider various methods of evangelization to engage people in ways that lead to missionary discipleship.

Issues about leadership include clergy shortages, reliance on international priests, the role of women in church ministries and governance, the prevalence of clericalism among clergy and laity, lay ministry, and formation for ministry. It was noted that the Vatican II understanding of the church as people of God with a ministry rooted in baptism could be a corrective to a number of the problems related to leadership in the church. A wider awareness of the council's teaching can help the church as we seek to be more synodal as a listening church walking together in mission.

As Catholics have become aware of the impact of Residential Schools and other government programs involving Indigenous peoples, a sensitivity to Indigenous concerns is developing. The diocesan reports indicate that many non-Indigenous Catholics have no contact with Indigenous peoples and their history and, for that reason, do not understand the church's commitment to reconciliation. However, many other Catholics are calling upon church leaders to take more decisive steps together with Indigenous peoples to assist in the healing of those wounded by the church. There is widespread support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action, including local and papal apologies, repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery, adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) as a framework for reconciliation, development of projects to assist in the renewal of Indigenous languages and culture, and support for healing initiatives. There is considerable hope that the upcoming papal visit will lead to new opportunities for reconciliation.

## **1. Companions on the Journey**

In many reports, respondents mention their fellow parishioners, parish priests, and members of various groups and faith organizations as their most frequent companions on the journey of faith. Reports of marginalization within the church included those on the fringes of society, such as those who are Indigenous, poor, imprisoned, LGBTQ+, elderly or homebound, or those who have drug and alcohol addictions, mental disabilities, or poor education.



The teachings and pastoral practices of the church have also pushed people to the periphery. Among those that were identified as being on the margins of the church, the reports frequently mentioned divorced and remarried Catholics, youth and young adults, singles, common-law couples, single parents, non-Catholic spouses, people with disabilities, people who are homebound or hospitalized, cultural, racial and other minorities, refugees and other immigrants, those who have left the church, and those who have suffered physical or sexual abuse or were themselves perpetrators.

The diocesan reports called for opportunities to build relationships with all marginalized groups through activities in the church and beyond the parish walls. Particular suggestions included priests reaching out to those who do not attend Mass regularly and training lay and ordained to walk together with people. Personal invitations and outreach were noted as crucial to establishing and transforming relationships.

## **2. Listening**

While understanding the importance of listening, the reports identified a number of barriers inhibiting the church from hearing the voices of the faithful, chiefly the busyness of our society and lifestyle. Many reports identified the workload and stress on priests as a barrier, as several reports noted that priests' workload is increasingly taken over by administrative responsibilities that could be delegated to lay people. Other barriers related to clergy include a clericalized practice of ministry and a lack of priests in rural parishes. Some reports noted a general perception that celibate clergy are ill-equipped to preach on the day-to-day challenges of married life.

Trust in church authorities is seriously lacking in our society and within the church membership itself. This is due, in part, to the failure of church leaders to respond appropriately to clergy sexual abuse and the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. A distrust in church authorities was expressed even by those who continue to identify as Catholic, which has led to increased levels of dissent from church teachings. Associated with a lack of trust in church authorities, there is also a perception of negative or even hostile media. The decline of Catholic media has meant that Catholics must receive their news from secular media with little access to religiously literate journalists.

The Catholic Church is increasingly seen as unwelcoming, non-inclusive, or a 'closed community.' Counter-culture mentalities have led to tension between some church leaders and people with other worldviews. Experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other discrimination within parishes can be barriers to inclusion and listening. Some of the church's moral teachings have contributed to perceptions that the Catholic Church is in conflict with society and may be barriers to people approaching the church for support.

Many dioceses reported hearing objections to the use of 'archaic language,' an emphasis on suffering and sacrifice, or on morals and other doctrines, all of which indicate that in an increasingly secularized society, we no longer have a common vocabulary of faith in which the words, symbols, and metaphors of the Gospel are understood. This is not only a problem of catechesis, but it calls us to find new ways of evangelization.



Several opportunities to address these problems were identified in the diocesan reports. Noting that “the church must go to the people,” increasing the presence of priests and youth ministers in schools was suggested. The experience of some parishes that have employed registered nurses as part of the pastoral team was cited as a way to connect the church’s healing and pastoral ministry. Because of the high incidence of people with mental health issues seeking assistance from parishes, it was suggested that clergy and lay leaders receive training appropriate for mental health triage. Other pastoral training suggestions included increased access to Spiritual Direction and workshops on being present to others and truly listening. The importance of safe environment policies and training was mentioned, noting their role in building authentic relationships of trust and accountability.

Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples was frequently included under the rubric of “Listening,” indicating that many respondents recognize that listening and walking together with Indigenous peoples is the first step towards right relations. Some suggested that in complicity with colonialism, the church converted Indigenous peoples and then abandoned them. It was noted that the church needs to learn repentance for its collective guilt. We must learn to walk with humility in this land, in restored relationship with first peoples and with all of creation. It was also noted that church members must recognize intergenerational trauma as the legacy of the Residential Schools, be prepared to assist with healing initiatives, and work and walk together with Indigenous people.

### **3. Speaking Out**

Speaking courageously is essential to a synodal church. Many respondents offered examples of fear that hinders speaking freely within the church. They mentioned fear of judgment or rejection for their views, a fear of being labelled as a dissenter, and a feeling that speaking out is pointless. Some have a fear of taking a stand, others fear criticism, and for many, there is a fear of offending others. Some do not speak out because they think they will not be supported, and others believe they are out of step with a “liberal hierarchy.” There was a lack of trust in the synodal process in many places, expecting that particular voices would co-opt the process. Others indicated an unwillingness to speak due to a perceived lack of education or information. Some reported previous experiences of being shut down. In some rural parishes, a lack of a physical space or resident pastor were indicated as barriers to dialogue.

Several responses referenced a sense of not belonging to the community as the reason for not speaking out or engaging in the Synod. Some spoke of being invisible within the community and unknown to the pastor. Others indicated that their cultural norms do not encourage sharing of feelings. Some pointed to an atmosphere of political correctness that discourages dialogue, while others indicated a rigidity on the part of church leaders that discourages dialogue. When people have personal objections to church teachings, especially hot-button issues such as same-sex marriage and other LGBTQ+ issues, there is a tendency to withdraw from church life or self-censor due to an expectation of conflict.



#### 4. Celebration

The theme of Celebration elicited a great many responses, both critical and constructive. Several responses indicated the priests' crucial role in creating the culture of the parish, noting that receptive leadership is critical in helping to create a community that "walks together." Numerous concerns were raised about homilies, indicating that many people have difficulty hearing due to volume levels or delivery. Some had difficulty understanding the homily due to the use of theological language and unfamiliar or unexplained concepts, while others were concerned about a lack of inclusive language. The dependence of many western dioceses on international priests was noted, with a concern about difficulties understanding accents. Related to this was a concern about priests who are unable to relate to young people due to age or cultural differences. Other homiletic concerns included an overemphasis on piety and doctrine and difficulties connecting the Gospel to the lived experience of the laity.

Several reports indicate a lack of understanding of the Eucharist's centrality in the community's life. In some cases, this was cited as a need for catechesis. Still, in other cases, it was a criticism of those they perceived to lack orthodoxy or an understanding of the sacraments. A number of responses indicated that some pastoral norms have been misunderstood, such as the introduction of the restored order of the sacraments, reception of Communion, and annulments. Others are concerned about the perceived exclusion of particular groups from Communion, such as the divorced and remarried and LGBTQ+. Numerous dioceses reported that participants have called for the ordination of women and married people, with many suggesting that such candidates would be more able to relate to the lived experience of the laity.

Noting that priests are not resident in many rural communities, the reports cited the lack of opportunity to attend Mass every Sunday and even more rarely on weekdays. In other cases, shift workers reported difficulty attending Mass due to a lack of Masses later in the day. Rural depopulation and the increasing average age of parishioners have led to numerous parish closures in recent years. A cultural shift appears to have occurred, resulting in the belief that Mass participation is unnecessary. Others think that watching Masses online fulfills their Sunday Obligation.

Proposals to enhance the communal celebration of the Eucharist fall into three general categories: pastoral, catechetical, and liturgical. Pastoral suggestions include reaching out to those not attending, adopting a more invitational approach to teens, helping grandparents become evangelizers, building relationships outside Mass, and working to include those on the margins. Catechetical suggestions include providing workshops for liturgical ministries and employing mentors in these roles, homilies that inform and challenge, teaching the Mass through bulletin inserts, more tradition/orthodoxy, emphasizing and encouraging reverence, more teaching on the Real Presence, and cooperation of parish and school in sacramental preparation. It was also suggested that parishes have additional services to teach different ways of prayer (Rosary, Moleben, etc.).

Not surprisingly, most suggestions are related to the liturgy itself. These include encouraging participation in liturgical ministries, including lay people in more roles such as preaching, and





encouraging congregational singing and responses. More frequent use of the *Sunday Celebration of the Word* was requested to address the lack of priests in many rural parishes. Some called for using traditional music and offering Mass with greater devotion.

Specific suggestions related to the Byzantine liturgy included wider use of Ukrainian and making the Divine Liturgy more relevant to the modern world. Some people called for promoting other devotions to allow for an exploration of the church's rich liturgical heritage, while others called for further standardizing of liturgical texts.

Numerous suggestions were received about incorporating elements of Indigenous spirituality into the Mass, including drumming, smudging, and Indigenous languages. Some suggested incorporating Indigenous funeral customs into the Rite of Burial. Others suggested including Indigenous Elders within the liturgy, including assisting at the altar or consecrating the sacrament.

## **5. Co-Responsible in the Mission of the Church**

As noted in the introduction to this report, diocesan reports addressed a number of issues related to leadership. Understanding the church as the people of God with a ministry rooted in baptism can serve as a corrective to many leadership issues identified in these reports. The Synod theme of "Co-responsible in the Mission" points to this same conclusion and connects this to the exercise of synodality.

Barriers to the greater participation of lay people in ministry and governance of the church are frequently related to a lack of catechesis and formation in Scripture, sacramental life and other church teachings. In most parishes, lay leaders lack the skills and tools necessary to assume these roles. This deficit can be addressed; however, many laity lack confidence in their understanding of the church's mission, the laity's role in that mission, and the personal responsibility of all baptized. Many Catholics have accepted a secular vision of religious indifference, apathy, and the privatization of faith. They are uncomfortable speaking about faith or sharing their faith outside the church.

Difficulties engaging lay people in ministry are not always the result of lay reluctance to assume this role. Frequently, lay people are excluded from ministries and decision-making by priests who cannot work collaboratively. Clericalism can creep in unintentionally as clergy fail to encourage or promote lay leaders, provide appropriate guidance, or ensure that lay leaders receive the necessary formation to assume the role. Clergy rarely see their role as mentoring lay leadership, and there is a lack of priests that model missionary discipleship. Pastors and bishops must empower the laity to use their gifts to manifest the reign of God.

Some dioceses reported an overemphasis on how to get to heaven at the expense of promoting a church tasked with the responsibility of reclaiming society for Christ. Laity frequently express frustration with a church that is "strangely silent" on teachings it once voiced with confident authority. This can result from polarization in the church over hot-button issues, leading many priests to avoid controversial topics in their homilies.



In a secular society that is frequently hostile, lay people find it challenging to defend counter-cultural teachings that are attacked, mocked, or misunderstood by the media. They look for efforts from church leaders to articulate doctrine in contemporary language that is accessible and relevant. Many people have shared disappointment in the Canadian Catholic bishops' lack of sufficient contrition for their handling of clergy sexual abuse or Residential School fundraising.

In response to lay reluctance to assume leadership roles, some dioceses suggested an enhanced catechesis and formation related to the baptismal call to ministry. There are several proposals in the diocesan reports, many of which are already in practice in our dioceses, such as offering lay formation and other adult education for people in the pews. Other suggestions focus on improving faith formation in Catholic schools, strengthening the connection between schools and parishes, and supporting school teachers in living their faith. Parishes called for ongoing formation opportunities for all ages, especially following Confirmation and RCIA. There are a number of suggestions about the specific content of catechesis or formation, including more attention to church tradition and the sacraments. Other topics include Catholic social teaching, church history, and Scripture. Other suggestions include joint parish missions and other shared efforts between parishes to strengthen parish leaders, pastoral councils, and deaneries.

In addition to renewed catechesis, other suggestions to strengthen collaboration in the church's mission include assisting parents in evangelizing their children, parish-based evangelization projects like Alpha, greater access to spiritual direction, and more faith-sharing groups.

There were calls for greater visibility and access to the pastor. Some called for priests to show support and interest in the activities of lay organizations associated with their parish. Catholic school students asked for priests and youth ministers to visit schools. At the same time, there was an acknowledgement of the priests' heavy workload preventing them from being as visible or accessible as either party would like.

## **6. Dialogue in Church and Society**

The church is in dialogue internally and with the world. Not closed in upon itself or forming an enclave away from the world, the church is called to proclaim the Gospel with courage to a world in need of Christ's salvation. This dialogue engages the arts, culture, science, politics, and ideology in a new Areopagus. At a time of increasing polarization in church and society, reflection on dialogue is a necessary response. There is a sense that our broader society is hostile to Catholic teaching, particularly on moral issues. There is a public perception that the church's views on marriage and divorce, gender, same-sex marriage, contraception, and abortion are incompatible with a pluralistic society. Some people noted a failure of the church in Canada to speak to moral issues and doctrines. There is a perception that Catholic teaching is not welcome in our society, which may lead church leaders to mute their public witness. On various issues, the Catholic Church has been at odds with public opinion leading to a decline in social capital and trust. Particular failures by the church concerning residential schools and clergy sexual abuse have exposed the inability of the church to act transparently. Suspicion of the church and its motives has become rampant, resulting in hostile secular media coverage and great difficulties in continuing to speak out on other social issues.





Dialogue within the church is also strained. Polarization between so-called liberal and conservative, or progressive and traditional, wings has been exacerbated in recent years by many factors, including social media, fake news, the decline of Catholic print media, and disputes over the pre-conciliar liturgy. Each faction blames the other, questions their Catholicity, and offers simplistic solutions. Dialogue is needed within the church to maintain communion between groups increasingly unable to recognize faithfulness in the other.

Many diocesan reports focused on a lack of coherence between personal beliefs, the church's teachings on morality, and the exercise of conscience. There appears to be a need for further education and formation for those involved in these disputes. Numerous responses noted the value of Synod listening sessions and encouraged the continuation of these and other forms of honest conversation. Others proposed witnessing through action, such as projects to support the poor and marginalized, the people of Ukraine, and other needy causes. Additional social justice activities and advocacy were mentioned, including volunteering at soup kitchens, writing to elected representatives, and acting on the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. To promote a culture of life, Catholics should speak out on the problems in Long Term Care facilities, access to palliative care, and the spread of assisted suicide and euthanasia. Simple ideas such as coffee and fellowship after Mass, more community and prayer events, and better use of social media were also shared.

## **7. Ecumenism**

The core insight of Vatican II that permitted the Catholic Church to embrace the ecumenical movement was recognizing that we share a common baptism with other Christians. In this report, we have noted baptism's place in establishing the people of God and in calling and forming us for mission. As we seek to become a more synodal church, we learn from our ecumenical partners how synodality is experienced in their context. The diocesan reports indicated a broad experience of prayer and working with other Christians. Suggestions for enhancing these relationships included more social action and prayer. Bible study, pilgrimages, Alpha, World Day of Prayer, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Way of the Cross, Good Friday services, Remembrance Day, and other spiritual ecumenism were proposed. Ideas for working together include pro-life and social justice issues, mental illness and isolation, poverty, support for families, homelessness, suicide, environmental issues, clean drinking water on reserves, issues faced by rural areas, and reaching out to those on the margins. Respondents encouraged us to focus on what we have in common and look for ways to break down misconceptions. We should also work together with other Christians on interfaith relations and dialogue. The diocesan reports expressed a desire to examine ways to increase occasions where there might be greater sacramental sharing.

It was noted that the experiences of interchurch couples are a resource for the church. These couples, with a foot in two churches, can be a bridge assisting the Catholic Church in establishing and strengthening relationships with other Christians.



## 8. Authority and Participation

As noted in the introduction, leadership issues were reported from many of the dioceses. A common concern is the education and formation of clergy and lay ministers. This is related to the broader problem of catechesis and formation discussed earlier. Problems in the exercise of authority and the ministerial participation of all the faithful could be resolved with a greater understanding of the baptismal call to ministry.

Examples of clericalism are found earlier in this report. In many places, people describe the church as clerical, rigid, and patriarchal. The root of clericalism is a distorted understanding of the Christian community and the clergy's authority in the community. This misunderstanding may exist among clergy or laity but is equally pernicious. Clericalism leads to failures in the shared responsibility of clergy and laity within the church. It is a combination of a lack of understanding of the role of the laity, a lack of understanding of the structures and processes of the church, and a lack of self-awareness by clergy; clericalism impacts the proper functioning of the Christian community. Several diocesan reports indicated that where decisions are made exclusively by priests and bishops, there is a lack of transparency and subsidiarity. Clericalism means that clergy service the spiritual needs of a passive laity.

Several dioceses reported a limited number of lay ministers, particularly in youth ministry. There are difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified lay ministers in parishes because, in most cases, parishes do not offer a living wage or job security. Lay ministers receive little recognition for their professional training or experience. During the pandemic, lay ministers were laid off in many places, resulting in the loss of numerous experienced and committed personnel.

In many cases, lay ministers experience difficulty working collaboratively with clergy. The common pastoral model in the church assumes that ministry roles are normally filled by clergy, and that lay people only minister vicariously. The transfer of priests or bishops can disrupt a pastoral team leading to job insecurity for lay people. Youth ministers face a unique difficulty. Youth ministers report that parishes place unrealistic expectations on them, hoping that they will restore the life of the parish and fill the pews.

Several dioceses reported calls for the ordination of women and married people. Some of these proposals referenced Synod discussions about ordaining *virī probati* and ordaining women to the diaconate. Others proposed sweeping reforms to end mandatory celibacy of priests and bishops and open all ministries to women.

## 9. Discerning and Deciding

Many dioceses reported positive experiences of synod consultation, primarily when group discussions occurred. Participants frequently asked for more opportunities for discussion and expressed hopes that these discussions would result in changes to pastoral plans and practices. It is evident that clergy and laity are enthusiastic about introducing more synodal discernment. Few specific ideas about ways to implement synodal processes were proposed, but several synodal virtues were identified. These included setting discernment within the context of prayer, listening



to everyone, discussing charitably, providing feedback to those affected, transparency, and involving youth.

Acknowledging the crucial role of the clergy in the parish, it was suggested that priests need to consult parish councils more often and should avoid overruling the council. There are still parishes that do not have parish councils, which needs to be addressed. Frequent movement of clergy was identified as a problem that impacts good decision-making and destabilizes parishes. It was suggested that parish councils and other laity be consulted regarding priest appointments to help match skills to the needs of parishes. Others suggested that priests need additional leadership training and to make greater use of lay people with management and leadership skills. Parishes should find ways for the laity to take on more of the administrative burden.

## **10. Forming Ourselves in Synodality**

The diocesan reports indicate several barriers that inhibit the formation of synodal life in the church. Problems of catechesis and leadership have been described repeatedly in this report. One diocese noted that the laity are sacramentalized but not catechized. This leads to passive participation in the church's mission with limited contribution to decision-making. Clerical defensiveness, poor leadership, and a heavy workload have led to resistance to participating in the Synod process and implementing change. Parishes without resident priests have difficulty establishing trust between pastors and parish leaders, such that processes of discernment are less effective.

Several proposals indicated the need for implementing synodal practices within the church. Proposals include learning how to have healthy conversations, developing spaces for youth to talk, providing spaces for encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to promote healing, and encouraging simple gatherings to promote relationship building within parishes and beyond. Seeing the central role of the Holy Spirit in synodal life, several proposals suggested beginning dialogue sessions with prayer.

Recommendations from the diocesan reports include continuing synodal processes in diocesan councils, parish councils, schools, lay associations, movements, and ministry groups to build trusting relationships.

## **11. Conclusion**

Whenever the gospels speak of Jesus sending out his disciples on mission, we hear he sent them in pairs, two by two. What is the smallest Christian community? It is two. Two disciples sent on mission. In the synodal experience that we have just lived in the dioceses and eparchies of western Canada, we hear that some of the sharing circles were small, but none could be smaller than two. Discipleship puts us in relationship with one another. Following Jesus and the Holy Spirit that blows where it wills always binds us together in love. This is one of the many lessons re-learned in the course of the past several months.

We have not now come to the end of anything. Missionary discipleship does not end. Neither have we just begun; the church has experienced synodality for two millennia. We walk by faith



and not by sight, with sister and brother disciples at our side. Let us rejoice in the Spirit's presence with us.

Alleluia!



**Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario**  
**Assemblée des Évêques Catholiques de L'Ontario**



**For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission**  
**Regional Synodal Synthesis from the Ontario Dioceses**

**Church as Institution | Church as Community | Church as Formation**

*Joys | Difficulties and Obstacles | Hopes and Dreams*

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**Approved by the Bishops of Ontario**

**Submitted by Bishop Gerrard Bergie, President of the ACBO, on July 8, 2022**



## Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario Assemblée des évêques catholiques de l'Ontario

### Regional Synodal Synthesis Report

#### A. BACKGROUND

In October 2021 Pope Francis launched the path of synodality “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*”. From 2021 to 2023 the entire Church is embarking on a journey of sharing, reflecting and listening. As Pope Francis shared “*It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.*”

Through this synodal process the Church worldwide has been asked to reflect on and discern the following:

**A synodal Church in announcing the Gospel, “*journeys together*”: How is the ‘*journeying together*’ happening today in the Church? What steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow in our “*journeying together*”?**

#### B. SYNTHESIS OF DIOCESAN SYNODAL REPORTS

Dioceses across the province having completed the Diocesan phase of the synodal process (Appendix A) submitted their synod reports to the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO) in mid-June. A committee (see Appendix B) was assembled whose task was to synthesize and capture what was heard from each of the 12 dioceses and produce a provincial report that would then be passed on to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB).

The Committee’s work was grounded in the words of Sister Nathalie Becquart, the Undersecretary for the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, “*There is no synodality without spirituality*’. A three-day synodal process of prayer, listening, reflection and synthesis opened with the spiritual reflection, *A Step Along the Way* (Appendix C). Over the course of the three days, the committee identified the main themes that emerged from the diocesan reports. Specifically captured were respondents’ experience with the Catholic Church with respect to: joys, difficulties and obstacles, along with their hopes and dreams. **To the greatest degree possible, the Committee sought to retain the authentic voice of the participants and the dioceses by identifying key illustrative quotes from the reports submitted.**

#### C. MAJOR THEMES

Once the major themes were identified three main categories naturally emerged: Church as Institution; Church as Community and Church as Formation.

1. Church as Institution – structure, authority, hierarchy of the institutional Church
2. Church as Community – relationships within the Church, relationships with others and outreach
3. Church as Formation – experience of faith, faith formation and catechesis

The Committee noted that while these categories are not mutually exclusive and much intersectionality exists, they proved very helpful in providing an organizing framework for the report.



## D. WHAT WE HEARD – THE JOYS EXPERIENCED ‘JOURNEYING TOGETHER’ WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

### 1. Church as Institution – Joys

Joy in being invited to and participating in the synodal process:

- *“. . . it was clear that everyone involved cared deeply about their faith, religious traditions, the Church, and each other. This daring sharing was a new process for lay people, staff and clergy. It was a consolation to see elevated levels of engagement, resulting in positive and self-reflective feedback. Even when comments veered into negativity, it was heartening that people cared enough about the Church to participate in the process.”*

### 2. Church as Community - Joys

Joy for the parish faith community of which they are part:

- *“While a significant majority expressed a profound desire for more community, it must be said that a considerable number of people conveyed a deep gratitude for their parish community. I feel such joy in being part of a sacramental church.”*
- *“If we learned anything from the pandemic, it is that the Church is a community, the Church is the Body of Christ, the Church is the Communion of Saints.”*

Joy in *belonging* to a faith community:

- *“I have no family, so the people who attend Mass at my Church have become my extended surrogate family.”*

Joy in being *supported* by the community during times of both joy and sorrow:

- *“As one respondent stated, speaking unknowingly for many others: ‘The church was there at my lowest points.’”*
- *“One student summarized his feeling for the Church as a place where joy was to be found, ‘in knowing that no matter what happens [there is] always a place to go that feels like home.’”*

Joy in *servicing* the needs of the community:

- *“This is a matter of giving people multiple small and meaningful experiences of commitment together, it forms them in action, it makes them discover the joys of giving.”*
- *“Our parishes do well in supporting their members who participate in the Church’s Mission by serving society in various and sometimes secular ways . . . We have contributions to the food bank, clothing drives, Christmas gifts for those in long term care and giving flowers to homebound seniors. We also wanted to mention that our Deacons do a great job by visiting the sick, Holy Communion to the homebound and encouraging parishioners to talk and support each other.”*

Joy experienced in and through the Catholic schools:

- *“Our schools act as Church for many of our students.”*
- *“Catholic schools are a blessing that deserve our utmost attention and care.”*

### 3. Church as Formation - Joys

Joy experienced through reception of the sacraments, in particular the Eucharist:

- *“Like the apostles on the Road to Emmaus it is in the breaking of the bread when we truly recognize Jesus.”*
- *“Respondents unanimously felt inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and honoured that He entrusts His mission to us. Many practicing Catholics say their experience of the faith provides them with traditions and a spirituality that supports them.”*

Joy in taking part in faith formation opportunities offered:

- *“According to most of the participants, the voice of God is heard through individual private prayer including adoration, rituals and devotional life.”*

Joy in the different ways in which the Catholic faith is celebrated:

- *“Some Catholics provided feedback about their desire for the Traditional Latin Mass which they find to be more reverent and therefore preferable.”*

## **E. WHAT WE HEARD – THE DIFFICULTIES AND OBSTACLES EXPERIENCED ‘JOURNEYING TOGETHER’ WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

### **1. Church as Institution – Difficulties and Obstacles**

The hierarchical and authoritative nature of the Church:

- *“The administration of our Church looks less and less like the life of our Lord when He was on earth. The Church as an institution lacks humility. It is hierarchical, patriarchal, with a sense of being better than others.”*

The Church’s uncompromising doctrine along with an unwillingness to change:

- *“There are also the strict, unyielding, and uncompromising doctrine with the Catholic Church that limits our ability to actively listen when we have no ability or leeway whatsoever to deal with the concerns that are diametrically opposite to Church doctrine.”*
- *“The survey surfaced discontent with the Church’s current direction or teaching. Some, clearly frustrated with the Church’s lack of support for the use of the 1962 missal, the corresponding liturgies and what they see as a rejection of the Church’s orthodox teachings, believe the Church has rejected the truth as taught by Jesus Christ. Others, just as frustrated, that the Church is unwilling to change its teachings in areas such as its hierarchical structure, no women’s ordination and some moral teachings, particularly concerning same-sex relationships and living together without the Sacrament of marriage and believing the Church is more concerned about preserving its structure and privilege than spreading God’s call to charity. The deep divisions and polarization found in the faithful were painfully clear in the response we received.”*

Exclusion and limited roles available to women in Church leadership:

- *“Not having an equal role for women is degrading, disrespectful and frankly stupid.”*
- *“Women have played a huge role in society, in education and health care over the past decades, so why is their role in the Church limited?”*

The Indigenous, sex abuse and financial scandals of the Church:

- *“A common sentiment shared was that the Church was hiding from history and trying to protect its own self-interests rather than protecting those who could not protect themselves.”*
- *“Parishioners are searching for honesty, transparency regarding funds that go towards lawsuits, support for victims, and their families and help for abusers.”*
- *“It is challenging to frequently have to defend my beloved Church against those who don’t share my faith because of many scandals [the] perceived second-class status of women and material wealth in the face of poverty.”*
- *“The Church must also take responsibility for its mistakes and repent for the wrongs committed. If the Church fails to make amends for past abuses, many people will not listen to our message or respect us. We should take part fully in the reconciliation process towards Aboriginal [Indigenous] communities.”*
- *“The strong feeling that not enough was done to provide restitution and express sorrow for Indian Residential schools was the top reason for feeling of embarrassment and shame.”*

Laity not encouraged nor have opportunities to share their gifts and talents:

- *"I feel I have an obligation to my parish, while I am poor, I do have talents I could offer, but I feel unwelcome, and unwanted."*
- *"I have not really seen the Holy Spirit at work regarding decision making in my parish"*
- *"There appeared to be a belief that there is no evidence that the laity are listened to and there is nothing to show that opportunities are created to change this."*

Priests required to take on too many roles:

- *"Reduce the workload of pastors – the pastors are too busy handling the administrative needs of the parishes."*
- *"Many priests express the need to feel more supported in their work, as well as the need for companionship."*
- *"Priests often forced to fill many roles but should be allowed to focus on being priests ahead of administrators."*

A disconnect between the diocese and parishes:

- *"The inconsistency between parishes, as well as current diocesan procedures to review pastoral plans collaboratively and routinely need to be studied."*

Fear of change and skepticism with respect to the synodal process:

- *"Some feared that inviting input might lead to the transformation of a church that they would prefer remain the way it is or the way it was."*
- *"When invited to offer feedback, people said, 'What for? Nobody is going to listen to me. It [response] will get changed.'"*
- *"Cynicism expressed regarding the synodal process specifically. A recurring pun used: Sin-Odd. Many respondents did not believe the Church would listen to their responses or that the Synod was rigged to bring about a certain result."*

## **2. Church as Community – Difficulties and Obstacles**

A lack of welcome to and connectedness with the community:

- *"The majority of participants in the synodal conversations desire or are searching for their place in the Church."*
- *"For individuals who have felt condescended, intimidated, isolated, judged, marginalized, rejected or unwelcomed by the Church, it is clear they have experienced a Catholic community at odds with the welcoming, inclusive and redemptive message of the Gospel."*
- *"We struggle to be a welcoming Church. There is a gap and bridging it will be difficult."*
- *"Some grew up with the faith and slowly drifted away or no longer attend. They may still pray and believe in God, but they no longer feel connected to the Church community. Some feel they do not need the Catholic Church to explore their faith or relationship with God."*
- *"There is a tension or perhaps a growing divide between Catholics over the Mass form itself – the Novus Ordo (Mass in English/Vernacular) and the Traditional Latin Mass. Some Catholics provided feedback about their desire for the Traditional Latin Mass which they find more reverent and therefore, preferable. They take exception to the restrictions placed on the Traditional Latin Mass and are pleased that it is celebrated within most regions of the Diocese."*
- *"People have left the Church and left people questioning not their trust in God, but in the organized Church."*
- *"The vast majority of respondents expressed that any moving forward of the Church's mission needs to include a greater and further reaching out to those who feel abandoned by the Church."*
- *"We must live lives of kindness to others. Unless we develop friendly relationships with those around us, they will never be interested in the Gospel."*
- *"Changes in pastoral leadership styles when transferring pastors and associates can also damage a community, especially if done too often with a particular community."*

The great absence of youth:

- *“The youth are the great absence; they have not abandoned the Church but feel abandoned.”*
- *“If young people are not present in their local parishes, it is not so much that they don’t feel the Church is relevant, as they don’t know whether they can trust it.”*
- *“One of the youth summarized what was felt within his youth group by stating, ‘while certain non-controversial topics are “safe” to discuss within the Church, others seem to be completely taboo. Racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, colonialism, COVID-19, poverty and human rights are all issues that weigh heavily on our conscience as a Catholic, but we feel that we cannot discuss these topics with other members of the Church because they are too “political” or “controversial”.’*

A belief by families that the Church is out of step with its understanding how the family of 2022 functions:

- *“Parishes need to be: delighted to see new families, children who cry, young people who worship God. The animosity towards young people and new families is tangible and drives people away. Parishes should accept people where they are at rather than point out what they should change.”*

A lack of inclusion for newcomers, marginalized, divorced/remarried, LGBTQ2S+, seniors, youth, women:

- *“Churches tend to form a comfortable community for members but exclude the poor and marginalized. Members may donate money, food, clothing but not friendship.”*
- *“. . . this question (how are the concerns of the laity listened to) has shown light to a pattern of how many women don’t feel like they are being listened to at all.”*
- *“Whether perceived or real, ‘the Church is considered misogynistic, homophobic, racist and colonial’ or at least some of the above, by a great many. “*
- *“Many people indicated the need for a Church to be more intentional about inviting and engaging people in the Church’s ministry, especially women and those living on the edge of the Church, for example, LGBTQIA+ community.”*
- *“Our parishes must become more invitational.”*

A fear of being judged or dismissed, in particular: newcomers, marginalized, divorced/remarried, LGBTQ2S+, seniors, youth, women:

- *“We acknowledge that sometimes those seeking companionship are often reluctant to do so because of fear of judgement or rejection, its our responsibility to have informal conversations to gain understanding of each other.”*

The disconnect among parish, school and home:

- *“Priests are not visible in the RC schools so there isn’t any connection between church and school.”*
- *“Relationships between parishes and schools are uneven across the Archdiocese. Some schools have good and dynamic relationships with their local parishes. Other schools have zero connection or interaction with any parish. . . A few summaries suggested that sacramental preparation be placed back in the schools in order to strengthen church-school relationships and bring families back to the Church.”*

Communication within the community and to the larger community:

- *“The Church continues to operate in traditional ways and misses opportunities to reach people in innovative and culturally responsive ways.”*

#### 4. Church as Formation – Difficulties and Obstacles

A lack of ongoing faith formation and resources:

- *“The world is evolving at a faster pace than ever and many have expressed concern that the church should be more connected to the reality of evolving contemporary matters.”*
- *“Some individuals showed a passionate commitment to Evangelization but requested better resources to equip themselves and their parish.”*

The laity’s lack of knowledge and understanding of Church teachings and doctrine:

- *“Catholics don’t know their faith, can’t explain it or teach it and parents can’t help their children. Most people know the rules but not the ‘why’s’ for the theology of the rules.”*
- *“In our local context, formal catechesis ends with confirmation for many parishioners. We can therefore assume that many of our Catholics have a 12 – 13-year old’s understanding of Church.”*

Inadequate formation of priests and deacons for contemporary parish ministry:

- *“Many of our respondents acknowledged the generous and self-giving service of our Priests and Deacons. Our people still love their clergy and are grateful for their life and ministry. Yet, some still expressed concern that the formation of Priests and Deacons does not adequately prepare them for contemporary parish ministry.”*

Homilies that are not relevant to everyday life and fail to inspire:

- *“If the homilies are of too high a spiritual or intellectual level, without people being able to make a connection with their everyday life, they gain nothing. They fall asleep physically and spiritually.”*
- *“Have scriptures explained in a way, that makes it relevant and useful in today’s world.”*

Schools and their role in faith formation:

- *“After 12 years of religious education and 37 years attending church, I do not feel prepared to be a missionary disciple.”*

#### F. WHAT WE HEARD – THE HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS WE ‘JOURNEY TOGETHER’.

##### 1. Church as Institution – Hopes and Dreams

Leadership and organizational models rethought in ways to promote greater collaboration among clergy and laity:

- *“Another (response) insists let love be the guide, not just rules and regulations.”*
- *“Leadership and organizational models can be rethought in ways to promote greater collaboration.”*
- *“One attendee offered that the theme of Education Week 2022 was apt for the Church at this moment in its history: ‘Rebuild, restore, renew is a good theme for the whole church now.’”*
- *“Parish Finance Committee is a requirement in the Code of Canon Law but the Parish Pastoral Council is not.”*
- *“It was suggested many times that a shared model of ministry among priests and laity would be more engaging than the heavy load of ministerial tasks that the priest currently carries on his own.”*

The leadership and voice of women:

- *“There were repeated comments concerning the Church involving women in a more meaningful way, positioning women in leadership and recognizing the impact of language by updating and applying inclusive language.”*

Reconciliation for past mistakes:

- *“Indigenous peoples also need healing from the past harms done through the residential school system. An apology from the Holy Father that takes responsibility for the harm inflicted upon them will begin the process of healing for many.”*

- *“Promote new approaches to the pastoral care of indigenous peoples developed by the Episcopal Conference of Canada.”*
- *“One person suggests making an honest assessment of current Church policies and practices, as well as identifying past transgressions, ‘Think of it as an examination of conscience.’”*

A re-emphasized ‘Call to Holiness’:

- *“We are being called to re-emphasize the call to holiness, as we seek to respond to the challenges that we face today.”*
- *“How can our style of Church be relevant in the society in which we live? How was Jesus relevant in the society of his time? He was a shepherd, he prayed, instructed and loved. Our parish must model Jesus, we have to invite, welcome and involve others. The need for spiritual direction is natural but we need to make sure we are actively listening, communicating, leading by example, be visible, be respectful so that we can properly model the faith and speak the truth in love. We must be the ones to stand up for the word of God in total love for all the people.”*

An embracing and continuation of the synodal process:

- *“Passionate engagement of pastoral leaders is key”*
- *“The best way to make a change is to be part of the change. Priests need to ask for suggestions, feedback and encourage input regularly.”*
- *“A continuation of the synodal process may be a form of communal accompaniment in which parish communities are encouraged to listen to each member and grow in solidarity and compassion. “*
- *“One person writes that we need to ‘be open to a variety of methods to evangelize, dare to try new methods, don’t always put new wine in the old wineskins.’”*
- *“There is a need to develop stronger, deeper community in the parish, which will hopefully quench thirst of the lonely. In our local context, determining how we can best accompany people remains the central question for pastoral ministry.”*

## **2. Church as Community – Hopes and Dreams**

A welcoming and accepting community:

- *“The majority of participants in the synodal conversation desire or are searching for their place in the Church.”*
- *“We must learn how to better welcome people whose lives are publicly at odds with the Church and her teachings. There should be no division of ‘us’ and ‘them’ because in community there is only ‘us’”.*
- *“I was encouraged to learn how much people attending our session are keen to increase their faith, to re-engage in their spiritual formation. I was encouraged to hear people acknowledge it is not up to just the Church hierarchy to make necessary changes, but it is up to the laity as well.”*
- *“We need others to see love, community, joy. Show and tell. Be an example of living faith in action. People need to feel and experience God’s love through us.”*
- *“May people find our churches a place of love and healing, a place where they feel PEACE. Everyone counts, everyone is loved, without conditions, without exceptions.”*

An inclusive, merciful, and compassionate community:

- *“More people might frequent the Church today if it was viewed as a sanctuary for searchers, the confused, the wounded, the broken and the non-religious.”*
- *“The vast majority of respondents expressed that any moving forward of the Church’s mission needs to include a greater and further reaching out to those who feel abandoned by the Church. Particularly those in irregular marriage situations, those holding uncommon or unpopular views, women, the elderly, the youth and the LGBTQIA+ community.”*
- *“We must strive to help them experience a welcome, a sense of being loved and valued, and know that this Church is their loving Mother who knows their needs and want to hear their voice.”*



- *“The wish expressed is for the parishes of the Diocese to be like families, in which the priest feels supported by parishioners and parishioners share deeply in faith and life. Children should be 100% safe and all minorities should be respected. Ideally, the parish should be a place of listening, dialogue and exchange ‘in which we can share our dreams and visions inspired by the Holy Spirit.’ We should also have dialogue with our Christian brothers and sisters.”*

A non-judgemental community of faith:

- *“The fear of judgement must be replaced by the unconditional love of Christ. The session notes regularly identified fear as one of the main factors that people do not speak up or become involved in the life of the parish: fear of being judged, fear of not knowing their faith or parish/diocesan procedures, fear of offending someone who thinks differently, and fear of confrontation was often identified. This fear must be replaced by the unconditional love of Christ.”*
- *“My hopes are that as a group of faith filled people is that we can break down the walls and stereotypes’, my wish is that we can be more welcoming and less judgemental.”*
- *“The Church needs to first understand where people are at in their life and faith journey and walk with them with respect, compassion and gentleness.”*

A greater connection to families and youth:

- *“There must be a way to make the Church more comfortable for our young families and youth – one that reflects the ‘family structures’ of modern times” Another insists, “Let love be the guide, not just rules and regulations.”*
- *“The participants’ dream is first and foremost for churches to be filled with life and overflowing with families and young people.”*
- *“Youth want a greater sense of inclusion and belonging and they desire to hear their own voice in the process. The experience of synodality stands out to them positively because it has been a rare opportunity for them to be heard without judgement.”*
- *“Young people are the future, they must be given a place to speak or rather a place to better explain themselves. You have to listen to them and understand their needs. The more their questions will be listened to and the more answered, they will be able to take their place.”*

A greater and trusting collaboration between clergy and laity:

- *We must learn to better walk with all of God’s children, regardless of where they are in their journey, without compromising what we hold to be true as Christians. This is the narrow path of true synodality.”*
- *“A community that will ‘accompany people through difficult times.’”*
- *“Only in humility with open hearts and minds can listening and courageous conversations begin to build bridges between the different perspectives to bring a shared vision of the Church.”*

A Church that takes responsibility for its mistakes and takes action towards reconciliation:

- *“Reconciliation with the Indigenous people was seen to be a priority. One participant summarized this deep feeling sincerely, stating: “I dream of genuine healing for all families of misunderstanding, hurt and damage and those who were left behind because of these events, sharing their story and seeking healing.”*
- *“Our faithful want the interpersonal relations between the bishop and the priests to be well cared for in order to avoid certain situations of the past to recur and to call into question the paternal relationship of the bishop with his priests, while also avoiding the climate of mistrust of priests towards their bishop.”*

A continued synodal process of listening and dialogue:

- *“Open the windows and let fresh air in’ as one participant shares. This synodal process is woven together with the journey of healing together as a church. The experience of sharing and listening without judgement feels new and unexpected to many, helping us to meet one another in our shared humanity as we relearn, or perhaps re-remember, our common wishes and fears, and perhaps most importantly, our common heritage as the People of God.”*

A deeper connection of church and school:

- *“Church must cultivate a firm and deep-rooted relationship with our source schools and parental community. Young people need a safe place to gather and dialogue about Church teaching in addition to having time to enjoy social gatherings such as weekly movie nights, dances, games night and take part in mentorship activities.”*

### **3. Church as Formation – Hopes and Dreams**

Faith formation opportunities beyond the sacraments that places a renewed emphasis upon catechesis and formation:

- *“The desire for a deepened parish community through prayer, devotions and other community events.”*
- *“Ongoing faith formation is the key to one’s understanding of their own faith. Without that, they cannot go out and spread the Word of God and further evangelize within our greater society. Education for the laity on current moral issues, aspects of the faith and adult catechesis and on-going faith formation were requested.”*
- *“The promotion of Christian unity is intrinsically linked to evangelization. Renewal in the Church is assisted when Christians proclaim and witness together to the power of the Living Word of God at work in the Church and reaching out to the peripheries.”*
- *“If Catholics are not being formed by the Church, we can presume they will seek formation and guidance elsewhere including the media (especially social media) and government. This is especially true on complex societal questions, such as end of life issues, sexuality and gender, marriage and divorce . . . We require strong leaders, both lay and clergy to shepherd our people to a fully integrated view of the human person within our Catholic tradition and faith.”*
- *“We can’t love or communicate what we don’t understand.”*
- *“RCIA, Alpha re-imagined and reformatted for a synodal Church.”*

Liturgy that is reverent and enhances and promotes prayer life:

- *“Others wish for a more engaging Mass for their children, or even a children’s Mass, with children playing active roles in its different parts.”*
- *“Preach good sermons about living in our now and direct the people to read the part of the bible that strengthens us.”*
- *“Music was mentioned several times as a very important part of the experience of liturgy.”*

## G. WHAT STEPS IS THE SPIRIT INVITING US TO TAKE IN ORDER TO GROW IN OUR 'JOURNEYING TOGETHER'?

*"Obstacles become opportunities with God."*

### 1. Church as Institution: 'Journeying together' to . . .

- . . . have a church hierarchy that is more inclusive and provides laity a greater voice.
- . . . have dioceses and parishes where more women are provided leadership roles.
- . . . have parishes where there is greater laity involvement.
- . . . embrace the synodal path, a path of healing.
- . . . ensure that synodality not be a one-time opportunity and that it becomes our way of operating.
- . . . adopt a process of synodality among the clergy – bishop to bishop, bishop to priest.
- . . . ensure that synodality is not dependent upon the present Pope, the present bishop or the present pastor.

### 2. Church as Community: 'Journeying together' to . . .

- . . . truly listen to each other.
- . . . enter into dialogue with openness and without judgement.
- . . . create a more loveable Church that welcomes and is more inclusive – to include everyone and exclude no one.
- . . . embrace Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous communities through concrete actions.
- . . . work towards a Church that is more transparent.
- . . . actively reach out and 'cross the road' attending to the marginalized.
- . . . engage youth and listen to their voice.

### 3. Church as Formation: 'Journeying together' to . . .

- . . . offer formation at every age and every stage of life so that clergy and laity are equipped for today's challenges.
- . . . provide formation that prepares and supports the laity to be missionary disciples.
- . . . engage in ongoing catechesis and education.
- . . . find new ways to engage families, parish and school in sacramental preparation.
- . . . inspire Catholics, both in the Church and those who have moved away from the Church, to develop a richer understanding of sacramental life.

## H. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF NOTE

### Common areas of note among the diocesan reports include:

- Whether the diocese was small or large, predominately urban/metropolitan or rural, there was much commonality among the joys, struggles and hopes and dreams expressed by the respondents.
- In reviewing the reports and identifying, joys, obstacles and struggles and hopes and dreams -- struggles and obstacles predominated.
- Some responses noted skepticism, that what they shared/submitted would indeed be listened to and acted upon at all levels of the Church's hierarchy.
- Responses demonstrated that people cared enough to contribute. The responses were perceived to emerge from places of deep-rooted care and concern for the Church. In some cases, the responses came from places of great joy and others from places of wounded love. As one committee member reflected, *'In reading through all the reports you were left humbled and moved by the fact that the respondents cared so deeply'*.

## Appendix A – Synodal Synthesis Process

The Province of Ontario is comprised of nine dioceses, three archdioceses, and five eparchies and is home to approximately 4.5 million Catholics. Mass is celebrated regularly in approximately forty languages.

Dioceses and eparchies were asked to submit their own synodal synthesis reports to the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario by June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The dioceses had several short months during which to gather as much information as possible from their parishioners, parishes, and many other individuals and groups who wished to contribute to this important undertaking. These diocesan reports were condensed into a ten-page report. The Regional Synod Synthesis Committee was likewise charged with the responsibility to condense all submissions into its own single ten-page report that would attempt to capture the voices and contributions heard across all of Ontario, and then submit that report to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops by July 8, 2022.

The dioceses and eparchies worked diligently to gather as much information as possible in very trying times, as waves of the pandemic continued, with ongoing restrictions on in-person gatherings, coupled with anxiety about gathering in any group settings.

Despite these restrictions, valuable information was gathered using a variety of means and formats. Parishes undertook unique approaches engaging communities in the synodal process including:

- Online surveys
- Paper questionnaires
- In-person small group discussions and meetings
- One-on-one conversations and meetings
- Virtual discussions and meetings
- Online forums
- Outreach to community groups, schools, school boards, etc. for written submissions
- Community groups and organizations made their own submissions
- Discussions with clergy, deacons, staff, parish volunteers

Dioceses engaged in regular and ongoing communication with parishes, parishioners, community groups and external partners and organizations, encouraging participation in this synodal process.

Dioceses expressed regret that they were not able to conduct more in-person meetings or to meet with groups multiple times during this synodal process. Nonetheless, dioceses felt confident that many people were able to participate and contribute their thoughts and ideas. Dioceses also expressed how powerful this experience has been for all involved, and there is a genuine desire to continue this conversation at the parish, diocesan, and provincial level. Many expressed a sense of urgency that these conversations must continue, and that there is no need to wait for the Synod in 2023 to continue the work locally.

## Appendix B – ACBO Regional Synod Synthesis Committee

The Executive of the ACBO asked the Ontario Bishops to nominate individuals to serve on the Regional Synod Synthesis Committee. These names were submitted to the General Secretary prior to the 2022 Spring Plenary. At the Plenary, the Bishops considered the names that had been submitted, including others proposed during the plenary itself. The Bishops charged the Executive with confirming the members of the committee and with appointing a Committee Chairperson.

The following are the members of the ACBO Regional Synod Synthesis Committee:

Valeria Ayala, Spiritual Affairs Coordinator with the Archdiocese of Toronto, co-chair of Archdiocesan Synod Committee

Brian Beal, General Secretary of the ACBO

Hélène Boudreau, retired Catholic Francophone educator, member of Assomption de Notre-Dame, Oshawa, Facilitator of Regional Francophone Community Synodal process

Kristen Carey, Executive Assistant of the ACBO

David Dayler, retired Director of the Discipleship and Parish Life Office, Diocese of Hamilton, Co-Chair of Diocesan Synod Committee

Margaret Jong, Chancellor with the Diocese of St. Catharines, Member of Diocesan Synod Committee

Most Reverend Wayne Lobsinger, Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Hamilton, Member of Diocesan Synod Committee

Sébastien Lacroix, Assistant General Secretary (Francophone affairs) of the ACBO

Linda Staudt, retired Director of Education of the London District Catholic School Board, Co-Chair of the Diocesan Synod Committee.

The Executive also confirmed that Linda Staudt would serve as chair of this committee.

The committee was mandated with the responsibility of reviewing the submissions of all the dioceses and eparchies of Ontario, and creating a regional synthesis report that would be submitted to the CCCB by July 8, 2022.

Following three days of prayerful discernment at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre, Mississauga, Ontario, and following the process outlined in Appendix C, Committee Chair, Linda Staudt authored this report on behalf of the entire committee.

## Appendix C – Synod Synthesis Committee – Agenda - Days of Prayer, Reflection and Synthesis

*Days of Prayer, Reflection and Synthesis*  
ACBO Synod Synthesis Committee  
Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre, Mississauga, Ontario  
**Day One**

**10:00**            **Welcome**

**10:00 – 12:00**   **Session One: Welcome and Team Time**

Setting the Stage for Prayer, Reflection and Synthesis

**12:00 – 1:00**    **Lunch and Personal Reflection Time**

**1:00 – 4:00**    **Session Two: *Joys***

**Prayer and Reflection – The Good Samaritan - Luke 10: 25-37**

What we heard - The joys experienced '*journeying together*' with the Catholic Church

### **DAY TWO**

**8:00 – 9:00**    **Breakfast**

**9:00 – 12:00**   **Session Three: *Difficulties and Obstacles***

**Prayer and Reflection – The Road to Emmaus (Part 1) – Luke 24: 13-24**

What we heard – The difficulties and obstacles experienced '*journeying together*' with the Catholic Church

**12:00 – 1:00**   **Lunch and Personal Reflection Time**

**1:00 – 4:00**    **Session Four: *Hopes and Dreams***

**Prayer and Reflection - The Road to Emmaus (Part II) – Luke 24: 24-35**

What we heard -- The hopes and dreams for the Catholic Church as we journey forward

**4:00**            **Break**

**4:30 – 5:30**    **Mass and Personal Time**

**5:30**            **Dinner**



### **DAY THREE**

**8:00**            **Breakfast**

**9:00 – 12:00**    **Session Five: *The Path Forward***

**Prayer and Reflection – Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Part 1) – 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11**

- I wonder if? I wonder why?
- Couldn't we at least?
- How can we help?

**10:30**            **Checkout of Rooms**

**12:00 – 1:00**    **Lunch and Personal Time**

**1:00 – 2:30**    **Session Six: *From our Experience***

**Prayer and Reflection – Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Part 2) – John 20: 19-23**

What is the message we wish to leave to those in our parishes?

**2:30 – 3:00**    ***In Conclusion . . .***

***“To listen is to lean in, softly, with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.”***  
Mark Nepo

## *A Step Along the Way*

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.  
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,  
it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction  
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.  
Nothing we do is complete,  
which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.  
No prayer fully expresses our faith.  
No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.  
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.  
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.  
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted,  
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.  
We cannot do everything,  
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something,  
and to do it very well.  
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,  
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,  
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders;  
ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future that is not our own.

**Now Is the Favourable Time  
for the Church's Renewal and Continuation,  
Provincial Synthesis — Quebec — Synod on Synodality  
July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

For the Church's renewal and continuation in Quebec, the faithful of this region responded to Pope Francis's invitation to organize and participate in a synodal process focused on our "journeying together" in our particular diocesan Churches. This was accomplished by listening to the Word and to each other, by paying attention to the signs of the times, through great freedom of expression, in discernment and prayer, under the Spirit's guidance. Participants dared to speak, hope, dream and walk together. The *sensus fidei fidelium* shone forth. In doing so, people realized that this was a favourable time to welcome the conversions and changes they perceive to be inspired by the Spirit.

In engaging this synod, these faithful men and women thought first of their own Church in Quebec, still hoping to contribute to the reflection of the Churches of Canada and possibly of the Church throughout the world. Each step of the process was truly lived in a spirit of synodality with all the patience this requires, thanks to the help of the Holy Spirit. The same holds true for the writing of this provincial synthesis.

**An alarming assessment:  
If we change nothing, the Church  
will no longer be a sign of the Gospel for our world.  
Well, now is the favourable time!**

If we don't undertake a true pastoral conversion, the Church will not fulfill its vocation of being a sign of God's Reign God and a leaven in the culture. It could even disappear! This is one of the first obvious conclusions to be drawn from reading the various synthesis reports. For several decades, the Church in Quebec, like many Churches in the West, has been searching for inspiration and vigour in a context of secularization and globalization. Recent events such as the isolation imposed by Covid, the sad reality of residential schools, the sexual abuses committed by members of the Church, the lack of ordained ministers and mandated laity, the financial precariousness of many dioceses and the decline in participation in Sunday celebrations have led to the emergence of a new awareness. In evaluating the present situation, a large number of Christian communities spread throughout Quebec are experiencing a real sense of urgency regarding the future of the proclamation of the Gospel. In fact, some Christian communities have already died out. To what conversions is the Spirit inviting us? What changes does the Spirit inspire in the Church? This sense of urgency appears in various forms following the themes addressed during the synodal meetings.

This realization could lead to discouragement or resignation. However, this was not the case during the meetings. All the faithful who participated in the various gatherings recognized that they lived these moments as positive and enriching experiences. They listened to the Word and prayed together. The synodal process freed their speech. They welcomed and listened to others and were welcomed and heard by them. Numerous conversations allowed them to experiment and to bring to light the beginnings of solutions that appear as signs of the Spirit at work even in these difficult times. A favourable time does seem to be taking shape. It's no longer possible to turn back the clock. The faithful have expressed a great desire for change. This is what we'll explain in the following pages, following the seven themes that came up most often in the diocesan syntheses.

According to the Bishop of Rome, "The purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust." The Church in Quebec has allowed itself to do this, in keeping with the missionary challenges of today. It has dreamed of truly human, fraternal, just and egalitarian relationships that awaken the desire and the joy of the Gospel. Whether it's the unconditional welcome of others in their diversity, their youth and their culture; whether it's the primary service of the poor and attention to the poverties of our modern world, the Church in Quebec dreams of exploring off-track roads. From dream to reality, there's but a step! For God, everything is possible if we really allow ourselves be guided and inspired by Him. This is undoubtedly the greatest of the Spirit's graces: to help us take this step by truly receiving one another as Christ's Church.

## 1. For a more listening and welcoming Church

Listening and welcoming are the two themes that come up most often in the diocesan reports. Associated with these are inclusion, healing and the need to take time.

Listening and welcoming are considered insufficient and deficient in many situations and places. Respondents spoke of youth, families, the sick, Aboriginal people, sexual minorities, people on the edges of society and those wounded by the Church. "The lack of listening or follow-up after committee meetings contributes to volunteers being less and less willing to get involved again." How much listening do people need? In fact, we never listen enough to the people we encounter. We will never welcome them as the Gospel bids us. We are all learners in this field.

At the same time, the participants in the synodal meetings all express, among their first impressions, that of having been heard, thus illustrating that this is possible in the Church.

The conviction we need to "move from a teaching Church to a listening Church" is becoming clearer and clearer. Our great desire to teach the love of God and to hand on our faith in a particular way has hindered our listening to the desires and needs of people.

To journey with people requires listening to them in an unprejudiced way, accepting differences and not trying to convert the other at all costs. “When people ask for a sacrament, they express desires and needs that we must decode in order to develop an appropriate response.”

The time has come to cultivate listening with the intimate conviction that it means welcoming the word of the Other. God’s Spirit speaks to us through those who, in Quebec society, aspire to a more human, just and fraternal world. “In the words of others, where the All-Other abides, we can already begin to recognize the signs of the Kingdom of God for our time.” When we listen to others, their words can make their way into our hearts. To be recognized is to be someone for someone, which is the basis of any healing process. To build bridges, it’s important that our words reflect the quality of our listening.

The necessity of listening affords us the opportunity to change our relationship to time. In a world where everything goes fast, listening to others implies slowing down the frantic pace of our activities and taking time. Jesus himself took the time to listen to the people he met. This is how we can become another’s neighbour. Moreover, listeners often confess that they themselves have been positively transformed by their listening experiences.

Listening is not self-evident. “Because of our human weakness and sinfulness, listening with an open heart and without prejudice is a challenge that requires great maturity, kindness and practice.” Many reports call for training to become good and true listeners. It’s also necessary to develop availability, places and activities to encourage listening to people in their own problems and reality.

The importance of listening goes hand in hand with another attitude that is crucial for the renewal of the Church, that of welcome, which the reports always characterize as “unconditional”. “To welcome is to open a space for dialogue and trust. It is important that the community avoid any form of judgment so that each person feels part of the family and welcomed.” Respondents dream that there might be fewer conditions for welcoming the other, such as in the case of divorcees, people in same-sex relationships, transgender people, etc.

In the context of this first theme, there is little mention in the reports of dialogue initiatives with our sisters and brothers of other Christian denominations. The latter seem to communicate little with each other: “We don’t know each other.” Yet Christians of other denominations could be good companions on the journey and contribute positively to the synodal process.

## 2. For meaningful and nourishing celebrations: listening to the Word of God

The importance of the Word of God and of prayer emerges from all the reports. “It’s essential that we be gathered spiritually by Christ as brothers and sisters.” The celebration of faith requires that the liturgy be both meaningful and nourishing: a liturgy

that introduces people to the sacred with homilies that connect to people's lived reality. The very way of celebrating the faith contributes to evangelization.

If the liturgy is at the heart of the celebration of faith, several reports point out that the way of celebrating in the Church is too rigid, that on many occasions the homilies are inadequate and uninspiring, disconnected from "real life". For some, the music and songs are outdated. Celebrations are passive, focused mostly of listening. Several syntheses note that the language of the liturgy is more concerned with faithfulness to the expressions of the past than with reaching out to the present culture. For example, the formula "Blessed are the guests of the wedding banquet of the Lamb," in the new [French] translation of the Roman Missal, doesn't speak much to people in 2022...

The faithful are seized by the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Word that unites us and compels us to learn the language of those to whom He sends us. It's important, therefore, that the way we speak in the Church, during celebrations and also in all the circumstances in which we are called to bear witness, truly echoes the concerns and values of our contemporaries. "To counter the risk of delivering sterile words, we could make more use of testimonies that connect with people's experiences."

Groups formed to share the Word of God can help the faithful to understand it, to learn to speak about it and to interpret it in a language that is their own and that speaks for today. The prayerful reception of the Word of God is at the heart of the "solutions" for renewing the liturgy and the Christian life as a whole and making it more attractive.

The faithful ask that lay people be allowed to preach. Then, for example, a feminine perspective might allow for new receptions of the Word to come to light.

Rites are popular. All around us, we witness a proliferation of secular rituals marking births, unions and deaths. This new situation leads us to ask how can our Catholic liturgies be both beautiful and meaningful in the today's world? "It's important to adapt for today the rites and symbols used in the liturgy that are not very accessible for the uninitiated and difficult to understand for many." Overall, the syntheses call for renewal and creativity to help our celebrations become more alive. Many yearn for the active participation of all.

Many deplore that there are few opportunities for the community to gather for prayer outside the Sunday Eucharist. Those that do exist are mainly moments of adoration or praying the rosary.

The need for formation in liturgy to better live one's faith is frequently mentioned. Training in actualizing the Word of God in the homily is particularly highlighted. Apart from the Eucharist, we note little mention of the other sacraments: marriage, reconciliation, confirmation and the anointing of the sick.

### 3. For true participation in the life of the communities: small groups and speaking out

The reports frequently mention the issue of participation in the life of communities. Most of them respond by highlighting the importance of small groups in the Church.

All the summaries make the same observations: the low level of participation in Sunday celebrations, the very high average age of the assembly (over 75 years old in some parishes), the absence of young people, always the same volunteers and congregations that are often apathetic. However, some tell of initiatives that have already been implemented and that are energizing communities here and there.

Among them, the role of small groups is constantly recalled. Various known as faith-sharing groups or synodal fraternities or Gospel households, these groups encourage prayer and growth in faith by sharing the experience of a personal and transforming encounter with Jesus Christ. While they have usually been characteristic of various Church movements, something new has been noted: they are now appearing outside the movements. “We are noticing the emergence of small groups that freely choose to walk a part of their faith journey under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.”

The size of these small groups encourages encourage people to learn to read the Gospel together. They also allow for activities that build social bonds and respond to human and spiritual needs. Large, anonymous groups are not conducive to dialogue. It’s important to form human-scaled communities.

Small groups also allow for the experience of synodality. “The household is the lifestyle that connects us to the first Christian communities in sharing and deepening the Word of God.” The reports recommend that the Church promote these small groups.

Speaking up in the Church is another theme that frequently returns. There’s a major difficulty in speaking freely and authentically. People are afraid of being judged and fear the reactions of others. Small groups encourage speaking out to counteract church/community “drop-out”.

Several reports are willing to wager that by equipping people, they will be better able to articulate their convictions and, consequently, to talk about them with other people in a coherent and substantial way. Reports suggest that biblical events be organized as well as gatherings based on cultural elements—book, film, work of art—and adaptations of catechesis.

All agree on the importance of reaching out to young people. Some report positive experiences in this regard. However, many communities are still searching for the right approach and the means to reach them. We haven’t yet succeeded in this encounter. Still, the transmission of the Gospel for the future depends on it. What if we took the time to listen to young people and ask them how they longed to experience the Church?

#### 4. For co-responsible governance involving clergy-laity, male-female partnership: decision-making, ordained ministry and the role of women.

All the reports affirm the importance of ecclesial governance formulated in terms of co-responsibility of both clergy and laity, men and women.

Much dissatisfaction was expressed on the theme of governance. "The Church is still pyramidal. The ways some bishops operate shows that authority comes from above." There should be more participation of the faithful in decisions, more communication. The faithful complain about clericalism (priests or bishops who decide alone and exercise subtle abuses of authority), still very present to the detriment of the consideration of the laity and, especially, of women. "There is a feeling that we don't work together enough, it's every man for himself." On a more specific theme, people report racism against priests from abroad.

In the face of such observations, the synodal experience of recent months has allowed us to see that clericalism can be overcome by the increased participation of many lay people. In addition, the experience of co-responsibility, which has been in place in several dioceses in Quebec for a long time, shows that lay people, including women, can have their place in the leadership and governance of dioceses. This situation allows us to reaffirm a certain number of convictions.

First of all, it is no longer possible to exercise governance in the Church as it has been done for a very long time. People want to see the continuation and further development of Church governance in the form of co-responsibility of ordained ministers and laity, both men and women: "The attitude of many clergy suggests that they don't believe enough in the strength of their priestly ministry and in the baptismal vocation of the laity. The laity are called to an active and rewarding presence in this service." "The Church should be led by men and women. There is clearly a lack of formation to properly exercise the participation of all in the service of authority."

Given recent social innovations, some participants, inspired by corporate culture, speak of democratic governance and the management of cooperative relationships. This new model makes it possible to truly take into account a primordial element: the human factor.

Co-responsibility is sometimes difficult because there is still too much appropriation of power. "Authoritarianism is not limited to clerics. In fact, some lay members conduct their mission by exercising authority over other parishioners and thus weaken the relationship with God and the engagement of all."

We must review our decision-making processes in the light of a synodal mode of operation that allows us to listen decisively to the Spirit who speaks through all members of the Church community. "Discernment must take place more in personal and community prayer. The Spirit who makes it possible to discern passes through events and persons to whom we must be particularly attentive." "Through prayer, we foster a climate



of mutual trust and openness.” In addition, each person’s attitude is important since it’s necessary from the start, “to be inhabited by the desire to put our ideas in common without being attached to them, for the good of the whole community”. It’s important to accompany and encourage people in leadership roles.

Diocesan gatherings, echoed in various reports, often propose that “access to ordained ministries (access to women, access to married men, etc.) be re-examined and that the equality of men and women in the Church be promoted in the roles and responsibilities that are formally entrusted to them”. “The question of ministries constantly returns as a thorn.”

In this section on governance, we include the many calls to consider the place and role of women in the Church and be open to evolve on this issue. We should note at the outset that the Churches in Quebec have a great tradition of integrating women into all functions and levels of church life. As one participant said, “The presence of women in diocesan structures is now part of the genetic heritage of the Church in Quebec.”

Despite this state of affairs, Christians desire a Church that is more attentive to women. “It’s important that they have a greater visibility in leadership and formation. The access of women to all ecclesial functions is continually demanded.” “The discrimination they face in the Catholic Church in general rings a sour note in our society where equality between men and women is a priority.” “The place of women in the Church is a crucial issue for the Church’s future in a society like ours.” “The Church would show more empathy if women held real responsibilities in it.” The ecclesial body is impoverished at this time.

The frequency with which demands are made concerning the place and role of women in leadership leads us to highlight one change that is constantly requested: that women have access to ordained church ministries. “Women should have the same access to ordained ministry as men, if that is their call.” “Clearly, there’s a serious urgency to make ordained ministries accessible to women, beginning with the permanent diaconate.” “A wife could receive diaconal ordination the same way her spouse does, if she has received the call.” The recent opportunity opened to women in instituted ministries of lectorate and acolyte pales in comparison. At this time, these ministries do not create much enthusiasm.

## 5. For a true dialogue between Church and Society dialogue: means of communication

Here is another major theme that frequently recurs in the diocesan reports: the Church’s lack of dialogue with the contemporary world. “The Church is very often self-referential and does not always show openness to the world.” The difficulty in communicating between the two also comes from the negative image of society that the Church conveys and the negative image of the Church conveyed by society.

Much of this problem is due to abuses of power, sex scandals caused by church members and abuse in residential schools. "The credibility of the Canadian and local church has been severely questioned as a result of various real and publicized scandals. This context, for clergy, religious and laity alike, makes dialogue with our society difficult." If the Church loses its credibility, how can it be a sign of the Kingdom?

Fortunately, the Church's reactions to these events indicate that we have reached a turning point: we now see requests for forgiveness, proposals for reconciliation, various forms of compensation, etc. The establishment of a program for the prevention of abuse of minors and vulnerable persons is a step in the right direction, although there is still some way to go. "Calling on professionals (psychologists, sexual assault workers and other competent people) can be an asset for the Church."

The Church is invited to listen to and serve God's will for His people here, a people God entrusts to the Church. What are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the women, men, children and youth of Quebec today? This is how the Church will begin a dialogue with our world.

"Causes" denounced by the legitimate indignation of our contemporaries should be more embraced by the Church. "We think of environmental and social causes, of women's rights everywhere, of the plight of members of LGBTQ+ communities who are too often subjected to exclusion and harassment, if not more serious violence." "If the Church does not lead the way, how can it remain credible? Isn't it time for us to walk the talk?"

Several reports point to the problem of the Church's language. It's often not very accessible, often distant from people's daily lives. The Church should opt for a simple, clear and understandable language in communicating with all those who wish to approach it, without this language losing its zest and its challenging dynamism.

Syntheses point out that the Church is too discreet in its relationship with the world. It needs to make its social contributions of all kinds better known.

During the pandemic, various initiatives in the communications sector have emerged including broadcasts of celebrations, Gospel commentaries on Facebook, etc. The Church has much to gain from developing its own means of communication, on top of being more present in the media: "Being on Zoom, TikTok, Facebook, texting, etc." "Let's not be afraid to develop communication in a more professional way in order to make it more attractive and, also, to reach the distant and the new generations."

It's important to continue to transform an inward-focused Church into an outward-bound Church to ask ourselves what people need. It's also imperative to make connections with the values of Quebec's current culture, including feminism, equality and inclusion.

## 6. For a Church at the service of the poor and excluded

Improving dialogue with society begins with attention to the poorest and most excluded. "It is imperative to walk with and be close to those who are wounded by life and suffering. "There is a crisis of credibility with regard to the Church, a deficit of trust, and many people no longer expect anything from it. It is by turning towards the excluded and the poor, as Pope Francis asks, that she will regain her credibility, not by taking over everything, but as a partner of already existing organisations."

The frequency of this type of comment in diocesan syntheses deserves to be highlighted among the most frequently recurring themes. The primacy of charity and service at the heart of the Church's life is a fundamental challenge for the rebirth of faith communities. Evangelisation cannot be carried out without espousing the preferential option for the excluded in a concern for justice and the dignity of the person.

Since the beginning of the Church's presence in America, commitment to the poorest and most excluded has been one of her great strengths. The Church still does this to a considerable extent everywhere in Quebec. One thinks spontaneously of the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul conferences present in almost every parish. But we cannot forget all the charitable works developed and still carried out by many religious communities and all types of committed Christian groups. It would be good for the Church to make its contributions more publicly known.

## 7. In answer to the many needs for training

Almost all the reports express in one way or another the need for serious and professional training to answer all the challenges facing the Church. However, here and there, we see resistance on the part of pastors and the faithful. "The training of the baptized and of leaders is necessary if we want to see real change in the Church." To commit to the Church is first to commit to training in Christ. We learn from each other, we are "shaped" by so many other witnesses to the Gospel along the way.

The faithful feel the need for training in Scripture, theology (especially in the face of current issues) and liturgy. Professional training is also needed in the humanities in order to develop skills in deep listening, communication, leadership and teamwork. Not to mention training in life skills and know-how.

"The feeling of incompetence in the face of the responsibilities entrusted to them is often due to a lack of training, or to shortcomings in the accompaniment of people in the development of their charisms." Training should be offered to the laity to facilitate their participation so that they can continue to be of service and to journey together in living Church differently. Online training programs already exist that should be suggested, used and accompanied. Moreover, self-training among peers represents a richness to be considered in any ongoing training project.

In order to live all aspects of ecclesial life, training must be based on a synodal culture. Listening and welcoming will be credible among missionary disciples if we learn together to listen and discern in an authentic desire to meet the other. Training is not only for others. It concerns all of us.

## Conclusion

The consultations and the various diocesan meetings have shown that it is possible to speak out in the Church. The Church in Quebec has spoken out, frankly, with its ardour and youthfulness. These moments of reflection on how we “journey together” and of discerning the signs of the Spirit were positive experiences for the participants. If the current situation presents serious challenges, the faithful are aware that they are living in a favourable moment. Beginnings of solutions were identified. Participants expressed real hope that the Church can renew itself and continue to proclaim the Gospel of the God’s Reign for our world today.

The people want to see some follow-up to the process through which we’ve just come. The implementation of various renewal projects at the diocesan level is already one such element. A further synodal process is planned in the near future for the whole province, focusing this time on mission.

In the course of this major process, a new conviction has emerged: the importance of functioning in synodality. The multiplication of synodal meetings has brought about greater trust, complementarity and a spirit of mutual aid between the faithful and among parishes. Pope Francis affirms that synodality is the missionary challenge of the third millennium. While it’s easy to talk about, it’s very difficult to put it into practice, because we are weak and sinful. We remember that the Spirit is our guides. Synodality is a spiritual matter of flair, of discernment, of a sense of faith and of the Church that helps bring forth the Kingdom. Small steps forward are possible. Things have changed. Going back is no longer an option.

# Synthesis of Synod Process

*Atlantic Region*

*July 11, 2022*

## 1.0 Introduction

Overall, in Atlantic Canada, the synodal journey was fruitful but challenging. Attempting to gather people in the midst of a global pandemic and skepticism for the synod process provided some challenges. Despite these challenges the resulting contributions provide much insight and opportunity.

### 1.1 Nova Scotia

The Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth opened the process with an Assembly of the People of God. A general session explored the core themes of synodality with the people. The next day synod teams from all parishes gathered to learn and contribute to a process of spiritual conversation to use with their parishioners. The end result was 145 gatherings happening in every one of our parishes bringing together 821 people for reflection on the scriptures, spiritual conversation, and dialogue on six key questions distilled from the synod themes. The fruits of these conversations were recorded and submitted to the diocesan synod team. The synod team added a follow-up survey for an additional 117 parishioners who were unable to attend in-person or virtual listening sessions.

Additionally, the diocesan synod team launched an external survey to help give voice to those not normally considered. The faithful were encouraged to invite their friends, neighbours, and relatives who were no longer connected to the church to offer their feedback. These invitations were supported by social media ads encouraging participation. This survey garnered 513 responses, more than half of whom identified that they attend church rarely or never.

In the Diocese of Antigonish, individuals engaged through online surveys, mail-in surveys, email letters and poetry. Letters were mailed or hand-delivered to the diocesan offices. Groups engaged through in-person conversations, missions, and virtual conversations via Zoom or Facebook live. These activities resulted in 156 individual submissions and group reports from 8 ministries including two university youth chaplaincy programs, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha and Martha Associates, and 18 parishes.

The Diocese of Charlottetown also conducted sessions and completed a synthesis that will be sent separately.

### 1.2 New Brunswick

The Archdiocese of Moncton held listening, discernment, and faith sharing exercises with their diocesan committees, parishes, pastoral units, religious communities and a few individual members. The sessions helped participants to listen to each other, to the Holy Spirit and to the Word of God to hear how the diocesan Church can "walk together" to become messengers of the Gospel, in accordance with the Mission entrusted to the Church, and to discern what are the further steps that "the Spirit invites to ask

in order to grow as a synodal Church". A number of diocesan men and women undertook this reflection with respect and depth.

The Synod Team from the Diocese of Bathurst prepared a document to assist groups in their reflection and how to plan the synodal consultation in their community. The bishop organized a meeting with all the parish priests of the diocese where each priest chose a question for his parish unit. The parish units formed groups and met under the direction of their parish priest focusing on a synod issue. The size and homogeneity of the groups differed according to the situation of each parish unit. The members of the diocesan committee followed up with each group to assess the progress of the process and help if necessary. At the end of this spiritual exercise, each group sent a report to the members of the committee who synthesized it to produce the diocesan report.

This Synodal Process was experienced in various ways by the participants. The diversity of the questions nourished and generated good reflections among the participants. In short, this process was well received by the faithful who walked together, being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Diocese of Edmundston laid a groundwork of prayer and adoration in all the Christian communities of the diocese. The synod prayer was widely disseminated in parishes, homes for the elderly and religious communities. Several communities also set up Word sharing groups, some face-to-face and others virtual. The second phase marked the work within each pastoral unit

The bishop and diocesan committee held meetings with the pastoral animation teams in each of the areas of the diocese to help set the expectations of this synod and the needs of the communities. These meetings were supplemented by an online diocesan gathering with about sixty participants. The goal of this gathering was to inform, reflect and share on the meaning of this synod.

Additionally, the team developed resources to be put at the service of the pastoral units. They developed a reflection-discussion approach around the 10 themes proposed in the Preparatory Document and the Vademecum, prepared videos with the bishop to present each of the three stages and the series of themes proposed for reflection-exchange, conducted several weekly radio programs to provide information and motivation to live this synod and to update on the work in progress.

Saint John Diocese hosted synod sessions in parishes, with 79% of parishes making submissions to the diocese. Those who participated in the Synod seemed genuinely interested in the process and had a sense of the urgency of this moment and a desire to be heard, both by the local and Universal Church. Online meetings and submissions were held when necessary. The diocese had a parish participation rate of 79%, with 22 of 28 parishes submitting responses, plus 6 lay associations/groups.

### 1.3 Newfoundland & Labrador

The listening process in the Archdiocese of St. John's was overseen and facilitated by a team of three persons. Thirteen focus groups gathered in different parts of the archdiocese, either in person or online. In each focus group, discussion and conversation revolved around the ten "thematic nuclei" in the Preparatory Document. In addition to the focus groups, people also had the opportunity to respond to

the ten themes by means of an online survey. Thirty responses were received, each of them commenting on all ten themes.

The Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador collected submissions from parish councils, as well as from the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Women's League, the Presentation Associates and the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Committee. The priests of the Diocese dedicated a portion of their pastoral study days to consideration of the questions. Several individuals preferred to submit written responses to the questions.

The Diocese of Grand Falls hosted parish listening sessions as primary means of input. Of chief importance was the fact that all participants felt truly heard and their reflections valued. 48 sessions were held, with nearly 700 participants. An opportunity to provide feedback in writing was made available as well.

## 2.0 Discernment of the Collected Contributions

Synod sessions were held in each diocese in Atlantic Canada. Submissions were gathered through prayerful discussion, surveys, email, and online forms. Submissions through listening groups and discussions were strongly preferred to online submissions. Overall there was a beautiful diversity of methods used in our region to help the faithful journey together through the synod process. Within this diversity of methods a number of common themes emerged.

### 2.1 Listening

A common theme was that the people of God had significant doubt that their voices would have a meaningful impact. "People often expressed a weariness about the long string of processes, in which they were 'listened to, but not heard.' A commonly-heard refrain was, 'Listening is critical, but it is not enough by itself – it must be accompanied by respect, and action.'... The problem is not identified as a lack of invitation to speak; in fact, many identified that there have been multiple opportunities to speak, but the listening has been poor and response nonexistent."

Furthermore, some were concerned that the sessions did not attract individuals of other demographics such as youth, people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and most parishes indicated difficulty reaching the peripheries and engaging non-churchgoers in the Synodal Process.

### 2.2 Centrality of Christ & Power of the Holy Spirit

Parish groups were extremely clear of the need to allow the Holy Spirit to work and for the person of Jesus Christ to be central to their lives and to the work of the Church. This theme extended into all questions where there was a call for more focus on Christ, both personally through prayer and teaching, and sacramentally through the Eucharistic celebration and devotions. In some cases, there was a slight edge to this, suggesting that the institutional Church was a block to what the Lord and Spirit want for the world.

Overall, there was great personal faith demonstrated by parish respondents and an overlapping interest in Jesus from external respondents. However, we also see the beginning of an emergent trend where

there is a perceived distinction between the “institutional Church”, the commands of Christ, and the people of God. This is further evidenced in the themes of inclusivity and leadership outlined below.

### 2.3 Inclusivity & Welcome

The theme of inclusivity was pervasive in all reflection questions. This theme contained many different aspects related to *doctrine and disciplines*, *evangelization*, and *communion and community*.

#### *A) Doctrines and Disciplines*

Further responses revealed that inclusivity and welcome were not as simple as having more greeters at the door of the church — although local hospitality was deemed very important. Instead, many felt there were institutional and systemic issues that were exclusionary. In particular, many people named doctrines and disciplines such as married priests, divorce and remarriage, ordination of women, the role of women, and stances toward LGBTQIA2S+ people as exclusionary and unwelcoming.

These sentiments were very strongly felt, as one diocesan submission quoted: “The availability of ordination to men only is hurtful to women who feel called to ordination and an abuse of human rights in the minds of some faithful. The exclusion of LGBTQIA2S+ individuals from full communion with the church is also seen as a human rights violation, particularly by youth.”

#### *B) Evangelization & Mission*

A large number of responses identified evangelization as a priority, with a strong desire to reach out to the peripheries and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. A true and authentic Christian witness was identified as essential. Many felt a witness of joy and integrity was crucial, and that a culture of listening and inclusion would help people feel welcome at all levels of parish life.

This witness includes moving beyond our own walls to truly welcome those who suffer from social injustice. “As a Church-People of God, we must be more attentive to the need of the poor and come to their aid. Paying attention to the poor and abandoned derives from the logic of Christian faith itself.” Pope Francis says: “We are called to find Christ in the poor, to lend our voice to their causes and to be their friends.” (The Church of Mercy, p. 25)

#### *C) Communion & Community*

Synod groups identified the importance of community as part of inclusivity and welcome. When asked of an example of journeying together many people identified a small group or ministry (Faith Study, prayer group, service groups, etc.) as a key experience. For many people smaller group experiences helped to generate real connections and relationships that fostered a sense of being part of something and offered opportunities to grow and serve. Generally speaking, negative experiences in these smaller settings were also a source of not feeling welcome or included. Occasionally, a sense of exclusion was felt by a decision from another source such as “leaders”, “the diocese”, or “the church”, but it appears primary experiences of welcome or inclusion occur in smaller settings. In both circumstances the frustration of “not being heard”, whether new ideas or an alternate view point, was paramount.



There was also a great desire for unity and diversity. Many people identified theological or liturgical divisions as problematic in the church and raised division as a key concern. Division was also experienced locally in the divide between communities, particularly in light of amalgamation of parishes or the creation of pastoral units within the region. The desire for diversity mainly manifested in allowing for many different devotions, gathering types, and liturgical expressions including space for contemporary and Latin celebrations. The main idea was to make room for many expressions stemming from a desire to include as many people as possible while maintaining a unifying Catholic identity. There were, of course, advocates for a singular form of expression as being primary or ideal over others although this sentiment seems to be vocal but less prevalent.

## 2.4 Leadership & Accountability

A great number of responses centered on leadership and identified these issues as barriers to outreach and evangelization as they colour the entire external reaction to the church and discourage members from inviting others to join.

### *A) The Impact of Scandal*

The two primary issues of accountability were Clergy Sexual Abuse and Residential Schools. Of those who raised them many external respondents cited them as reasons they would never be interested in the Catholic church. Synod participants felt that taking “real” responsibility for these issues was important. The shape this would take was unclear but the sentiment was strong. For example, one submission noted: “In 2022 the last of the class-action debt was paid, however, bitterness and hurt over the crimes, the lack of accountability by the institutional church and download of financial responsibility to the parishes remain deeply among our faithful – in those who left and those who stayed.”

Some said that the mishandling of clergy sexual abuse made them ashamed to be Catholic. Others reflected that their trust has been destroyed by the scandal of sexual abuse by clergy and by the way it has been handled (or rather, not handled). There has been a serious lack of consultation of the laity with regard to the sexual abuse crisis – and little, if any help toward healing of the pain and anger that so many are feeling.

Stemming from these issues was a strong sense of division between the average person and the “institutional church”. Institutional church seems to mean a small caste of leaders, generally clergy or central organizations such as the diocese or Rome, who make decisions with outsized effect on the people impacted. Examples of this ranged from local decisions about financial resources to the sex abuse scandals.

### *B) Participation & Decision Making*

This sense of division led to strong calls for increased participation in decision making, not necessarily a democratic approach but rather more emphasis on listening, consulting, and truly “being heard” in decision making processes. This is especially important when working with those on the peripheries who have an intuitive sense of when they are not being listened to. As

a result, they will not open up when they feel they are being judged, hence the need to establish a bond and trust with them.

Ultimately there appears to be a divide between laity and leadership in the Church. There is a perception that decision making ultimately excludes grassroots input, particularly as it proceeds to Church hierarchy. This is further compounded by comments from respondents that point out that the lack of inclusion of women in decision-making renders the Church irrelevant to many thinking people.

Some people expressed concerns about where Church leadership is headed – for some, a fear that tradition would be lost and teachings of the Church compromised in favor of modernizing worship, and for others, a fear of going back to pre-Vatican II ways. People on either end of this spectrum are invested in their churches and extremely sensitive to anything they fear would compromise what they see as important and valuable in the Church.

## 2.5 Specific Considerations

In addition to the general themes identified above there were some specific considerations worthy of additional review.

### *A) Amalgamation*

Many of the dioceses in the region have recently undergone large-scale parish amalgamations in one form or another. Overall, while there was recognition for the necessity of such a move. Those with negative experiences spoke about being “blindsided”, “not being heard”, or “that everything was a foregone conclusion”. Some had positive experiences whereby many voices were heard, communication was clear, and opportunities for dialog existed. The creation of parishes or pastoral units with multiple locations left many feeling a sense of disconnection from their community and decisions of leadership. Additionally, some of those affected by church closures did not have a sense of inclusion/sense of welcoming in their new church. One lay association said, “this impacting structural change, followed by the two-year Covid pandemic, does not make it easy to assess the current state of affairs of our diocese. We are a church in flux and functioning within these limitations.”

### *B) Youth & Families*

There was a very strong desire to reconnect with youth and families. This was seen as both a current weakness and an important factor in growing together. Part of this concern focused on insufficient follow-up with youth after catechesis as well as difficulty reaching these groups despite a strong desire to do so.

Youth and Family participants identified the importance of faith for them but also highlighted the difficulty of being a Catholic in today’s world where there are many different voices and values. The value of being inclusive and welcoming identified above were also very important and many identified they felt very welcome and included in their youth groups. There was also a theme of not being heard: that young people have no voice in decisions at the local and universal level. It was

expressed that many felt a group of older people made all the decisions and input from young people was unwanted and unappreciated.

Youth worshippers are found in small numbers and are of prime concern to our faithful, who wonder how to engage them, share with them the love of God, and support their faith journeys.

### *C) Rural Experience*

While the general issues facing the church externally appear to overshadow locality two particular issues presented themselves.

Firstly, rural communities more intensely experience the limited number of priests where Mass may be celebrated on a limited schedule. As a result, Liturgy of the Word with Communion is more common. Secondly, the physical geography often makes having a unified parish identity more difficult.

## 3.0 Conclusions

Each of the dioceses in the region used criteria to develop their conclusions that were unique and appropriate to their situations. Nevertheless, the conclusions were quite similar across the board.

### 3.1 Centrality of Christ and the Holy Spirit

*“There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed” (Evangelization in the Modern World, #22).*

The Church needs to focus on her mission and her sharing in the mission of Christ. She needs to have a clear vision of what the Church should look like in the future and clear ideas about how to grow that Church of the future. The Holy Spirit is still with us and because of the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can have hope – the hope to which we are called.

Prompted by this experience of journeying together the local church must embark on its own journey, to accept Jesus’ call to discipleship and do as Jesus did. This is a true renewal of our baptismal promises to evangelize and live out the mission of our faith.

### 3.2 Inclusivity and Welcome

*“The centrality of the kerygma calls for stressing those elements which are most needed today: it has to express God’s saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical. All this demands on the part of the evangelizer certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental” (Joy of the Gospel, #165).*

While there is a desire to welcome marginalized groups such as women, the LGBTQIA2S+ population, separated Catholics, and divorced and remarried Catholics the results show a significant divide in the

Church between those who wish to see the Church advance on some long-standing issues and those who want the Church to remain faithful to its traditional teaching on the same issues. The issue of how this gulf is to be bridged (or if it can be bridged) remains a priority for the Church universal. The approach to take here is divergent. For some, “reforming the Church is about creating a new Church that would embrace all the fashionable values of today's society,” while for others “reforming the Church consists in becoming ever more faithful to the Church as Christ founded and desired it because it is his Church and not ours.” The former is a reform which would constantly be out-of-touch from the ever-evolving world, whereas the latter is one of constant updating our approach to the world, without distorting the teaching and tradition handed down.

### *A) Doctrine and Disciplines*

There is much work to do when considering the issue of inclusivity related to doctrines. The natural law and moral law do not change. So then, how to deal with these questions becomes a matter finding new ways to express them and recognizing that greater assent to truth occurs as we increase in conformity to Christ not by convincing arguments alone. On disciplines, perhaps these could be examined to find which are fundamental and universal practice and which need purification and renewal. This is a question for the universal church to consider. In the diocese, understanding this need for inclusivity can inform our evangelization and training efforts.

### *B) Communion and Community*

*“The grace that is given us by Christ in the liturgy calls for vital involvement: “The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church” (SC, 9), in fact “it must be preceded by evangelization, faith and conversion. It can then produce its fruits in the life of the faithful (CCC, 1072)”*

Interestingly, many felt most engaged and welcomed in a small group or ministry context such as prayer group, Bible study, or service organization. This points to a reality that inclusivity and welcome can be experienced locally through encounter and relationships between persons. Thus, providing more opportunities for people to connect in smaller settings appears to be a more fruitful, and practical, approach to take locally. These smaller settings can create spaces of inclusion, welcome, formation and evangelization, outside the context of the liturgy, which requires an appropriate disposition for full participation.

Smaller groups and opportunities to connect can also open up new spaces to work with specific groups. Respondents highlighted the need for increased effort with families and youth. Groups that gather and support families and young people can be the nucleus of this reaching out rather than solely fixating on the fact they are “not at Mass”. For those many families and youth who do participate in the liturgy such groups could also be a place of support in dealing with their felt needs of being Catholic in an increasingly difficult environment.

Likewise, the positive experiences reported by participations, demonstrate that smaller groups can offset many of the concerns raised in rural realities. In particular small scripture groups were

very effective in providing connection and community. As we wrestle with the challenges of geography and infrequency of the Eucharistic liturgy, perhaps the focus needs to shift to groups that nourish and sustain each other, who then gather for the Eucharist when available rather than focusing on communion services.

### 3.3 Leadership and Accountability

There is a deep need to acknowledge and apologize for the mistakes of the past and to make amends. Many submissions relayed the need for a “real” response. Unfortunately, it was not always clear what concrete actions could be taken.

#### *A) The Impact of Scandal*

*“Without real indignation, without historical memory and without a commitment to learning from past mistakes, problems remain unresolved and keep coming back. We can see this these days in the case of war. The memory of the past must never be sacrificed at the altar of alleged progress,”* (Pope Francis to Canadian Indigenous Delegations, April 1, 2022).

On the matter of residential schools, it is clear from our responses that the church in Canada must honour the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Holy Father’s Visit to Canada and the National Reconciliation Fund are good starts. They must be built on locally through work with our local communities. Clergy formation and religious education should include more focus on the local church’s relationship with Indigenous Peoples, including truth about the Residential School in our region to help foster new awareness. More can be done to celebrate this relationship around the Feast of Saint Anne.

Sexual Abuse scandals also dominate the public consciousness. Continuing our work toward safe environments and responsible ministry and commitment to action are key here. Perhaps more can be done to highlight current policies and make reporting and follow up as clear and transparent as possible. Locally, the ongoing lawsuits in our region marks a moment for expressing sorrow, offering apology, and making restitution. Clear and consistent communication about this process can help demonstrate commitment to a new way of dealing with these issues.

#### *B) Participation & Decision Making*

*“Besides this apostolate which certainly pertains to all Christians, the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy. This was the way certain men and women assisted Paul the Apostle in the Gospel, laboring much in the Lord. Further, they have the capacity to assume from the Hierarchy certain ecclesiastical functions, which are to be performed for a spiritual purpose”* (Lumen Gentium, #33).

The desire for greater participation in leadership by all the baptized is something we are working on locally. One diocese created leadership teams to assist pastors in decision making and established new guidelines for pastoral and finance councils. However, ultimately it appears people are not asking for a democracy but instead for their voices to be heard and respected. Developing processes that engage people in small groups and as individuals will need to form part of consultation and

decision in the future. Providing clear, timely, and transparent communication can also help people to understand the situation in their community and why certain actions are necessary.

Other means of participation in leadership could be developed through further study by the universal church on the concepts of *co-responsibility* and *delegation*. A deeper exploration of how the laity can, and should, cooperate in the temporal and spiritual aspects of the church and a parish or diocese can open up new pathways for participation. Deepening understanding of the importance of *all the baptized* in the mission of the Church is also necessary.

### 3.4 Local Actions

In addition to the above conclusions there are a number of concrete actions local dioceses can undertake as a fruit of the local Synodal Process. These actions can model a form of participative leadership, combat skepticism, and help orient particular churches on a more missionary path.

#### *A) Engage in Pastoral Planning & Mission*

The Synodal Process gathered large numbers of the faithful for moments of prayer and reflection on the Church and the world. Some dioceses were even able to capture feedback from those not normally consulted. The results provide a pool of insight which can be used to discern a plan for a particular church. Such a plan, growing out of a broad consultation, would be a sign of action from the Synodal Process even while the lead up to 2023 is ongoing. Even difficult feedback provides important information on how to communicate a plan or where to focus resources for further formation. While many items raised in the consultation are matters of universal law and doctrine, a solid plan that focuses on what can be done will help foster change: formation in Christian worship and practice, training in evangelization, gathering in small communities — none of these actions require a document back from the Vatican to bring to light.

#### *B) Encourage Synodality and Pastoral Dialogue*

In *Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis encouraged bishops to “encourage and develop the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law, and other forms of pastoral dialogue” (#31). These forms of participation not only include local synods but also the finance council and pastoral council at the diocesan and parochial levels. In many cases these existing bodies are not fully realized in their roles of consultation and participation. The local diocese can provide clear formation and training on the nature and role of Pastoral Council and Finance Council (with respect to their area of competency) regarding *authority, consultation, co-responsibility, deliberation, delegation, and pastoral planning*.

#### *C) Invest in leadership*

Formation in theology and pastoral care is critical for our ordained and non-ordained leaders. However, without adequate skills in leadership many will flounder in their roles. In particular bishops and pastors, who carry a great responsibility, need the tools and support necessary to ensure they can carry out all the duties entrusted to them. Adding leadership to the docket of local seminaries, clergy study days, and lay formation programs will help to improve the decision

making, communication, and participation at all levels of the church. Dioceses can also explore other means of support such as leadership teams or teams of clergy working *in solidum*.

While the challenges related to the Synodal Process, especially in the midst of a global pandemic put a damper on participation, a great number of the faithful were able to gather for spiritual conversation and discernment. We are now entrusted to move this discernment to action lest it become “just another process” with no results.