

SYNOD LISTENING SESSIONS

Synthesis Report for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

Submitted by Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic Church - Berkeley Springs, WV

Rev. Michael O. Lecias, Pastor

From the Parish Coordinator:

After completing this report for submission to the diocese, I realized that the expressed sentiments of the synod listening session participants are all negative as written. What this report does not convey is the genuine outpouring of love for our Catholic culture, faith, and community in which these comments were made. The faithful of our parish who participated in the Synod listening sessions are truly mourning for the Church; mourning over what seems to be the decay of what was laid as the foundation of our faith - Christ's uncompromisable teachings which now seem to be, in the opinions of the participants, at risk of being molded and sculpted by our bishops in order to cater to popular societal whims and desires.

St. Vincent de Paul parish is definitely not made up of mostly crotchety old people who are hard-hearted or closed-minded and who want to relive the past! We are a parish of vibrant people of all ages and all walks of life who deeply love the Catholic faith and the people of God as we are taught by Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. A silent and mournful groaning from the people could be heard at each synod listening session held when speaking about the current condition of the universal Church and what is feared for her future here on earth. However, we remain prayerfully hopeful for the continued growth and success of our own beloved parish as we go forth in mission together, building communion with one another, and participating in each other's journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

We pray in earnest as a parish for our pastor, Rev. Michael O. Lecias, for our bishop, The Most Rev. Mark E. Brennan, and all the clergy through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church.

Respectfully and prayerfully submitted,

Judith M. McBee, OCDS

Topic 1: Companions on the Journey

- In our Church, who are those who we “walk” with on our faith journey?
- Who are those most active in our parish?
- Who are those who come to Mass quietly and leave quickly?
- What can we do to be a more welcoming community, especially to those who feel left out or are less involved in the life of our parish?

Responses:

- The parish is mostly comprised of elderly parishioners who have served their time in ministries; at this time in their lives, most just want to come to Mass and go home.
- Members have died or have moved away to retire and few young families are moving in to replace them, thus affecting positive growth of the parish and continued renewal of parish life. Concern was expressed that the parish was “dying.”
- There are some who just want to come in and then go home - they just want to go to Mass and not join in ministry and fellowship
- Companions and those we associate with at the parish help us feel as though we belong
- “Meeting the right people” - being invited into ministry by others who are already involved in the various ministries of the parish help with a sense of belonging
- “A sense of belonging” - it’s a human thing to want to feel a sense of belonging to a group, another person, an organization; belonging to a group is a healing experience
- Growing up in the parish makes one feel comfortable
- “Being divorced is an obstacle to feeling I belong”; ministry to divorced Catholics would be helpful
- We sometimes seem to “build walls around us” which keep us from joining in
- Comments such as “Welcome back!” can be hurtful to some, as though they are being judged for not being at Mass for awhile
- Children can be a distraction, however “if you don’t hear crying, the parish is dying”

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- Mass could more accommodating for children, more welcoming, more engagement for children in the Mass
 - There could be a Family Mass and “Old Lady” Mass - people can choose what Mass they want to go to
 - “We should focus on making our parish better first,” as we are not confident that this synod will do anything positive for the faithful at large
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Topic 2: Listening

- How is God speaking to us through others we encounter?
- How are the laity listened to in the Church, especially women and young people?
- What helps or prevents us from listening to them?
- Are we able to provide opportunities to hear the voices of minorities, those experiencing poverty and excluded from society?
- What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own?
- How do we listen to the contributions of religious sisters and brothers?

Responses: N/A

Topic 3: Speaking Out

- What barriers do we face when speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our parish and in our community?
- What enables us to speak up when something is important to us?
- How should we relate to and make use of the media?
- Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community and how are they chosen?

Responses: N/A

Topic 4: Celebration

- Are we and other Catholics convinced that we truly receive Jesus himself in Holy Communion (the Eucharist) and not a mere symbol of him or just a piece of bread?
- How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission to society?
- How do they inspire our decisions and our actions?
- How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?
- How do we encourage parishioners to serve in a particular ministry?

Responses:

- The Church seems to lack respect for herself and the world sees this
- So much disinformation and misinterpretation of Church teachings; no corrections are being made to misunderstandings, i.e. eating meat on Fridays
- Bishops are allowing pro-abortion public figures to receive Holy Communion; rationalizing sin
- Bishops are being "politically correct"
- Lack of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, i.e. tabernacles removed from the center of the church, removal of communion rail, no use of patens
- Receiving the Holy Eucharist in the hands - we see the priest disposing of crumbs from the hosts, what about the crumbs on our hands?
- Saddened by controversy over the Tridentine Latin Mass where the Eucharist is the center
- Knights of Columbus could act as guardians of the Blessed Sacrament at Masses - should do this all across the country; would ensure consumption of hosts and guard against sacrilege of the Blessed Sacrament
- Catechesis needed regarding being in a state of grace, preparation - confession (adding more available hours in the parish)
- We are not drawing others into the Faith because we are not living our own Catholic culture; lack of Catholic identity in our lives

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- Overall, churches lack beauty and mystical imagery to inspire prayer; minimalism is not conducive to prayer: statues of Mary and Joseph seem hidden, no beautiful stained-glass windows
 - Vocations are not being inspired; youth is seeking and hungering for beauty in our churches
 - Congregation doesn't participate in singing as music is lacking; secular themes are being used; lack of chant being used; there seems to be more of a focus on the performance instead of the praise
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Topic 5: Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission

- Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church?
- What might be some reasons that keep someone from participating in the mission of the Church?
- How does the church community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.)?
- How does the Church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way?

Responses: N/A

Topic 6: Dialogue in Church and Society

- Do we make sure to include a diverse group of people in our church community when we have a dialogue?
- Where does this dialogue take place? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc.?
- How are differences, conflicts and difficulties addressed?
- What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to?
- What relationship do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation?
- How does the Church interact with and learn from politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty?

Responses: N/A

Topic 7: Ecumenism

- What relationships do we have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?
- How can we come together with them to continue the mission of the Church?
- What successes have we achieved working with other Christians?
- What prevents us from coming together?

Responses: N/A

Topic 8: Authority and Participation

- How does a Bishop exercise authority in the Church?
- Who should he consult with?
- How does a pastor exercise authority in his parish?
- Who should he consult with?

Responses:

- Fear of liberalism marching in - "I left another denomination for the Catholic Church" over liberalism in the other church, now seeing it come into the Catholic Church via the US Bishops; "I'm disillusioned" seeing corruption in the Catholic Church
- Bishops not correcting politicians who claim they are "devout"; US bishops are "helping aid mortal sin"; "there are no consequences" for public figures; it seems as though there is a "buying of indulgences"; "it seems who you are or how much you donate" determines whether or not you can receive Communion if you are pro-abortion
- "Why don't 'we' (meaning, the faithful) communicate with hierarchy? Does what we say or how we feel make a difference? Bishops are going to do what they want to do anyway."
- Priests who are outspoken about injustices and sacrileges within the Church (i.e., blessing of same sex unions, women priests, etc.) are admonished by the bishops. If bishops don't listen to their priests, then why would we expect them to listen to the faithful?
- Laity feel "judged" for expressing themselves and hold back for fear of retribution from the hierarchy

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- The laity will hold back donations as a way to “communicate” with the hierarchy when teachings of the Church are not upheld by the bishops
 - Pope Francis seems like a globalist who has a socialist background (Argentinian); seems he favors socialism, while Pope St. John Paul II fought against socialism and communism; why isn’t the Church speaking out against globalism, socialism, and communism?
 - Secular politics seem to have infiltrated the Church; what really happened to Pope Benedict XVI?
 - The laity feel as though the Church hierarchy are leaving “us” - we are not leaving the Church; a “them” and “us” mentality seems to be evident among bishops (i.e. doing whatever is popular instead of upholding Christ’s teachings as the laity is expected to)
 - “They (the bishops) think we are stupid.”
 - “I feel intimidated” talking to our pastor; “I’m afraid,” “I don’t want to ruffle” any feathers
 - Prior “bad” experience(s) with a priest; being told “no”
 - Our pastor/priests need to be accessible
 - How does the priest/bishop communicate with everyone? Signs on the door; letters asking for money
 - Parish council; pastor/priest who controls/has final decision with regard to parish life
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Topic 9: Discerning and Deciding

- How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures?
- Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God?
- What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice?
- What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability?

Responses: N/A

Topic 10: Forming Ourselves in Synodality

- How do we create a Church community that promotes inclusion, listening to one another, participating in the mission, and engaging in dialogue?
- What type of formation do we need to offer our community to grow spiritually and ensure the participation of all the faithful?

Responses:

- Catechetical and faith sharing opportunities for adults; there is a desire to learn more in group settings such as bible study groups.

- End of report -