

Summary Report for the Synod of Bishops

January 2022

Christ the King Parish, Haddonfield

What keeps most people, the majority of Catholics, from participating at Mass on a weekly basis?

With words including apathy, relevance, disconnect, exclusion, secularism, and unwelcoming, many participants communicated that the Church's traditions and doctrine do not reflect the moral compass of everyday Catholics in society at this time. They spoke of feeling judged because of their sins (like divorce) and their truths (like sexual orientation).

Many participants spoke to the importance of homilies that are relevant to the everyday lives of parishioners.

Some participants shared that they, and Catholics they know no longer trust the Church because of the sex scandal and the coverup. And a couple felt resentful about being asked for money regularly.

Others spoke of people being stagnant in their faith journey and the need for better catechesis for both young people and adults.

Who is missing from our parish community? Why?

Many of the responses to this question referred to the lack of connection our parish has to youth, young adults, and families. Some comments include: the need for personal invitations to return to church, "invite families to participate in conversations about (parish programming)," "...youth should feel welcomed and heard; (church) should be a place they can take refuge...where they see themselves as part of something bigger," "...emphasis on faith formation over community building (and it's not enough)."

Several participants spoke about the exclusion of the LGBTQ community. Discussions included comments about all people being made in the image and likeness of God, God's message to love all people, and that homosexuality is being singled out, judged while other alleged transgressions are overlooked (like living together before marriage).

Participants shared their concerns that women are missing from our church and from church leadership.

At two listening sessions, the importance of small Christian communities was discussed at length.

Several people mentioned the lack of minorities in our pews and that local people who what to worship in a diverse community go to city churches.

Do you feel you are able to speak up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in your parish community? Why or why not?

In almost equal shares, your participants were split down the line on this question between yes, no, and no response. Many comments included sentiments about pastors and parish staff.

Affirming responses included: feeling respected, being involved in teaching CCD giving one a voice, comfort in a small group setting, and having a voice because of strong convictions and faith.

People who did not feel able to speak up in the parish had many more words about their experience. Some were specifically directed to experiences with parish staff: "feedback is not...welcome or prioritized," "judgement and dismissiveness prevent speaking up," "parish staff does not want input on a visionary, leadership level." Others spoke more about speaking up about polarizing ideologies and the feeling that they would be "ostracized" or "criticized for my ideas."

How does your parish listen to the voices of minorities, the poor, the sick, and those generally excluded from society?

One response sums up most of our responses to this question: "We have (charity) programs to help but not sure about listening." Specific outreach programs were listed as well as the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Many people would like to see more volunteer opportunities offered.

An equal number of responses suggested we don't listen to the marginalized. "I don't think we do so in an organized, parish-centered way." "We don't seem to think about minorities at all because they are not represented in our parish."

A few people offered that our parish does a good job at visiting the sick.

Five respondents commented positively about recent social justice Sunday homilists.

Has the Church hurt you in any way? How?

Over half of our participants either did not respond to this question (especially at in person sessions) or directly said they had not been hurt by the church.

Some said they were not so much hurt by the church but disappointed. Disappointed that the church hierarchy does not reflect the "open, accepting and compassionate" model Jesus gave us.

The following are summaries of some of the specific hurts shared:

The church rejects LGBTQ people, "If buildings and animals can be blessed, why not civil unions? Everyone should be accepted and loved as God's people."

"The annulment process was hurtful, difficult, embarrassing, not healing, and punitive for the person trying to be a good Catholic. The process was abusive and disrespectful."

Regarding the role of women in leadership in the church, "(women) are not in positions of power that would enable (their) voices to be heard. We say we are pro-life but are we pro-family?" "The Church has excluded more than half its population by not including women, and/or married clergy."

Other hurts shared were important and moving and about particular people and interactions.

Is there anything else you would like to offer?

Several people made comments and quoted scripture suggesting the Church needs to better reflect the teachings of God. One used the words “less rigid in manmade laws, listen to the Spirit, and let God’s love lead.”

There is much concern about the division within the Church, the Church’s role in politics both at the pulpit and on a national level; participants who commented on this came from both ends of this spectrum. “Tell the bishops to stay out of politics.” “I want to know what Pope Francis discussed with President Biden on the issue of abortion.” “The split between the conservative and more liberal factions needs to somehow heal - the church needs to get out of politics in the way that is destructive and long lasting.”

Five people said they want to see women treated equally in the Church. “I believe women should be priests. We are marginalized in the mass itself. It is a weekly reminder that we are not one.”

On a local level, we had suggestions for better youth ministry, better catechesis, more opportunities to listen to parishioners, fellowship and staff concerns.

Less close to home people suggested allowing priests to marry, more transparency from the diocese, atonement for the sex scandal, inclusion of all people including LGBTQ.

Suggestions for priests included, better training in homiletics, being more pastoral, and being more involved and connected to the community.