



*“But speaking the truth in love, we must  
grow up in every way into Christ.”  
Ephesians 4:15*

Concerned Lay  
Catholics in Canada

# Synodal Listening Sessions



June 2022

Contact: [concernedlaycatholics@gmail.com](mailto:concernedlaycatholics@gmail.com)



## INTRODUCTION

Concerned Lay Catholics in Canada: Who are we?

Inspired by the call of the Canadian Bishops for healing, reconciliation, and transformation, we are an independent group of concerned committed lay Catholics formed in Canada in 2018 to affirm the laity's role of co-responsibility in the Church. Our vision, mission, and values flow from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the vision of the Holy Father Pope Francis. <https://concernedlaycatholics.ca/>

## ANSWERING THE CALL TO SYNODALITY

Concerned Lay Catholics encouraged all our subscribers across Canada to participate in the synodal process through their parish or diocese. We recognized, however, that there would be folks who might not be able or feel comfortable attending a parish or diocesan conversation. In addition, we were aware that the nature of some groups transcends diocesan boundaries, and that their unique perspectives might be lost if special opportunities were not offered. In keeping with Pope Francis's call to reach out to the periphery, and with Concerned Lay Catholics' mission to amplify lay voices in Canada, we discerned that we could play a helpful role in the Synodal process.

Between February and May 2022, CLC hosted 15 listening sessions for the following groups

- Older Adults (2 sessions)
- 2SLGBTQ+ folks, their allies and families (2 sessions)
- Victims/Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse, their families and allies in partnership with Recovery Speaking Initiative (3 sessions)
- Lay Ecclesial Ministers/Lay Employees of the Church (3 sessions)
- Racialized Catholics (1 session)
- Spanish-speaking Catholics (1 session)
- General Conversations -West and East (2 sessions)
- Members of other denominations and faiths (1 session)

Concerned Lay Catholics also offered the option of completing an on-line survey.

## COMMON THEMES

Common themes emerged across all the groups and in the survey. These are fundamental issues which, if addressed, we believe could help to reduce barriers for ALL Catholics to participate in communion and mission.

### **1. The Spirit of Jesus is alive and well in the lives of ordinary Catholics across the country -sometimes because of the Church, often in spite of it.**

Even those who participated somewhat reluctantly in our synodal process or from the periphery, demonstrated a strong connection to the rich and complex community we call the Roman Catholic Church.

One of the most moving aspects of this process, has been hearing the deep faith of so many committed Catholics; and as well, the sadness and the longing that some people feel in their sense of separation from the Church. This is reflected in people's stories. We heard joyous stories of people who have felt supported, affirmed, and empowered by leaders in the Church, in parishes, schools, Catholic organizations and spiritual communities. We also heard many sad stories from those who have been wounded by the Church and have just cause to be angry. We heard from cradle Catholics who came of age after Vatican II with great joy and anticipation; from converts who chose

this Church because of its BIG vision; we heard from victims of clergy sexual abuse and their families who can find peace neither within the Church nor outside it; we heard from 2SLGBTQ+ folks and their families who refuse to be forced to choose between their faith and their family; we heard from racialized Catholics who do not see themselves reflected in the institution which embodies their faith; we heard from Spanish-speaking Catholics who miss a sense of celebration and joy. Some people, it must be said, have given up hope that the institution can return to the vision of Vatican II. These folks have instead chosen small, informal intentional communities, meeting in homes or common rooms, following their preferred Catholic spiritual practices (such as Ignatian exercises or contemplative prayer) without the support of the institution. Some have moved to other Churches, perhaps that of a spouse or a friend, because they find there a more faithful reflection of the gospel as they understand it. What is clear from all the sessions, is that being in conversation with and about the Catholic Church is life-giving for many people, regardless of whether their experience is positive or negative, whether they stay or leave. In this Pope Francis is correct: being a synodal Church- a Church where we walk together on a common path and listen to one another -even those whose lives and experiences and choices are different from our own- is the way to God.

## **2. Leadership Matters**

The leadership style of the pastor/bishop sets the tone and either opens up or shuts down the voice of the Spirit moving in and through a congregation or community.

The most common indicator across all groups when asked where they hear God speaking to them and where they feel free to speak up, was the quality of ordained leadership. When people have a great pastor who listens to them, welcomes, and includes everyone, and sees himself as a facilitator of people's God-given gifts, they report feeling connected to God/Jesus and each other and inspired to participate in mission. On the other hand, when the pastor fails to listen, refuses to share decision-making, or consult with the people about the things that affect their spiritual well-being, and does not affirm that God speaks through the assembly of believers, then people feel dejected, disheartened, dispirited. Often the experience of an open, welcoming, and inclusive pastor is followed, in the same parish, by the arrival of a pastor who dismantles everything the previous pastor built. In such a circumstance people feel powerless and even angry. People ask: what is the model of leadership being inculcated in Catholic clergy? Why is a pastor not required to listen to how the Spirit is working in the community? How are priests formed, trained, monitored, and evaluated? Where is the episcopal oversight? Should parishioners not have an opportunity to input on their pastor's effectiveness, and perhaps even help choose their pastor? The style of the pastor sets the tone for the whole parish. It seems that once a candidate is ordained, there is no formal mechanism for ensuring he pastors appropriately in a spirit of Christian servant-leadership. Clergy sexual abuse and cover up and the failed leadership on reparations to Indigenous peoples were mentioned often. But these are seen as symptoms of the overarching issues in leadership.

## **3. Lay People Have Valuable Contributions to Make**

There is a huge reservoir of untapped gifts and talent waiting to be realized in every parish and Catholic institution across Canada.

Lay people feel frustrated watching their pastors trying "to do it all." Many of the tasks at the parish level could be handled by competent, experienced lay people- either as volunteers or as paid staff. People recognize that the time the priest spends doing tasks that the laity could do, is time taken away from pastoral and sacramental ministry. Pastors are not always the best qualified to handle finances, communications, property issues, human resources, (including employment law), information management/IT, community engagement and team building. Every parish has lay people with years of experience in all these fields that are very relevant to parish life. Moreover, many

ministries do not require ordained clergy, ministries such as bringing communion to the sick and shut-ins, conducting prayer groups and bible studies, organizing community outreach. We found in our sessions there are many lay people who are theologically and pastorally trained, ready to contribute. But to do so, they must feel that their expertise is respected, and are not expected to obey the pastor unconditionally. A team approach to institutional life at every level is long-overdue.

#### **4. The Church seems more concerned about preserving current structures than witnessing to the Gospel.**

The dissonance between the teachings of Jesus and the way the Church operates is a scandal – (an obstacle to faith) for many inside and outside the Church.

Lay people are not naïve. They understand that institutional life requires structures, appropriate exercise of authority and adherence to certain common tenets. None of our participants expressed a desire to overthrow ecclesial structure. But many expressed a desire to reform current structures to serve the needs of the contemporary Church and reflect our shared values, derived from the Gospel and the Church’s social teachings more adequately. They see this being done in other Churches and experience it in many secular institutions. The Catholic Church needs to operationalize its teachings so that everything it does is measured against the values of the Gospel.

#### **5. Women hold the Church together and are often the principal evangelizers in their communities.**

While we did not host a group specifically for women, by far the majority who participated in our process were women.

Many of the women expressed concern about the way the Church exercises power. These women believe Jesus and the early Church expressly rejected the type of “power over” dynamic of patriarchal society: “Do not be like the pagans who lord it over one another...” “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female...” The Church needs to take these teachings seriously and reform its model of leadership to reflect the servant-leadership called for by Jesus. Leaders should be chosen for their ability to create spaces of hospitality, to listen with compassion, to correct with charity and mercy, to empower the gifts of the faithful and to speak out courageously on behalf of the marginalized. Women, as well as men, exhibit these qualities, and indeed, are already exercising them often without official recognition or support. In too many situations, however, women experience a toxic masculinity posing as divine authority.

## **SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND THEMES THAT EMERGED BY GROUP**

### **Older Adults**

#### **Listening**

Listening to God over a lifetime takes many forms. Older adults have a mature perspective because of their many life experiences and experiences of Church. They listen to God through their fellow parishioners, through shared action for community and for justice, through contemplative prayer and meditation, through learning and sharing in groups. Some prefer to be more active; some feel drawn to quiet contemplation, either alone or with two or three others. Less words, more presence. Being in a Church building is not equally important to everyone. For some the pandemic has allowed them to feel more connected to the larger Church through the world of social media, listening to the diverse ways God is speaking in the world. Also, it has allowed some who are isolated to feel connected. Some older adults feel the parish does not listen to them, that homilies are directed to the young, that there is nothing for them. Others feel empowered and engaged. It seems to depend on leadership, on the style and priorities of the pastor. Something that was mentioned that would be helpful to

older adults in listening to God, is to explore the Sacramentality of Death. What is mature spirituality? How is it different from 20 years ago in one's life? We still have faith, but it is different. It can be surprising how our faith evolves over a lifetime.

### Speaking Out

The Church needs to adapt how it serves older adults. Older adults need accessible space and inclusive design-for all (dis)abilities. Churches could also be places where programs are offered to support older adults and connect them with community. Some wish to keep learning as they get older; there is not enough offered for their age and stage. Active older adults feel they can organize their own activities and provide for their own needs; this could become a ministry they could offer to others. Older adults have experience running Church education programs and ministries so they feel confident they could offer leadership. But what is the mechanism to speak out, to bring this idea forward? Some older adult women feel the priest does not listen to them as much as they listen to men. Some reported writing letters and asking questions about such things as inclusive language and getting no response.

### Celebrating

Pay attention to technology and use it. Invest in inclusive design and be flexible. Some seniors can't come to Church because they are caring for someone at home. Church needs to become more comfortable with people with disabilities - especially standing, sitting, kneeling. People with dementia and those caring for them may behave differently at Mass. For those who support a physically limited older adult, some may want help to attend, while some may want to tune in from home.

An example of celebration: in the diocese of St. Boniface, they held a BIG party outdoors around the basilica. Invited everyone from other Churches in the area. There was food, music, booths, and opportunities to participate in discussions. It cost money but you've got to invest to get something back. Hospitality and celebration are not just inside a building. Hospitality helps create a culture of encounter between generations and with other faith groups in the community.

### Moving Forward/Decision-Making

Elders may need to accept that their role has changed. It might be more about guidance and wisdom; maybe about playing a support role for the younger generation to gather in community. Fellowship, coffee Sundays are great community builders. Older people mentor those younger in serving and cleaning up, thus becoming intergenerational events. Create community and people will come together in small groups and want to share. Key is listening in the Holy Spirit: not listening to respond or fix but listening to understand. Priests need to listen to the people and let them express their needs. Parish councils are essential.

## 2SLGBTQ+ Folks and their Families and Allies

### Listening

Feeling listened to depends very much on the situation or the personal views of the priest or individual Catholic. Some 2SLGBTQ+ folks have felt affirmed and supported, even 'saved' by their experience in the Catholic Church; but this almost always occurs either in a private conversation or a special setting such as a school, a campus retreat or conference specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ folks. Most 2SLGBTQ+ folks do not feel safe talking openly in a regular Church setting. Homophobia is enabled by public statements, by some homilies, by the 'official' line. People have experienced hostility in Catholic schools and parishes. Other people may come to their defense and 2SLGBTQ+ folks appreciate the kindness. But the resulting mixed messages make it difficult to hear what God is saying. 2SLGBTQ+ folks know that the people who support them are doing so as individuals and not officially on behalf of the Church. It is very hard on 2SLGBTQ families to have some members rejected by or left out of their faith community. The Church is losing whole families.

### Speaking Out

It takes courage for people to speak out; sometimes the cost is too much and allies step back. Clerical authority is misused. People can lose their jobs or not be promoted because they are 2SLGBTQ+ or support people who are. It is very encouraging to hear a priest have the courage to preach a homily supporting 2SLGBTQ+ folks, admitting to being closed-hearted, calling for the Church's teachings on sexuality to be brought up to date with modern scientific thinking. Some parents have written to their bishops and received no response. The places 2SLGBTQ+ voices are welcome are on the margins of the Church. It would be great to have 'affirming parishes' where people show their support for 2SLGBTQ+ folks publicly, perhaps even wearing a symbol to that effect.

### Celebrating

Sometimes special retreats and Masses are held for 2SLGBTQ+ folks and that can be fantastic. Music can be a way to feel part of the whole Church without getting into the divisions. In the sacrament of confirmation, being 'confirmed' as who I am and being supported by a sponsor who affirms me as I am - this is a great gift. Seeing couples attend Mass together unapologetically is inspiring. Some families say it is hard to feel a sense of celebration when part of your family is not welcome. The situation also causes tensions in families, tension which can spill over into family celebrations.

### Moving Forward/Decision-Making

2SLGBTQ+ folks have so much to offer the Church. The Church is losing so much talent and creativity. We need to acknowledge that the gifts and talents are being offered in the life of the Church, but unseen because people are forced to be closeted. The Church could be a powerful witness to the joy and non-judgement of Jesus. The Church through this synodal process has an opportunity to bring the light and love of Jesus into the world. The Church has a responsibility to foster the growth of all its members in being more Christ-like. It can't do that if the starting point is that some of those members are not allowed to be honest about who they are.

## Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse, their Families and Lay Catholic Allies

*[NB: Due to the nature of the issue, we used different questions for these conversations.]*

### **Describe either your relationship with the Church/God or your spirituality before the abuse took place?**

Survivors speak of the Church as a place of safety; of feeling at peace in Church. It was the place where God lived. Most families were quite devout. They were grateful when the priest took an interest. They never questioned the priest or the Church. Some survivors felt called to the priesthood and felt their family's approval when they became an altar boy. In many cases, the family was in distress (such as the death of a parent) when the priest started to come around. This represents a double betrayal.

### **How did the abuse impact your relationship with the Church/God or your spirituality?**

Most victim-survivors talked about complete loss, a black hole, something lacking; but the thing they miss is the thing that put them in this hole in the first place. They felt abandoned by God when it happened – and even believed that it was God who abused them. Victims/survivors feel destroyed at the very essence of their being. There is no way this can be undone. All seem to be searching for something to replace what was taken: questioning if there is a God, why would God do this to me; feeling like an outsider not having a religion; parents feeling terrible guilt for not protecting their children; survivors feeling guilty that their parents feel guilt. It's a circle of pain that cycles through all the relationships in the family - and with the Church. Family members watch as their loved one who was abused is triggered at family religious celebrations such as the baptism of a grandchild. Some family members continue to attend Mass, and this can cause pain and guilt to the survivor and tension in the relationship. There is huge

confusion regarding God and what one believes, because there is this question of why God allowed it to happen in God's own house. If there is a God, what kind of God would do this? Not a loving God, surely?

### **Did anyone offer anything or was there anything that happened at the time or since that has helped you spiritually?**

Apart from one survivor who has developed a friendship with a retired priest, there were no examples of victim-survivors or their families receiving any spiritual help from the Church or any sense that survivors have something of value to offer the Church. In fact, quite the opposite: the Church through its agents, has seemed intent on breaking victim-survivors' spirits even further. In spite of this, victim-survivors and their families exhibited unbelievable wisdom and grace alongside their justifiable anger and disgust. As with any trauma, there is a swirling vortex of emotions- rage and guilt mixed in with compassion for good priests who are tarred with the same brush; a belief that if priests saw their pain, it would somehow make a difference; giving priests the benefit of the doubt that they don't realize how clergy abuse has affected society. The ability, in the midst of their agonizing pain, to feel compassion, is quite remarkable. Because so many victims-survivors self-medicated with substances to dull the pain, it is not a surprise that the place where they often find spiritual support is through programs such as 12 Step Programs and survivor support groups. Peers provide an honest and safe space. Loving, supportive relationships with a spouse or partner, parent, or child, can also be redemptive and victims shared what a difference it makes to have such relationships in their life.

### **If you could say something to the lay people in the Church, what would it be?**

How can good come out of the Synod when they're still fighting us with lawyers? How can they preach about good things when this has been going on? I need them to say "Yes, it happened, and we're sorry." We ask that you walk with us, not feel sorry or pity us. Join us as we challenge our Church to act with honour. Ask yourself this question: what would Jesus want me to do on this issue? Practice unconditional love. If anyone is left out in Church, go to them. Wake up! We have to get over this idea that clergy sexual abuse is something that only happened in the past. Listen! The laity need to know the lives of the victims and what they go through. The Church needs to be accountable. I want to tell my story from the altar. The Church should be supporting victims. The only way to change is to teach the people who are willing to listen; I will tell my story as well. They need to see the pain. Forgiveness is the only thing that has worked.

## **Lay Ecclesial Ministers & Lay Employees**

### **Listening**

Lay Ecclesial Ministers listen to a LOT of voices. We listen to people when the priest won't or can't listen to them. Sometimes we listen to the pain that the Church has caused them. We are sometimes not listened to by the people we serve because we aren't a priest. Then we aren't listened to by the hierarchy despite having experience, training, and knowledge. Often the priest who hires us really listens but that ends when a new pastor is assigned. Typically, we lose our jobs and our livelihoods when a new pastor comes. It is difficult and painful. We feel invisible and expendable. We can also be the person who people do listen to because we straddle the ecclesial/secular world. The clergy do not really listen to the laity in general. The laity has a lot of knowledge and wisdom, but the pastor often does not listen. Sometimes the priest is from a very different culture and that is a barrier to listening. We feel frustrated because the bishop has an obligation to listen to us and to work for us, but we often do not feel this to be the case. Many feel discouraged about the lack of implementation of Vatican II.

### **Speaking Out**

Clerics have a disproportionate voice. Discussions end with "I am the pastor and I decide!" Priests sometimes ask us to lie and tell people they are too busy or make excuses for them not

showing up. But we are here to serve people – all the people not just the ones who come on Sunday. We speak up for the poor, the young, Indigenous people, immigrants who are afraid to use their voices. The voices that are heard are those with money. People on the far right speak disproportionately loudly. Lay ecclesial ministers act as “translators” to parishioners. In our roles, we see a lot of the unhealthy side of the Church: misuse of funds by pastors, abuse of power, alcoholism, breaking of vows. We are afraid to speak because we want to protect the Church from scandal. Also, when we speak to the bishops, we almost always lose our jobs which we need to support our families. The Voice of the Holy Spirit is being ignored.

### **Celebrating**

We celebrate when there is a connection between our worship on Sunday and our lives the rest of the week. Good liturgy has so much power. It changes us and energizes us for mission. Many of us are trained in liturgy. Some of our pastors make the liturgies come alive. Others do not have skills or training to lead life-giving celebrations, they go by rote. Liturgy can be too clerical. Liturgies at conferences and missions can be really inspirational. Good homilies are vital and rarer than they should be. Our celebrations would be enhanced by hearing women speaking about the meaning of Scripture.

### **Moving Forward/Decision-Making**

We need to immerse ourselves in the vision of Vatican II and let the Holy Spirit work within us. Rules are getting in the way of what we are here to do. Cast out fear. The rejection of Vatican II is fear. The lack of transparency is fear. Clerics need to lose their egos, work cooperatively and listen! We must have transparency and accountability and checks on the power of the pastors. Truth matters to us. We need to speak openly about problems, not doing so undermines the Church. We love the Church and we want to help make it healthier. We are a gift - not a threat - to the Church.

## **Racialized Catholics**

### **Listening**

The more culturally diverse our parishes are, the more we feel listened to. Mostly our opinions are not really welcome. I found the Church to be very cold when I first joined, I was the only Black person in the church and no one welcomed me. Now I am very active and outspoken and am listened to. Racism keeps us from being listened to: a Black cantor in our parish was told she needed to sound “less Black.” The Church is not listening to our young people. The Church doesn’t listen because it is afraid to lose its power. Black saints and Black bishops are absent from our churches, so we do not feel “seen.”

### **Speaking Out**

Our Church leaders – those with power – do not speak enough about issues of social justice. We are told to pray for people but hear little about concrete action (e.g., against racism or standing up for housing affordability or the needs of the working poor). Controversy is avoided in favour of “being safe” and preserving the image of the Church. The classroom in a Catholic School is a place where many important issues are discussed. I am grateful for Pope Francis’ speaking about Indigenous people and apologizing. Membership in Development and Peace and St. Vincent de Paul offers a space to have a voice. Issues of race are never addressed in Church. In the context of Black Lives Matter I haven’t heard any pastor speak about racial justice. In fact, I heard a white priest defending the Church’s involvement in residential schools. When I studied theology, we heard many different voices and perspectives. In the parish, you have to “stick to a script.” When I spoke out about an experience of racism I was shut down. When I spoke about an issue with a priest’s inappropriate behaviour, it was swept under the rug.

### **Celebrating**

Our young people are very creative but that is not welcome in the parish; the Church is missing out on this richness. Cultural celebrations allow us to share our racialized identity with the Church. Multicultural music makes celebrations more involved and engaging. Music and art should be more inclusive. When asking a priest to have more multicultural art and music to represent our family, I was told that he



was too busy. Experiences of racism harm our celebrations. At RCIA I dressed in traditional clothing and comments from a parishioner were “what is she doing here dressed like that?” A Black Jesus in the Christmas creche was surprising and inspiring. I feel if we played the sitar and tabla in Church, it would not go down well. Liturgical dance is beautiful, but some people are scandalized by it. We live in a global community – and we need more multiculturalism in our liturgies. Artists who produce liturgical art and music must be paid fairly.

#### **Moving Forward/Decision-Making**

Because priests are male and celibate, all women and most men are excluded from power. There are so many talented and qualified women who would do an amazing job as leaders. We also need to make youth a priority – meeting them where they are – not telling them what they are doing wrong when they come to the Church but what they are doing right. We need to take care of the poor. The laity should be involved in all decisions that affect the life of the Church. The lack of accountability is a serious problem. The Church must be more inviting. Jesus reached out to the people on the margins and brought them in; we need to do this too. With respect to racism, the Church should follow its teaching on reconciliation: begin by telling the truth about the role of the Church in slavery and racism, then having a firm purpose to make amends. Take action. Only then can we celebrate.

### **Spanish Speaking Catholics**

#### **Listening**

In our culture family is very important. We hear God speak to us in our parents and our spouses and our children. In our culture we had more groups in the Church where we could share faith. This is not so much the case in Canada. We feel the voices of our young people are not heard. Sometimes in Canada, we listen to too many voices, and we become lax and permissive. We lose the horizon of what our faith means. We haven't felt part of the parish community. We feel the priest is too shy or lacks the initiative to listen to us. We feel the Church does not know that or doesn't listen to our need to have a solid community.

#### **Speaking Out**

Because of my faith, I feel uncomfortable speaking about a lot of topics around sexuality that are discussed so openly in Canada compared with my country. We should talk more openly about the problems in the Church (e.g. sexual abuse or residential schools). We need to discuss what happened rather than defend the Church. We are afraid to speak out about moral issues and errors we see in humanity. We are afraid to defend our faith. We also are not taught how to talk about political issues from a religious perspective. In my home country, we only prayed about things. We need to learn to speak about all things because faith is not independent from our humanity.

#### **Celebrating**

I feel that Eucharistic celebrations in my parish are very rigorous, and there's a lot of protocol... if they were more flexible or joyful, we could have a different perception as Christians and more people would be interested in joining us. The celebrations are pragmatic and concrete. There is not enough time for silence and recollection. We need to pay more homage to the Virgin Mary. Mass does not have to be so short. We celebrate with Marian devotions that are similar to back home.

#### **Moving Forward/Decision-Making**

We need more training in understanding the Bible and the catechism so we can transmit our faith with confidence. We need more groups where we learn more about the Church, a homily on Sunday is not enough. We must learn to be educators of faith in our families. Building community is so important. We must not allow the changes in our society, and the foundations left by Jesus to be lost. It is okay to listen to everyone but not to be permissive to the point of wanting to change our catechism.

## Interfaith Session

### Listening

We listen to God in a multitude of ways. We hear God's voice in the people we serve. We find it hard to listen to God if worship is not engaging. We see God in how people react to our differences (e.g. disability). We must see God in all religions' manifestations. We listen in private and together. We hear God's voice when we are not expecting to.

### Speaking Out

When we speak out at a high level (e.g. ecumenical dialogue), officials appear to listen but then nothing happens. We must be free to speak "in Spirit and Truth." All should have a voice. Too often, leaders are timid. Faith leaders must speak out on important issues and on behalf of those who cannot speak. But we also need to have those leaders' messages filter down to the 'grassroots' of our faith communities. We feel safe and comfortable in our 'tribes'- and feeling safe is a good thing. But it is not a good thing if it prevents us from connecting to others in different 'tribes.'

### Celebrating

Interfaith gatherings are celebrations. At interfaith weddings and funerals, we share in celebrating and supporting each other. World Day of Prayer, Walking the Camino and praying together in moments of crisis bring unity. We celebrate well when we do not feel like strangers. Interfaith devotionals where there is no proselytizing are places of celebration. Sometimes praying in silence is the most powerful way to pray together (e.g. when Russia invaded Ukraine). Planning interfaith/ecumenical worship is a place of fruitful dialogue. Being flexible about our traditions is so important. Beauty (art, architecture) helps us to celebrate.

### Moving Forward/Decision-Making

We need to listen to each other, to engage in social action together across faiths. We must eat together. Cooperation is a hopeful act. We need a worldwide conference – "building vibrant communities," about service in whatever areas required.

## CONCLUSIONS

Lay people would like to see transparent and accountable leadership in the Church. They wish to have a say in decision-making, some even wish to have input on choosing who can be priests. Many lay Catholics want to be more involved, but they expect their gifts and talents to be respected. Lay Catholics are frustrated that they must go elsewhere for spiritual nourishment because their parishes are often so poorly led. They want to work in partnership with the clergy. They would like to see parish councils and diocesan councils mandated, with lay representatives, chosen by lay people themselves. People want their Church to reflect everyone- not just a particular culture or group. We follow the Universal Christ and belong to a universal Church-everything should reflect this truth-and not in a token way. Older people remember a time when much more was happening in their parishes in Canada: Renew, Genesis II, Cursillo, Marriage Encounter. They also remember when our parishes and dioceses were connected to national and local ecumenical justice efforts such as 10 Days for World Development, Third World Visitor program, Kairos. Younger Catholics are impatient and frustrated that the Church is so slow to come into the 21st Century. They are looking elsewhere. Lay Catholics, old and young, no longer feel obligated under pain of hell, to stay in the Church. We hope our bishops will give us reasons to stay. If they do, the Church can thrive again. We pray they will.

## APPENDIX #1 – SYNODAL SESSIONS (FROM CLC WEBSITE)

*This first stage of the Synodal Process provides the foundation for all the other phases that follow. More than simply responding to a questionnaire, the diocesan phase is meant to offer as many people as possible a truly synodal experience of listening to one another and walking forward together, guided by the Holy Spirit. (Vademecum 4.1)*

The ideal or 'ordinary' way for Catholics to participate in the synodal process is through parish or diocesan events, and CLC encourages everyone to get involved at their local level. The Synod Office also recognizes that in some exceptional cases, it might be desirable to make submissions directly to Rome. So, this is also permitted.

Join Concerned Lay Catholics at one or more of our upcoming Synodal listening sessions by Zoom for folks who might not be able or feel comfortable attending a parish or diocesan conversation. We are also hosting sessions for specific groups whose nature may transcend diocesan boundaries.

In all our groups we will focus on

- listening,
- speaking/being heard
- celebrating
- contributing to the Church's mission

### Proposed Topics, Dates and Times for Synodal Conversations at CLC-February-June 2022

The conversations will bring together members of specific groups whose voices may not otherwise be heard.

- Victims/Survivors- (in partnership with Recovery Speaking Initiative)
- 2SLGBTQ+, their allies and families
- Lay Ecclesial Ministers/Lay Employees of the Church
- Older Adults
- Interfaith Conversations
- General Regional Conversations (West and East)
- Racialized Catholics
- Spanish-speaking Catholics

The conversations are being facilitated by CLC volunteers and partners on topics they have experience with. No identifying participant information will be retained or shared. Participants are welcome to change their label in the Zoom session to maintain confidentiality. Sessions will not be recorded although notes will be taken in order to include the group's input in our report.

Group	Date	Time	Description
General CLC Session - anyone welcome	Sunday, April 10	2-4 pm	How is every baptised person called to participate in the mission of the Church?

Western Canada			What hinders the baptised from being active in mission? What about the voices of those who have left the Church? Or those who are hanging on by a thread? In these sessions, we particularly want to hear from those who feel disconnected or disappointed in the Church, who feel they are not welcome or that their participation is not allowed. Let's explore together how we understand and try to live out our mission call.
General CLC Session - anyone welcome  Eastern Canada	Sunday, May 8	2-4 pm	
Interfaith Conversation- Catholics with members of other faith communities	Monday, May 16	7 – 9 pm	The Synod on Synodality invites members of other Christian denominations and members of other faith communities to engage with us on this path of faith. What do we share and how do we journey together? What fruits have we drawn from walking together? What are the difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?
Victims/Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse  (Victim/Survivors only)	Friday, March 25	7 – 9 pm	This collaboration between Recovery Speaking Initiative and Concerned Lay Catholics is intended to join a conversation that both organizations feel is long-overdue. It is a conversation about how our spiritual lives have been impacted by the experience of clergy sexual abuse.  This series begins with a conversation among survivors themselves, then extends to their families and friends, and concludes with a sharing with ordinary lay Catholics who wish to show support. Registration is being handled by Recovery Speaking Initiative. Both female and male survivors are welcome. Registration is limited.
Families and Friends of Victims/Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse	Friday, April 8	7 – 9 pm	
Parishioners and Concerned Laity who wish to show support for Victims/Survivors and Families and Friends of those who have experienced Clergy Sexual Abuse	Friday, May 6	7 – 9 pm	
Older Adults	Thursday, February 17	4:30-5:30 pm	In the context of walking together in faith, older adults will explore their possible roles and needs within the Church – e.g. respect for experience, special calling and need for contact with youth/grandchildren, support for strengthened role within our families, strategies to promote intergenerational projects, training in peer
	Thursday, February 24	4:30-5:30 pm	

			support for older family caregivers and care receivers.
2SLGBTQ+	Wednesday, March 9	7 – 9 pm	In the context of walking together in faith, how can 2SLGBTQ+ Catholics have their voices heard and their contributions affirmed in a Church that has traditionally excluded them? We begin this conversation with 2SLGBTQ individuals themselves.
2SLGBTQ+ Families and Allies	Wednesday, March 23	7 – 9 pm	In the context of walking together in faith, families-especially parents, grandparents and siblings of 2SLGBTQ -often feel torn between their loved one and their faith community. Allies wonder how they can support LGBTQ+ folks in their faith journey. Is there a way forward? Can we help each other find it?
Racialized Catholics	Tuesday, May 10	7 – 9 pm	This listening session is designed specifically for racialized people to share their experience of the Church in the context of the global consultations on synodality launched by Pope Francis. It is important that your voice be heard, whether you fully identify as a Church member or feel disconnected or disappointed in the Church. The synodal process is based on the premise that every baptised person is called to participate, to have a place and a role in how the Church lives its pastoral and prophetic mission. Have you experienced any obstacles to your active participation? Have you had positive experiences of participation that you can share? What key message do you wish to communicate in this consultation on synodality? Please join the conversation whether or not you have participated in any other synodal listening session.
Spanish-speaking Catholics	Wednesday, May 11	7 – 9 pm	Pope Francis has called us to express ourselves on the future of the Church through the Synod on Synodality.  Aware of the multicultural nature of our country, we have prepared a listening

			<p>session in Spanish where all your opinions are welcome.</p> <p>Share your experience, good and bad, and help us understand how God is working in your life and community. What gifts and needs would you like to share with the rest of the Church in Canada? What areas are we neglecting? What about the voices of those who have left the Church? What about those who feel disconnected or disappointed?</p> <p>Let us listen to these experiences and seek how to learn to live our missionary call together. (Translated into Spanish for poster and website)</p>
Lay Ecclesial Ministers/Lay Employees of the Church	Sunday, March 6	2-4 pm	As lay employees of the Church, you have a unique perspective. You have seen first-hand the dedication, fidelity and commitment to Christ of both clergy and laity has served the People of God. You have also witnessed how mental health issues, lack of transparency and sinful structures have been obstacles to a healthy Church and the proclamation of the Gospel.
	Sunday, April 3	2-4 pm	
	Sunday, April 24	2-4 pm	

If you would like to volunteer to facilitate a group conversation that is not listed here, contact us to see if we can work together to bring that conversation about. [concernedlaycatholics@gmail.com](mailto:concernedlaycatholics@gmail.com)

The conversation(s) would have to be completed and the input submitted by mid-June.

## APPENDIX #2 – CLC SYNODAL SURVEY RESULTS: JUNE 2022

The Catholic Church’s 2021-2023 Synodal Process calls the faithful to journey together to discuss and discern the ways forward to becoming a more synodal Church. As part of this journey, Dioceses have participated in ongoing discussions and surveys with a diversity of folks who wish to have their voices heard in the Church to contribute to this ongoing dialogue. For CLC, this contribution was provided by way of a survey that was distributed to those on their email list and posted on their public website. Between March 9 and May 15, a total of 27 respondents completed this survey, and this analysis will provide insight into their experiences with their faith and the Church, and suggestions for how the Church can become more inclusive and synodal. Some high-level findings from this roll-up include:

- The abuse and scandal in the Church, and its perceived lack of response and accountability, greatly affects many areas of individuals’ faith lives and participation in the Church.
- There is a significant lack of transparency in the Church’s decision-making and parishioners do not feel involved in these processes.
- There needs to be more outreach and discussions that can reach those who feel they are not part of the Church; there needs to be more rootedness in social justice issues and being active in the community, especially locally, in order to expand the Church’s reach.

### Demographics

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of gender for the respondents. 17 (68%) were female and 8 (32%) were male; 2 people did not wish to respond to this question.

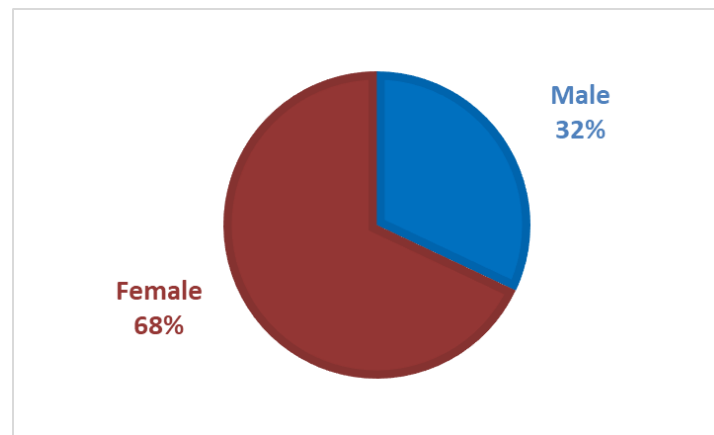


Figure 1 - Gender

A total of 65% of respondents (n=23) indicated that they were heterosexual when asked about their sexual orientation. Of those who were part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the largest percentage (22%) were bisexual, and the orientations of asexual, gay and lesbian saw only one respondent (5%) for each. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of these orientations.

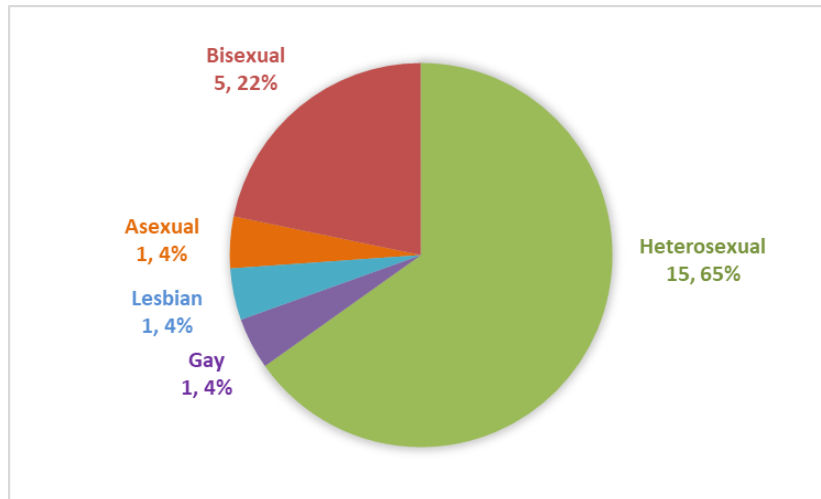


Figure 2 - Sexual Orientation

When looking at the age of respondents, the majority (65%) were over 70 years old, with the next largest percentages of respondents were under 18 years (11%) and between 18 and 34 years (12%). Only 1 participant did not respond to this question. Figure 3 shows the age categories of respondents.

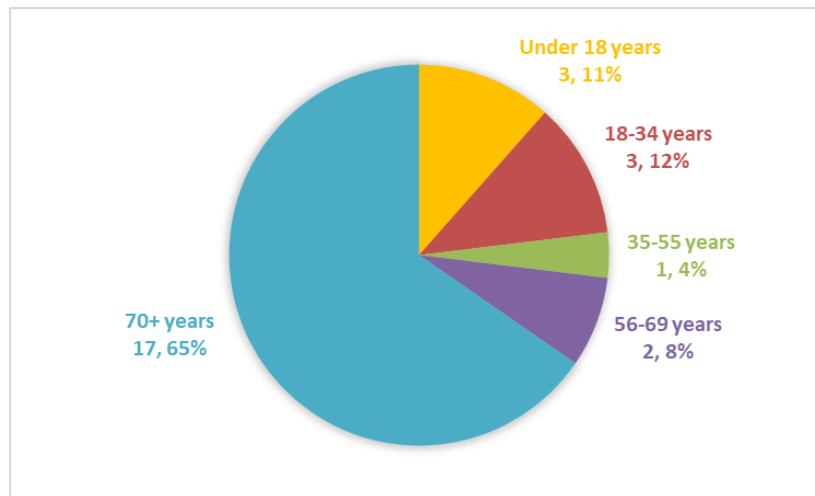


Figure 3 - Age

Other demographic information includes:

- 3 respondents (11%) identified as being part of a racial group; specifically, they identified as being Black, Latino and multiracial
- 2 respondents (7%) identified as being Metis
- 1 respondent (5%) said that they had an evident and visible disability.



## Relationship to Church

There were 24 participants who identified their relationship to the Church (2 people said they preferred not to answer; 1 did not respond). The greatest number of participants (9; 38%) identified as: 1) Being Catholic but not attending Church, or 2) Being a regular parishioner who attends Church on Sundays. Other roles that people noted in relation to the Church included being a regular parishioner who goes to Mass during weekdays (but not necessarily Sundays) and attending Mass more regularly before COVID and ongoing health complications. It seems that all respondents to this survey are the lay faithful. Figure 4 highlights these different relationships to the Church.

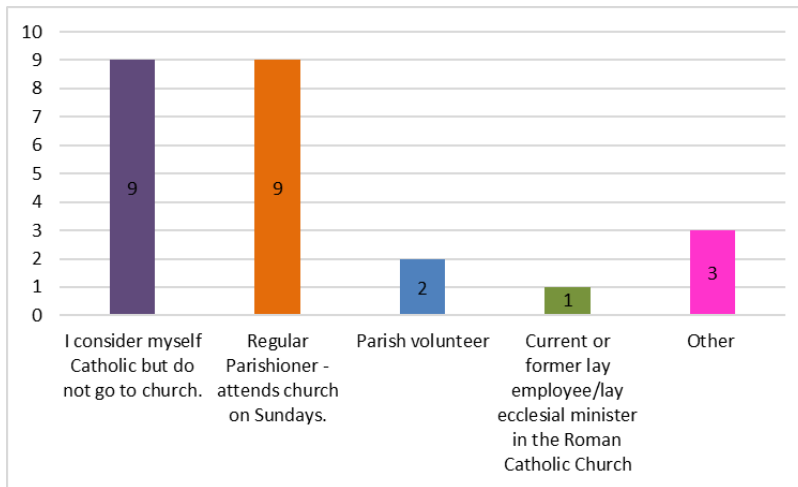


Figure 4- Relationship to the Church

## Diocese

There were 23 respondents who identified their Diocese. As seen in Figure 5, the majority (12; 52%) were from the Hamilton Diocese. In total, 74% of people were from a Diocese within Ontario, and 26% were from three other provinces, namely, Manitoba, Quebec and British Columbia.

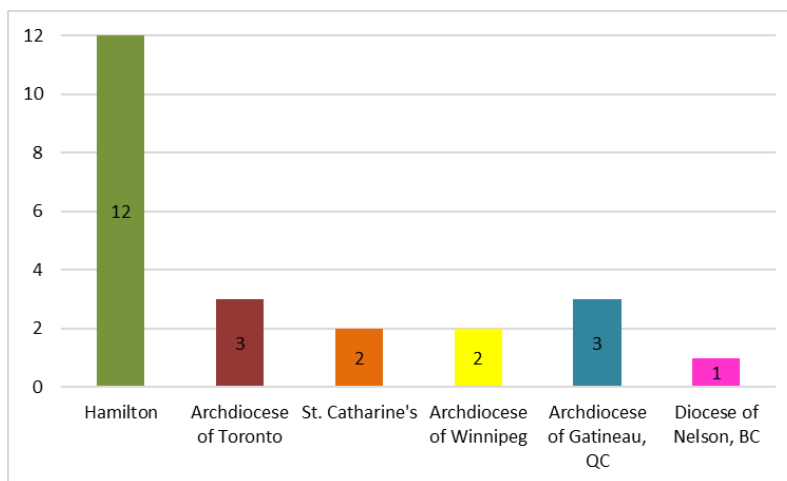


Figure 5- Diocese

## How close to, or far from God do you feel at the present time?

The average ranking of people feeling close or far from God was **7.2**.<sup>1</sup> Many people felt closest to God when they experienced God on a more personal level (e.g. during personal prayer, Scripture reading and meditation, reading spiritual books, visiting a cemetery), versus when they experienced God in a more organized or public way, such as being taught religion in a classroom, or attending Mass. In referring to their personal relationship with God, respondents appreciated how their faith and trust in God grew deeper over time, as it reassured them that “all are embraced” in a “Universal Christ” and provided them with a sense of “certainty.” People also felt distant from God due to their witnessing of the Catholic Church’s involvement in scandals and mistreatments such as: the lack of reconciliation on the part of the Church for various abuses; the Church’s stance on 2SLGBTQ+ issues; priests’ shortcomings and lack of relationships with parishioners; the complicated intersection of faith and politics; and most generally, witnessing any wrongdoing that has been done in God’s name.

## Listening

### To what extent do you feel your voice is listened to in the Church at the present time?

The average ranking of people feeling that their voice is listened to in the Church at the present time was **3.5**. The minimum value was 0 and the maximum value was 8.

### To what extent do you feel you can listen to God’s voice in the Church at the present time?

The average ranking of people feeling they can listen to God’s voice in the Church was **5.1**. The minimum value was 0 and the maximum value was 10.

### Identify an experience in your secular or spiritual life when you felt God/the Holy Spirit speaking to you.

Most people provided general scenarios of when God/the Holy Spirit was speaking to them. Most people knew that God was with them through their daily activities as well as in bigger decisions and alluded to this relationship and communication as always being present and ongoing. Many people experienced the Holy Spirit during times of grief or when making a decision that would start a new chapter, such as starting a ministry, leaving seminary and deciding on a life partner. Some people experienced the Spirit in their employment or extracurricular involvement in ministry or volunteer work. Another couple felt the Holy Spirit when they received the Sacraments. Meditation, prayer and spiritual reading were also common moments when people would feel God speaking to them.

### Who has supported and/or encouraged you in your journey to develop your spiritual/faith life in your parish or Church?

The people who supported/encouraged participants the most in their faith journey were parents and friends, each with 70% of respondents saying that they helped them often or occasionally. As seen in Figure 6, a parish priest seemed to be someone who was also helpful, with 52% of respondents feeling supported by them in their faith journey. The lowest percentage of participants (22%) indicated that deacons and lay pastoral ministers helped them.

---

<sup>1</sup> All scaling was on a scale between 0 (not at all) and 10 (a great deal).

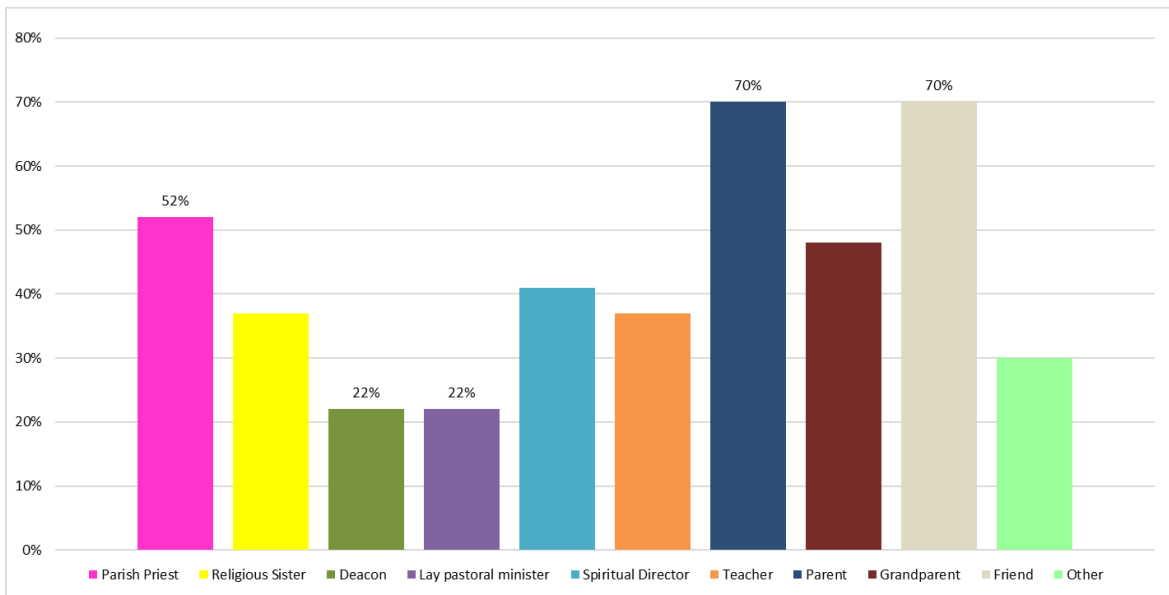


Figure 6- Supporters/Encouragers on Faith Journeys

One common theme that emerged from participants was that being part of faith-based courses, Bible studies, retreats and other faith-based initiatives helped to support their faith journey, especially when done with a loved one, such as a friend or spouse. Participants also found it helpful to be around people who were not of the faith and to learn about topics and resources that were not exclusively Catholic.

**What enables you to hear the voice of God speaking through others in your parish community and Church?**

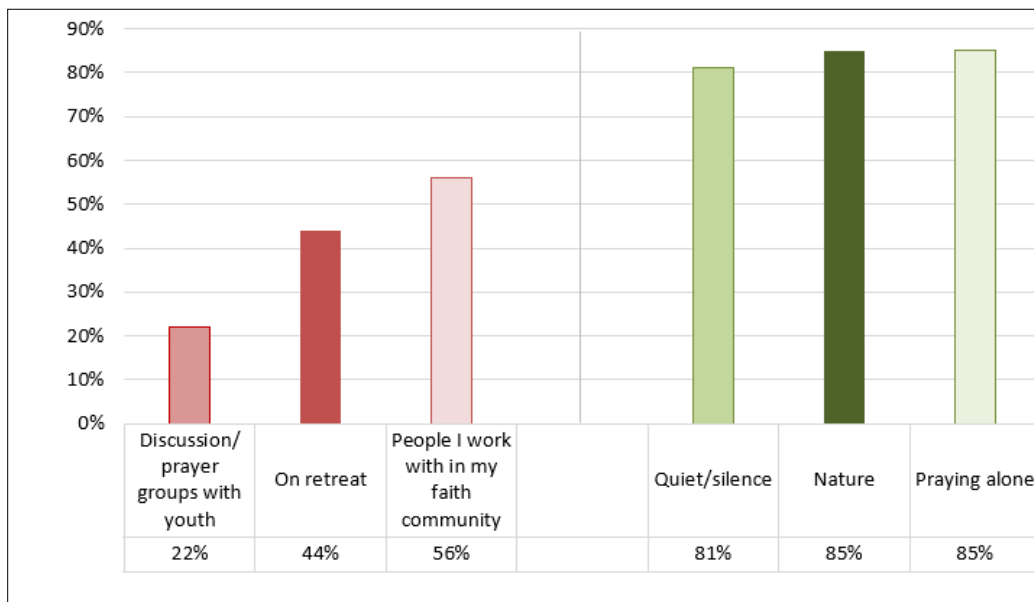
Figure 7 outlines the top three factors that enabled participants to hear the voice of God, and the three factors that appeared to be less influential in enabling them to hear the voice of God.

The top three factors that enabled participants to hear the voice of God speaking were:

- 1) Being in Nature (85%);
- 2) Praying alone (85%);
- 3) Quiet/silence (81%).

The three factors that had the least impact on enabling God speaking were:

- 1) Discussion/prayer groups with youth (22%);
- 2) On retreat (44%);
- 3) People they worked with in their faith community (51%).



*Figure 7- Helping to Hear God Speak*

It is interesting to note that one of the least influential factors that enabled people to hear the voice of God was discussion/prayer with groups of youth. Young people did not warrant a larger percentage of respondents; however, this insight offers an opportunity to incorporate more youth voices and look into how young people interact and feel in the Church with others.

Participants expanded on what enabled them to hear the voice of God and explained that listening to God during Adoration, during Mass, and in being open to conversations with others at their parish and with others from other faiths helped them. People also said that they had faith to remain present to the voice of God and trust that He is always speaking.

### **What hinders you in hearing the voice of God speaking through others in your parish community and Church?**

Figure 8 outlines the top three factors that hindered participants in hearing the voice of God, and the three factors that appeared to be less influential in hindering them to hear the voice of God.

The top three hindrances for participants to hear the voice of God included:

- 1) Some Church leaders (74%);
- 2) Judgemental attitudes (70%);
- 3) Harshness of some Church teachings (67%).

Things that appeared to have the least amount of hindrance in hearing the voice of God were:

- 1) Lack of love (41%);
- 2) Fear of not being well-regarded (33%);
- 3) Other reasons (19%; specified below).

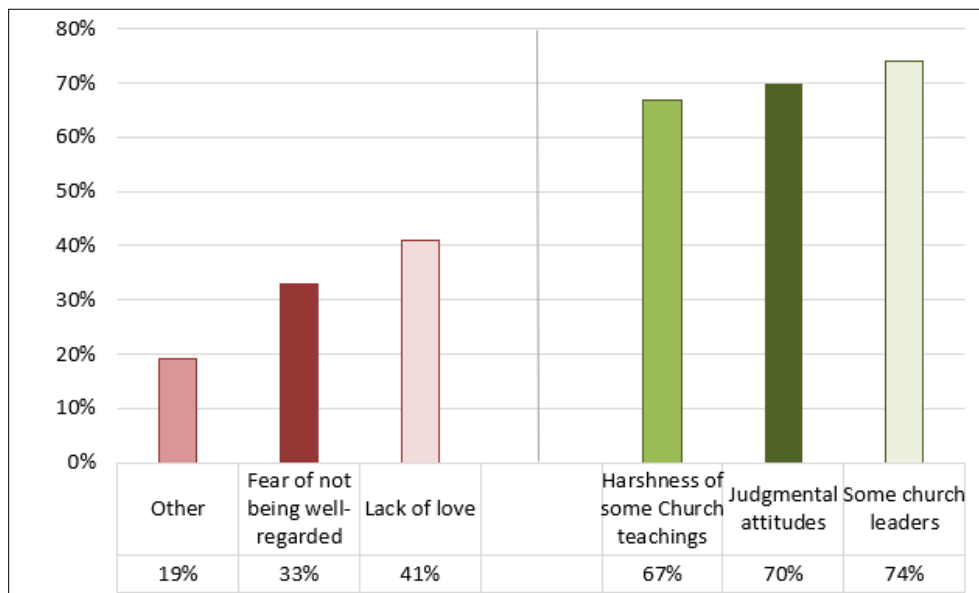


Figure 8- Hindering the Voice of God

When people talked about the “Other” reasons that hindered them hearing the voice of God, the most common comment was the gender inequality in the Church, specifically the disregard of gifts that women can bring to the Church. Other reasons mentioned included: marginalizing 2SLGBTQ+ folks, sexual abuse, issues of injustice, not feeling connected to their priest and feeling restricted by the rules of the Church.

The biggest area of difficulty people had with hearing the voice of God was clericalism and the way they experienced clergy’s managing of spiritual and social affairs. Other difficulties that people pointed out which hindered them hearing the voice of God included:

- Hypocrisy that they see by Church leaders
- Poorly trained clergy
- Marginalization and exclusion of certain groups of people, specifically women, LGBTQ+ folks and differing voices on parish and diocesan councils
- Lack of ownership of historical and ongoing abuses of Indigenous peoples

## Speaking Out

**To what extent do you feel you are welcome to share your insights, concerns or opinions in the Church at the present time?**

The average ranking of people feeling that they were welcome to share insights, concerns or opinions in the Church at the present time was **3.4**. The minimum value was 0 and the maximum value was 8.

**To what extent do you feel you are welcome to share your insights, concerns or opinions in your local diocese at the present time?**

The average ranking of people feeling they were welcome to share insights, concerns or opinions in the diocese was **3.2**. The minimum value was 0 and the maximum value was 9.

**Identify an experience when you felt comfortable to speak up, honestly, in the Church. What factors made you feel comfortable to do so?**

People felt more inclined to speak up in the Church when they were in environments where they knew that their voice was important and their questions were welcomed. Some of these environments included this synodal process, religion classes, university courses, being with friends, and ministry/parish council meetings. For some participants, it depended on the topic of discussion and their representation of their voices for marginalized groups that helped them to determine if it was safe to speak honestly. Other factors that made people feel comfortable speaking up included:

- Approachable clergy members or teachers
- Trusting that those who are listening are non-judgmental
- Understanding Church doctrine
- Knowing which conversations are important and worth exploring further
- Availability of different means to have conversations (i.e. virtually, in-person, via email)

A couple of participants responded to this question by saying that there were either no opportunities to speak up or situations where they would be comfortable to do so.

**Identify an experience when you were hindered in speaking up, honestly, in the Church. What factors prevented you?**

Some instances that participants shared where they were hindered in speaking up, honestly, in the Church included:

- In elementary school
- When disclosing clergy abuse and receiving a dismissive response from a Bishop
- Lack of Church response to scandal and abuse, including the Residential School System
- Unapproachable nature and lack of respect by the priest and/or council members at the parish level
- Life experiences, in general
- Anytime homosexuality is discussed
- When feeling anger towards the Church

Most commonly, participants shared that their efforts in having conversations (most often at the local level with their priest) about what was going on in their parish, or lack of how the Church is responding to scandal, were often shut down and that they were required to blindly accept what was being shared with them. Parishioners have gone to great lengths — endorsing initiatives to help with reconciliation, countless emails, private conversations with the priest — and they were met with excuses or lack of meaningful action toward addressing what they have spoken. One participant shared that “criticism comes hand in hand with understanding and fulfillment,” because complex systems, such as the Church, requires every concern to be addressed before moving forward in unity.

**If the Church and society are meant to be in dialogue with each other, how can the Church be more relevant and connected to issues that affect people (e.g. local government, NGO's, business, academia, etc.)?**

- Mutual respect of a variety of opinions both inside and outside of the Church
- Clergy need to be more connected to society and minister among the people
- Ensure that there is more emphasis on social justice and less on our diocesan goal of contributions to our local Church and diocese.
- Increased dialogue between Christians
- The Church needs to be more visible in the community

- Take meaningful action to address issues facing the Church
- Keep up with the current times and thinking
- Ask people their issues and needs and take meaningful action to address these concerns
- Communication needs to improve at the parish and diocesan level
- Educate one another and become more involved in current issues and councils, both inside and outside of the Church

**In the dialogue between Church and society, what can the Church learn from society (eg. climate science, human psychology, anthropology, politics, etc.) today? Please provide concrete examples from your experience.**

- Church should be more open to when society wants to see change; sometimes the way that things have always been done are not always seen to be the most loving
- The Church can be more transparent in modelling restoration and reconciliation
- Clergy need to remain open, humble and compassionate
- Become more involved in current issues that go beyond religion in order to reach those who have been excluded, including young people (i.e. topics regarding climate change, sexuality, migration, euthanasia, social justice, and the intersection with science)

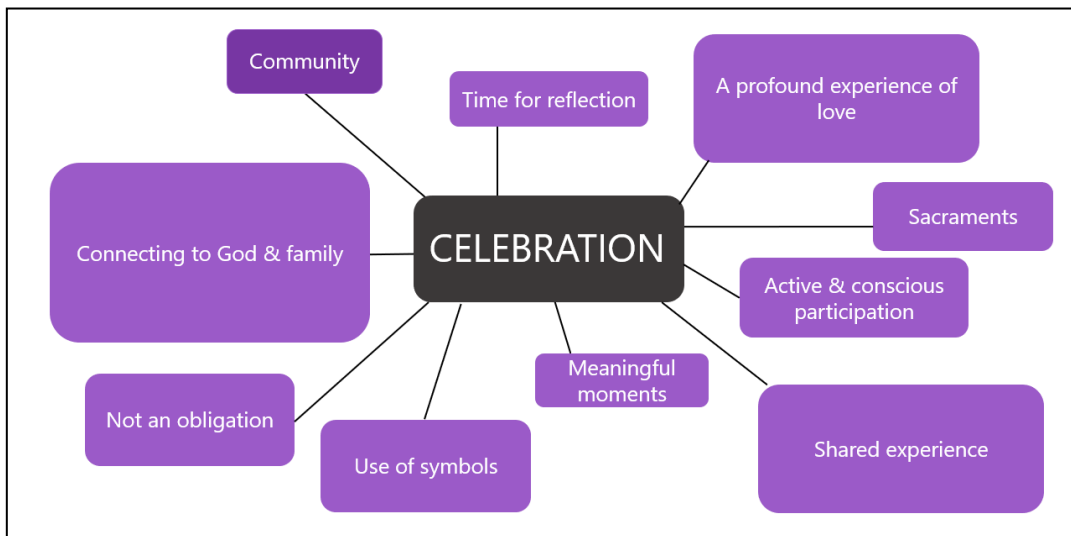
**Celebration**

**To what extent do Sunday celebrations bring you closer to God and God’s people?**

The average ranking of people feeling that Sunday celebrations bring them closer to God and God’s people was **6**. The minimum value was 0 and the maximum value was 10.

**To what extent do other Church celebrations (e.g. social gatherings, other liturgies, diocesan events, etc.) bring you closer to God and God’s people?**

The average ranking of people feeling that celebrations bring them closer to God and God’s people was **5.7**. The minimum value was 0 and the maximum value was 10.



*Figure 9 – Celebrating in the Church*

## **What does celebration, in the context of the Church, mean to you?**

Figure 9 showcases what people think about when they think about celebration in the Church.

### **Identify a celebration experience (Liturgy, Sacrament, communal prayer) in your parish/diocese/Church that inspired you and guided in your spiritual journey and/or your mission in the Church.**

The most common celebration that people said inspired them on their spiritual journey was the Easter Vigil Mass. Receiving the Eucharist, hearing about Jesus' death and resurrection, and seeing new Catholics enter into the Church during the Vigil helped people feel more connected to family and God. Sacramental celebrations also help to guide people on their spiritual journey, as many noted that Reconciliation services, Marriages and Baptisms were experienced in profound ways. For one participant, witnessing a Baptism of another Christian denomination was inspiring and deeply spiritual. Other celebrations that were helpful for people included funerals, Advent prayer services, Diocesan-sponsored events, marriage ministry, CWL programming, coffee after Mass, and spiritual music and prayer in community.

These celebrations were memorable for people because of their ability to bring about joy and positive feelings, a sense of togetherness, faith-sharing, participation as "signs of new life and growth," the involvement of youth, the sense of tradition, welcoming environment, and the simplicity and multi-sensory approach of the event.

Factors that hindered the celebration experience were:

- Not feeling included
- personal tiredness
- Unprepared celebration
- Mundanity of the service
- Lack of participation by attendees
- Strict COVID protocols
- Not feeling like it was a personal experience.

A few participants noted that they do not attend such celebrations or do not belong to a Church-related group of this nature.

## **Moving Forward in Mission**

### **To what extent would you say you are involved in mission (i.e. the Church's service to society) at the present time?**

The average ranking of people saying they were involved in mission was **5.1**. The minimum value was 0 and the maximum value was 10.

### **Please explain your involvement in Mission.**

Most commonly, participants identified their involvement in Mission by advocating for, collaborating with, or serving those in marginalized and impoverished positions in society. These involvements included: organizing school events such as food drives or fundraisers; volunteering with different organizations and initiatives (e.g. Development and Peace, St. Vincent de Paul Society, hospice, bereavement groups, soup kitchens, CLC, spiritual reading groups); through employment in different sectors (e.g. education, counselling); financially contributing regular donor toward Church-related organizations; and directly advocating for social justice issues.



For some, direct participation in their parish and local Churches provided them with a sense of Mission, specifically when they prayed, attended Mass, were Ministers in their parish (Eucharistic, Lectors, Sacristan), volunteered in parish service, and brought Communion to the sick.

Several participants also mentioned that to them, contributing to the Church's Mission came in the form of living their everyday lives according to Christian values and ensuring that they were respectful and acted in good character in order to "witness" to loved ones and strangers. A couple of participants did not feel a sense of Mission as related to the Church, but rather felt that they were on mission themselves without affiliation or support from the Church.

### **How can you individually, or we collectively, participate more in the Church's life and mission?**

- Need younger people to participate more meaningfully and consistently; the older generation cannot do it anymore (i.e. health, personal circumstances, etc.)
- Have different people participate in the Church and different ministries in the parish
- Attend Church more regularly
- Good and kind acts toward others
- Increasing participation of women in the Church
- Fervent prayer
- Effective leadership and parish councils
- More outreach and presence in the broader community

### **What hinders you from being active in mission?**

Participants outlined a variety of factors hindering their participation in mission including (in order from most common response to least common):

- Lack of time
- Age/personal commitments & health challenges
- Lack of opportunities and awareness to be involved in the parish
- Seeing the Church as exclusionary and disrespectful
- COVID-19 protocols and lack of in-person interaction
- Lack of initiatives in the Church that reach the wider community
- Clericalism

### **What areas of mission do you think your parish or local Church is neglecting?**

Participants outlined a variety of areas that their parish/Church is neglecting including (in order from most common response to least common):

- Youth ministry and outreach and inclusion of young members
- Remain diligent (yet cautious) in reaching those in poverty both locally and internationally
- Increase the role of women in the Church
- Respect for human rights and members in the Church
- Remaining open to change
- Shift resources to where there is a greater need
- Ministry to the bereaved and those struggling with mental illness
- Enhance other councils at the parish level (Finance, Parish)

### **To what extent would you say you are involved in decision-making in your parish?**

The average ranking of people saying they were involved in decision-making in their parish was **1.7**. The majority of respondents responded, "Not at all, 0."

**What decisions at the parish level should involve the laity (e.g. finances, assignment of priests to parishes, pastoral plan, hiring decisions, liturgy planning)?**

The consensus was that all decisions at the parish level should involve the laity. Specifically, these decisions may include finances, administration, sexual abuse disclosure and response, liturgy planning, a pastoral plan, management of the physical space, and communications. There were a couple of participants who noted they just want to ensure that decision-making processes are transparent and that the priest is involved.

**What decisions at the diocesan level should involve the laity (e.g. finances, assignment of priests to parishes, pastoral plan, hiring decisions, liturgy planning)?**

The biggest area that people want to involve the laity in is the development and assignment of priests to parishes. Another suggestion was that they should also be involved in deciding on the Bishop for their Diocese. There was also the recommendation to have a lay advisory council at the diocesan level which would collaborate with these councils at the parish level, and in the area of finances to ensure accountability.

**Are there specific groups of people who are excluded and should be included in decision making at the parish/diocesan level? What might they bring to the Church's mission?**

There was a general consensus among respondents that it is time to hear from those who are usually excluded from the Church's circle. Specific recommendations included hearing voices from:

- Women
- Youth/young people/young families
- Elderly
- Indigenous voices
- Multi-cultural parishioners who can bring global insights
- Disabled
- 2SLGBTQ+
- Religious and secular professionals/organizations, especially those who represent the marginalized

## In the Context of COVID-19

**Please explain in what ways your speaking up, listening and/or participation have changed since COVID-19.**

Figure 10 shows the responses from respondents and how they have experienced any changes (if any) related to COVID-19 and their voice in the Church and personal relationship with God. There seems to be less significant change in the way that people feel they can share their voices in the Church, as only 48% of respondents said that they saw a change in this area. This is likely because there was already the general sense that lay voices were not included in the Church prior to COVID, so any hindrances related to COVID were likely less impactful here or already present. Most people have seen a change in the way that they have been involved in the life of the Church.

People most often commented on how their attendance at Mass or their local parish changed since COVID-19, since they were forced to watch Mass virtually and did not have the fellowship before/after Mass. Although some people appreciated that the virtual Mass offered them less distractions, they also missed Communion and being in the physical Church. There were also many people who could not risk going back to Church in-person after COVID due to increased health risks and concerns. There were 56% of people who did not think things would go back to normal after COVID, and 44% who did.

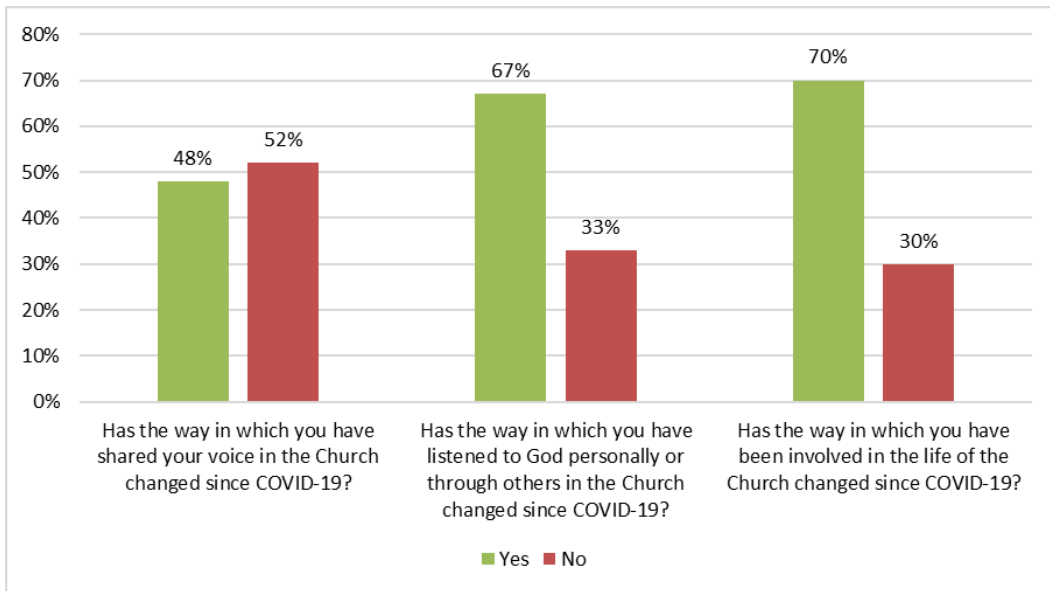


Figure 10- Changes since COVID-19

## Closing Thoughts

There is a real plea from the faithful that the Church needs to take concerns and responsibilities for their past and future actions more seriously and consider the voices of the people who they do not normally listen to. There is struggle in maintaining Catholic faith because of the scandals and sense of direction that the Church is going, especially by Indigenous Catholics and those who have experienced abuse by clergy. There is a call for the Church to become more transparent and welcoming, both locally and globally. Further, some people see that involvement in organized religion is decreasing overall, and there is fear that this momentum will continue.

## APPENDIX #3 – FULL NOTES FROM CLC SYNODAL LISTENING SESSIONS

NB: The following are transcribed notes from CLC's Listening Sessions. They have not been edited for grammar or style.

### Older Adult Catholics - 2 Sessions - February 17 and 24

#### Listening

- Generative listening. Welcoming newcomers (immigrants) to parish – the Spirit moved me to reach out to a young couple from Colombia. Husband didn't speak English very well; wife's English was better. I introduced them to our priest who speaks Spanish. Now we are friends, and we get together often.
- I listen to God through the people on the parish committees that I serve on. They listen to me and encourage me. It is more through my fellow parishioners than my pastor. I am trying and learning to listen more.
- Need to find ways to listen to people on the margins.
- I listen through social media - get a bigger sense of the universal Church, not just the local Church.
- But it can be a problem, too. I worry about the people we are isolating and missing, especially older parishioners. Move to on-line everything - some people miss the paper bulletin.
- I attended a conference years ago and joined a spiritual community. We met and prayed at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier - with people like MLK Jr., Rabbi Heschel, Robert MacAfee Brown. I was listening to God speaking through the anti-Vietnam movement. I was attracted to the Berrigan brothers. They inspired me to the join Catholic Church. I was arrested for protesting at a Catholic Church in Syracuse. The Church doesn't always listen to its own people speaking out.
- 30 years ago, I was fortunate to join a group - Formation for Healing Ministry. The first year we really learned to listen and to share. Not listening to try to figure out how to respond while the person is speaking. Not trying to 'fix' them. "Holy Spirit - you listen for me."
- Then speaking through me - spectacular to learn how to listen not to respond or fix - apply this to family and friends - share this with others. Go out to others, offer to pray with people - not recklessly, but humbly. When a hindrance comes, it might be something to learn from - learn how to listen to another part of my spiritual self. Might be an invitation to obedience, humility. We prayed to start something that we learned we should do. We prayed for 2 years for the new priest to come - we were ready for him.
- Social Justice enabled me to hear/listen - especially Indigenous experience. My fellow parishioners inspire me. Social justice - such generosity.
- University community was a place we felt welcomed/listened to, aware of social issues, speaking out.
- I found the RENEW program very helpful in our spiritual journey small group faith sharing.
- Parish committees need more laity leadership - need a voice in the parish.
- Through the pandemic, I listen through morning Mass daily from Loretto Abbey. Dynamic Catholic. We are hard-of-hearing, so we like the subtitles.
- Priest in the parish puts writings in the bulletin from Fr Ronald Rolheiser. This is a good help with listening to God.
- Feel the contemplative is needed more - seems to be missing. I go outside a lot - e.g. to the Quakers for this.
- "If you don't go (to Church/Mass), you can't grow" in faith, in community. You have to keep learning as you get older. Parish was wonderful before COVID; used to get together after morning Mass with other women for coffee and share.
- Such a shift in parish life in the pandemic - maybe CLC would not even have happened. Will parish life even resume? Will it be the same? Big questions - no idea what it will look like.
- Something interesting is going on...have you read *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion?*

- Things are evolving, shifting away from parish life and organized religion. What now? Where do we go?
- COVID experience has forced us to 'downsize' - looking online for something that nourishes us. I listen to the West End Anglican Church because the preachers are wonderful. I listen to another Church in Ohio that has an ordained woman, and she is also a wonderful preacher. We are becoming more discerning in what nourishes us and what doesn't. Sometimes Church rituals and liturgy get in the way of my spiritual nourishment.
- Before COVID, I was part of a self-organizing group of older women, mostly Catholic but not only- we held two retreats a year- this was most nourishing for me.
- The Jesuits in Guelph have been a big influence in my life and spiritual growth over the years. Also, Development and Peace. Regular Church - not so much. Every time I sit down in Church and listen to a homily, I fall asleep. I guess I don't know if I am part of the Church!
- I attended the CWL Lenten Retreat - amazing! The president is an amazing woman and really inspires me. My parish makes me come alive. I have been there for about 5 years. It reminds me of the Church I grew up in. The priest is the reason for this. And he is also the CWL Spiritual Director. I have left parishes that didn't make me come alive or feel I belong.
- The response of the Canadian Catholic Bishops to the residential school issue breaks our hearts. It is hard being a Catholic - even though we know institutions like hospitals, schools and universities are part of the Catholic contribution to our country.
- Divisions among Christians is the worst problem. I remember attending a service led by an Imam in Birmingham. It was so moving. We sat in a circle and he put a lighted candle in the middle. He said the light is God - and as we move closer to the light (God) we also move closer to each other. Can't do one without the other.
- The years bring us closer to death than to more life. Sometimes it shakes us up to think about dying or to discuss death and so we carry this silent burden, and it hinders our celebration experience. It is a quiet dilemma because it frightens us to think that perhaps our faith is not as strong as we think it is.
- Other than bringing Holy Communion to shut-ins and possibly support through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, there doesn't seem to be anything [attention to older adults].

### Speaking Out

- Practice of contemplative prayer - centering prayer. I had been teaching mindfulness but not with a spiritual or Christian dimension. Then I read a book by Father Thomas Keating and I knew something was pulling me. It was a turning point in my spiritual journey. I started a contemplative prayer group - still going after 6+ years. Some people (traditional Catholics) came to my first meeting and told me it was wrong – that this was New Age or yoga or something. I was ready to quit right then. I went to my priest, and he told me to keep going - that these people were misinformed. And if I got any more criticism to send them to him. That was reassuring.
- We moved to a parish, and we were happy there; I was sacristan. Then I was silenced by the new pastor - and had to leave the parish. Very sad.
- I don't feel like I belong to my parish. So much depends on the priest. We have been blessed with wonderful priests and then they are moved and it's terrible. It's pre-Vatican! I was part of a Bereavement Support group at my parish. It was lovely and meaningful. Then a new priest came in and we were no longer notified of a funeral and so the bereavement group ended. I would like less emphasis on the priest and more on the people themselves. 20 years ago, it seems like we had more opportunities to speak out and to lead.
- We have a wonderful parish. Lots of educational opportunities provided. We really can't blame the priests. It's up to us to engage. No complaints in my ability to share and be part of it. Our pastor started something called "Fridays with Father" – he went through the catechism. Lots of people attended - I never felt handicapped or restricted - we could ask questions. Yes, there are things I would like to see improve. When we lived in

Nashville for 7 years, people stayed around after Mass - great community and fellowship. We miss that here. There was a men's group and a women's group - no shortage of people willing to participate.

- I have been thinking lately do we need a building to be Church? Are we not Church here and now? In my condominium, we have formed a small faith group. Just three of us. We meet weekly to share. Only one of us is affiliated with a Church. It is contemplative, not discussion. We minister to each other.
- Church needs to be small groups of people who listen to each other and support each other. We have focused too much on big buildings – and then filling them with people. The Indian Residential School Survivors scandal shows how much we got wrong. Groups larger than 10 people - can't manage them. Bishops were appointed as managers because of the size.
- Maybe it is up to us to reinvigorate the Church.
- I write letters – I don't get responses. I talk to priests about inclusive language- no answers.
- It makes me wonder “Are they listening to us?”
- My experience in a smaller, rural Church- at Eucharist I would look around and know the stories and the families. I knew who was carrying what burdens. But then a new priest came in, does things very differently - pre-Vatican II - and people feel like they don't have a Church anymore. I had to leave. Maybe a Church has to be fragile. The IRSS findings to me- that was the last straw. I am disgusted that a Bishop of the Catholic Church in Canada would say “I have to look at the TRC recommendations” – in 2021!!!
- I have been reading a book *It Ain't Necessarily So- the Sensus Fidei*. It means the Church needs to listen to the people. Outside of official Church teachings.
- Rarely think of speaking out, as the Church has cultivated a culture of passivity. I am more passive at Church than elsewhere in my life
- We were never really asked, unsure of who to speak to about specific local/world/Catholic issues
- We did not speak out about world social issues since we looked at the Church as a place of peace, a place to worship in peace.
- We are aware of a few parishes in North America with active Seniors Ministry, but this is more likely in other faith communities. Seniors Ministry addresses the spiritual development of maturing adults and seniors, including contemplative prayer, grandparenting, seeking one's old age calling, strategies to contribute, preparing for frailty and dying.
- For pastoral care, the focus is on the sacraments, hence the focus on the priest. Some excellent examples of pastoral care by older adults in Hamilton diocese, but too few parishes offer this.
- Some of us are made to feel that our time has passed, and the focus is being placed on the younger generations.
- You are treated as if you are old (chronological age) but you personally don't feel that age (social age) you still want to be involved

### Celebration

- Five years ago, in our diocese they held a BIG party surrounding the basilica. Invited everyone from other churches all around – there was food, music, booths, and opportunities to participate in discussions. Cost money but you've got to invest to get something back.
- In my parish ARISE was the 'baby' of RENEW. Not easy to get people to come out. People took the bull by the horns - held an event on the eve of Advent - planned and prepared for the season. Families, young people - wonderful. Elders may need to accept that our role has changed. It might be more about guidance and wisdom; maybe putting out food to allow the younger generation to gather in community. There was lots of diversity – people of different nationalities and ethnicities. We share a Church with another community. Need to throw the seeds and see what grows.
- I love that a priest says “May Almighty God bless US...not you but US. Priest is part of us!

- Liturgy can be wonderful when it is led by a good priest. But it can be offered from 'on high'.
- For older adults there are accessibility concerns:
- Visually-impaired -need large-print copies of hymns and prayers
- Armchairs for those who need support to stand and sit
- Good microphones are SO important
- Pay attention to technology
- Some seniors can't come to Church because they are caring for someone at home
- Church needs to become more comfortable with people with disabilities - especially standing, sitting, kneeling. People with dementia and those caring for them may behave differently at Mass.
- People who support a physically limited older adult, some may want help to attend; some may want to tune in from home.
- Lack of physical and technological aids in the Churches. Useful would be: Subtitles/Closed Captioning for all On-Line Services, elevators as a priority, transportation committees to help people who cannot get a ride. The Evangelical Churches hire buses.
- We had African priests the first couple of years (eight years ago) we were in this parish, and they knew how to celebrate. They loved people. They loved children. They had great outdoor Eucharistic celebrations with lots of things that the kids would enjoy. Even though they were a little hard to understand, they exuded joy. Our Seniors Luncheon had around a hundred people.
- They also had a retreat that brought out a lot of seniors but sadly, they left and there was no follow-up.
- Our CWL started a telephone chain during the pandemic-important way to stay connected and support older adults who were shut in.

### Moving Forward

- Older adults can organize opportunities to welcome people back to Church
- Trying to pray for unity - in the Synod prayer-looking for wisdom in this prayer.
- Some concerns about words "we are weak and sinful." Prefer "we are strong and faithful."
- Create community then people will come together in small groups and will want to share. Fellowship, coffee Sundays- great community builders-older people mentored the younger ones in serving and cleaning up- intergenerational events.
- Older adults like to see the history of the parish- our 125th Anniversary celebration was very well-received by the older parishioners.
- Hospitality and celebration – not just inside a building.
- Small communities/small faith groups are the way to go.
- Need to do more activities like bereavement supports - at our parish we held candlelight services with people in the parish. We chose the readings and gave the homily. Lovely to see how people healed each other through these services. We all minister to each other, we learn, and we teach how to deal with death.
- Also, multigenerational activities - What do youth want from us? It's like we speak a different language. We used to say to a child "You are being disobedient." Now, their parents say, "You're not listening very well."
- Small groups are wonderful [even in the context of a larger Church community]. When we lived in Nashville we attended Cursillo. Small groups of 7-8 people- men and women separately. Saturday mornings- men sharing deeply- our struggles, our fears, our faith. We found every city has a different culture. As we have moved around, we can't expect to have the same thing in every place. Have to adjust to different conditions. What I know is you have to speak out and share if you are to grow and learn.
- When we lived in NC, we had a ladies' group that met on Mondays for dinner and prayer. We prayed the rosary. I am still in touch with some of them. We had an old-style priest at the parish. There was a mother of twins,

and she was in need. She went to the parish priest to ask for help and he said no. So, she went to another Church. Our group was shocked. We still helped her-and she turned out OK - but that was someone the Church lost.

- For older adults, small groups are important to us.
- I would like to explore the Sacramentality of Death. What is mature spirituality? How is it different from when we were 20 years younger? We still have faith, but it is different. It surprises me how much my faith has evolved.
- Parish ministry for older adults - what is that like? Homilies are for the young. Preaching is not for us. Priests don't know how to minister to us very well.
- I think there is great opportunity here. The women's and men's groups always seem to have to be fund-raising. As seniors, we can do our own thing to support each other. The expectation isn't the same. The Cursillo model of gatherings is a good one - the small groups and the coming together perhaps monthly as a large group. If it was coupled with our Baptismal priestly role, it could be dynamic. This role would need developing (e.g. difference between it and Roman priestly role). It would give an outward focus on serving in a more priestly role - caring and nurturing others as well as recognizing and affirming their gifts.
- Home-bound seniors could be encouraged to have a sacred spot within their home. They could have a little altar or prayer area. The parish could give them a relic or something meaningful to hold that place - even if that place has to be their wheel-chair.
- Perhaps the time has come for Jesus to leave the tabernacle and be with his followers in their homes. Practicing committed Catholics could be given a tiny piece of host to have in their homes to bring the sense of Church to them. Other concrete signs like a bottle of holy water to bless themselves with. For some, rosaries don't cut it. Whatever is offered, should reflect their spirituality.
- Other On-Line Services offered instead of the Mass - e.g. Taizé type of service.
- Time to connect with our Souls - since it is our souls that live on. I would like to see the Church develop a ministry to help people go deeper. This could be a ministry for lay people. When I was about fifty, I attended a retreat in which the priest presented the concept of the true self and the false self. The mantra was "I am rooted and grounded in Christ, I am rooted and grounded in Love." It changed my whole focus of spirituality and life in general.
- I paid a visit to an Eastern Rite Church -it was so multisensory: incense, continual singing, visual stimulus. I went up for 'private' confession and the priest put a heavy stole around my shoulders - I can feel the weight of it. It was wonderful liturgy!
- Need to listen - get out of our silos.
- Gabriel Moran, teacher/friend, suggested that because clericalism is such a problem, maybe priests should have a 5 -10 year job. Move out of entitlement. Think about priesthood in different ways.
- We had a wonderful university chaplain years ago. Had a strong sense of 'we' and 'us'- he had a generosity of spirit. I have 5 grown kids- none of them are part of the Church. How do we find ritual in a life or in a family without formal religion? If I use the language of the Church (with my kids) they don't receive it. Need to find ways to minister with a new language.
- Faith and Spirituality are strong with me. I am Polish and attend a Polish Church. John Paul II - I followed always - I turn to him and his wisdom. I am lucky to be part of a Polish Church. I like having a building to go to...we have a great priest. We come together/stay together, even if differences we find a pathway.
- Need stronger support for older parishioners from higher up in the Church.
- Need for Elected Parish Councils; provide training in listening and providing feedback to parish priest. Role of priest to serve his parishioners and value the feedback. Parishes are fiefdoms for some priests. This needs to be addressed.
- Focus on input should be gender neutral. There is a tendency in our Church to respect men's input and not take women too seriously. Promotion of courses like Christopher's



- Show us women in leadership roles, including elders.
- Coffee mornings for seniors and facilitation to enable seniors-led initiatives and follow-up on suggestions about needs.
- An intergenerational ministry?
- Working together for a cause for example Social Justice and the environment - discuss connections of respect to earth/environment and our faith, plan events together, e.g. Saturday mornings.
- After school program for kids (fun with a faith/moral lesson, homework support, talk about professions/future dreams/what are your skills - lots of sharing)
- Foster “grandparents” or “elder friends” with families
- We should think of the building, of the Church and the community as all part of a neighbourhood - not just for Catholics - but for everyone. How do we bring people in? address issues e.g. intergenerational groups; climate changes; TRC/colonial history, etc.
- Support for grandparenting - e.g. grandparent-grandchild events, such as making greeting cards or drama; support for sharing faith life with younger family members and other young families
- Church/other buildings - I think we could get rid of the Churches and put the \$\$ into sustaining/saving the environment. We need to invest in new ways of doing things to save creation.
- See the building as an asset for the community - I attended a group that met for free at a Church. But then they had financial challenges and had to start charging.
- Give rooms away - (don't charge - sign of generosity).
- Building is important to me - a place I can go to pray. Mass is my one hour of meditation, every week at Mass. Before COVID we gathered downstairs after Mass for coffee - volunteers baked goodies. People loved it. The divisions from COVID (masks, vaccines, etc.) will take years to heal. Church is the place where we can go and find this healing.

## 2SLGBTQ+ Folks - March 9

### Listening

**As someone who identifies as 2SLGBTQ+, who has supported and/or encouraged you in your journey to develop your spiritual/faith life?**

- At the Parish level, there have been a number of Jesuits who have offered support. There used to be a monthly Healing Mass for those who were living with AIDS in the 80s, 90s, and 2000s. Certain Jesuit clergy are also utilizing their voices as theologians.
- Lay Catholic staff in parishes assisted when there were issues for a youth in Catholic schools. Staff encouraged the development of faith and offset messages that “all gays are going to hell.” 2SLGBTQ+ identified parish staff became models for this youth.
- Not ‘out’ in the parish. Eucharistic Minister. Plans to come out. Good positive Catholic Environment growing up. Family. Wonderful parish priest, and nun. Cannot identify any 2SLGBTQ+ Catholics in current Parish.
- Became Catholic at 15 years old. Found a place. The Church was a place of refuge. Worked as LPA for a long time but not ‘out’ until the final four years.

**What enables or hinders you hearing God speaking to you in the Church?**

- The homily directly criticized gay relationships. But it is hard to hear, and partners feel rejected when you are proud to be Catholic. You also have challenges when going to Confession. When identifying as gay, it is assumed that this is what is the confession, when it is a point of identity.
- Another experience was a person confessing that they were homosexual and were told by the priest that it was not a sin to confess.

- One participant said he had never heard a negative homily except for the Cardinal Collins' letter on same-sex marriage. This person has never had a negative experience in the confessional. Many social conversations with Catholics who know they are gay, don't agree, and are still kind.
- Priest read the Cardinal's letter on same-sex marriage without comment as a way of supporting gay community.
- Youth - Experiencing homophobia from religion teachers more so than peers. Then a youth leadership conference where there was a lot of support. Yet contingents of homophobic persons presented a danger.

### Speaking Out

**As someone who identifies as 2SLGBTQ+, how have you been supported or hindered from speaking out in the Church?**

- Never went to Catholic schools and never received education against homosexuality. I get a sense that there is a huge influence from evangelical movements and media. Also, from people who say the most extreme things because their spirituality is rooted in other, more evangelistic, denominations and Catholic movements who do not truly know what the Church is teaching. I speak up and tell these people they are hindering dialogue in the Church and hindering the Church. Queer Catholics also struggle with their immigrant parents who speak what they believe is the teaching of the Church. Hard to distinguish what his parents said, his love for his parents, and what he knows the Church teaches.
- I have not really spoken up because there is a lot of hostility because people misunderstand the Church. I am more vocal with peers as an advocate for the Church, than I am likely to speak up in the Church.
- Youth - I have never been hindered speaking out in my Parish. Parishioners can help by wearing pro-2SLGBTQ+ symbols, acknowledging relationships. I have been given platforms to speak out in the Church and community

**What would make you feel welcome to speak up in the Church?**

- What the Youth said is what I would need (symbols etc. worn by parishioners). Even this meeting is not being mentioned in bulletins. 2SLGBTQ+ folk feel alone. There is a need for visible symbols and 2SLGBTQ+ Parish Mentors.
- Presence of Gay/Lesbian people who come as couples and are examples of faithfulness in coming to Church. They are a huge witness to what it means to be Catholic, faithful, and committed.
- When others speak up, it is an invitation for others to speak up.

### Celebration

**Identify a celebration experience (Liturgy, Sacrament, communal prayer, retreat, educational event) in your parish/diocese/Church that inspired you in your spiritual journey? What inspires or hinders the experience of celebration for you as someone who identifies as 2SLGBTQ+?**

- Youth - Inspired by Confirmation - Sponsor was amazing and giving messages of being here with you & for you. I knew I could continue on my journey because I had that support.
- A good-hearted pastor who struggled with his own level of discomfort. When there was the killing at the Pulse Nightclub in Miami, he called a committee of 2SLGBTQ+ persons to plan a way of commemorating. Instead of Mass, there was an Exposition of the Eucharist for adoration. His homily was moving and inspiring, even though the pastor was not a gifted homilist generally. Pastor shared his own personal story of an uncle he refused to love because the uncle was gay. He confessed this to the congregation that he had contributed to violence against gay people.

- There are lots of rituals etc. that feed me spiritually - Adoration, Rosary, Retreats, Prayer Life workshops, Bible in a Year, Divine Mercy Sunday - Online content - all have helped me to grow. Participation in the Sacraments is also important.
- Our Parish had a PRIDE Mass. Then there were complaints that it should not be a Mass but Liturgy of the Word because there could be no guarantee that the participants were “ready” to receive Eucharist. This view was hurtful.
- Hindrances include when we don’t pray for 2SLGBTQ+ folks in the community, and not have 2SLGBTQ+ focused liturgies.
- There is a local Toronto parish that has celebrated a 2SLGBTQ+ Mass for 20 years. This is affirming.

### Moving Forward

#### In what ways could the Church’s mission in society be enhanced by the participation of those who identify as 2SLGBTQ+?

- Wanting to go to Church without comments.
- Not having to go to another denomination to get married. It would be wonderful to be able to get married in our own parish.
- We are involved in many ministries in our own parishes, but then we are forced to go to other faith communities to get married.
- We need anything that acknowledges and specifically welcomes 2SLGBTQ+ of all ages.
- We all know embittered 2SLGBTQ+ Catholic folks. Yet, we have a lot to offer the Church. At our best, we have an ability to see through others’ eyes & walk in their shoes. We are surrounded by heteronormative culture. We must understand the heteronormative experience and perspective even though it is not ours. Hence, we have an enhanced inclination toward empathy. We have to do it to protect ourselves. The Church would benefit from such people who have spent their lives cultivating their empathy.
- Youth - Creating that image that everyone belongs, being a community and coming together We can not only talk the talk but walk the walk. Benefit the Church in that 2SLGBTQ+ people create safe space for 2SLGBTQ+ people.
- 2SLGBTQ+ people bring beautiful gifts: openness to love; loyal to each other. Internalized homophobia blocks us from seeing the gifts we bring. We are brave. We are humorous,
- Our mission as Christians is to grow and change to become more like Christ. We (2SLGBTQ+ folks) are not more like Christ, but we do bring the reality that we are inherently different. We live as a clear demonstration that diversity exists and so does change.
- We can’t evangelize if people don’t feel safe. RCIA could be more welcoming for non-Catholic partners. We, as 2SLGBTQ+ Catholics, know the treasure of the Church and we are great at hospitality. We can not only wait for straight Catholics to do it, but we can do it ourselves.
- Good to have 2SLGBTQ+ Catholic role models who encourage faith and faith development in 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

#### As someone who identifies as 2SLGBTQ+, what hopes, and dreams do you have for the Church?

- I am very aware of the difficult position the Pope is in. As a symbol of unity, he is Pope of the Western Church, and the Church is in countries where homosexuality is illegal. My prayers are with the Pope as we are aware of cultural differences throughout the world.
- Groups like “Dignity” should be encouraged.

**Listening**

**As someone who loves and supports 2SLGBTQ+ persons, who has supported and/or encouraged you in your journey to develop your spiritual/faith life?**

- As an ally/parent it has been through informal friends and other parents of gay children
- The meetings, like CWL, won't discuss, but afterward they do.
- Support from friends but not spiritual support at all. My family, in time, has been accepting and supportive
- It has taken me a bit of time to be able to say that I have a son who has a husband. I want people to know that this is normal.
- I became a Catholic in 2015 and knew an out and proud lesbian who inspired me. If she could be in the Church, I could, too!
- Needing "support" doesn't occur to me
- It isn't talked about at Church. Friends and family.
- I was supported by a Cardinal for work I was doing to support LGBTQ+ students but it was behind the scenes. Sometimes support is private and not public.

**As someone who loves and supports 2SLGBTQ+ what enables or hinders you hearing God speaking to you in the Church?**

- Former Spiritan chaplain at a university, and members of religious congregations I know who are serving the marginalized - they have a more faithful understanding of God's presence in every single human being and in all of creation.
- Seeing people I respect and that I think are intelligent and they can reason through and still serve the Church, that enables me.
- Music helps me hear God's voice. It holds me. The homilies usually speak to me as well.
- What helps me are spiritual writers like Richard Rohr or Joan Chittister who provide me with words about a bigger and more compassionate God than the one I hear at Church.
- Music can be helpful, but readings can be hindrances.
- Music and spiritual writers named above.

**Speaking Out**

**As someone who loves and supports 2SLGBTQ+, how have you been supported or hindered from speaking out in the Church?**

- I self-censor - there's nowhere to discuss - no parish council - I've written letters to the bishop and no answers
- The catechism has to change - my son won't come while the catechism says intrinsically disordered - where do I speak up about it?
- I wrote a letter to the CCCB because of my son
- No responses from bishops hinders voices
- I never lose an opportunity to speak up and it's the Church's opinion that is disordered.
- An overhanging threat of being fired for being on side with LGBTQ students was a hindrance - having your own sexual orientation threatened because of affiliation
- The cost of speaking up is sometimes too much and I stepped back.
- Supported by who the person of Jesus to be.

**As someone who loves and supports 2SLGBTQ+, what would make you and 2SLGBTQ+ persons feel welcome to speak up in the Church?**

- The encouragement of hearing members of the clergy articulate that everyone is welcome and God loves everyone and articulate that we need to work on getting the current beliefs of the Church on sexuality brought up to date with modern scientific thinking.
- This synod is an opportunity to have our say!
- When I see out and proud lesbian or gay people at our Church in the choir or as lectors it makes me very happy!
- We need a congregational approach to being an affirming Church like they have in the United Church.

**Celebration**

**Identify a celebration experience (Liturgy, Sacrament, communal prayer, retreat, educational event) in your parish/diocese/Church that inspired you in your spiritual journey?**

- An LGBTQ Mass in a parish in Ottawa.
- Retreats with LGBTQ Youth who felt surprised and affirmed when they heard they were an Alleluia from head to toe! Moving them from suicide ideation to feeling hopeful.
- We've sought places of inclusion and you find them on the margins. Spiritans and other communities we've created.

**What inspires or hinders the experience of celebration for you as someone who supports 2SLGBTQ+ persons?**

- How can it feel like a celebration when our children don't feel welcome?
- Especially difficult at Christmas and Easter when children don't come anymore.
- Hard to feel a sense of celebration with the Church with the attitude that it has toward LGBTQ people. That attitude is a hindrance and makes me feel sick. Tension between my son and I is very painful. This past Christmas was very difficult.
- The Church isn't just losing one person but losing whole families.

**Moving Forward**

**In what ways could the Church's mission in society be enhanced by the participation of those who identify as 2SLGBTQ+?**

- The Church, by affirming LGBTQ folks as sons and daughters of God and active members of the Church, it would represent and send a message of Jesus who welcomed and didn't only go to the powerful. A Church that does not give a role to women, to minority sexual orientations and genders, racialized people in some context, has lost its credibility.
- The Church has experienced a "brain drain" because of the loss of LGBTQ people in the Church.
- We would be more joyful.
- LGBTQ people are so creative, and they already add so much to music and liturgies in many places. If LGBTQ were removed, we'd lose so much.

**As someone who loves and supports 2SLGBTQ+, what hopes, and dreams do you have for the Church?**

- I hope they would rewrite that letter that was sent last year in a way that was less judgmental.
- I would hope we wouldn't have to have these kinds of conversations. No more arguing and fighting. Be as welcoming as we preach that we are.
- My hope is that this synodal process will, in time, wipe or brush away the cobwebs and do what Vatican II was starting to push us toward. Be present in the modern world!

- I wish they would stop being so afraid of sticking their necks out and follow a revolutionary Jesus and you put your life on the line and defend the weak and marginalized and be prepared to die. The Church is called to be prophetic.
- We need to be followers of Jesus and the Church does, too. The Church needs to bring a light to the world like Jesus did.
- A more empowered Church and less cowardly in the institutional part.

## Victims/Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse - March 25 (Session 1 of 3)

### Introductory Remarks by Participants

- Just starting to talk about spirituality again recently.
- Survivor of clergy sexual abuse. Slowly turning into a warrior (is able to talk about the experience). Lost spirituality a long time ago, age 11.
- I wanted to be a priest; been on spirituality quest since 2011; sister gave him a book, *Manifest your Destiny* by Wayne Dyer, while he was in rehab for drug dependency. Has read that book 3 times. Has been on God realization quest for 20 years; in 2016 he started being in touch with his own divine self.
- Had same abuser as another person in this group; in 2020 listened to a documentary on TV regarding his abuser; up to that time he hadn't been able to find any information about his abuser, but after documentary found another man's story about his abuse online and there were a lot of similarities with his own story, so contacted this person to get more details. He found they had the same abuser priest! He had buried the experience for years, spoke to a lawyer and now has a court case scheduled for May 2022. Doesn't have high regard for Catholic Church or spirituality, believes there is a power higher than himself, priest destroyed his faith; looks at what religion has done, all negative; was altar boy with abuser, groomed him and his parents; after this, participant refused to continue with the priest and abuse, priest turned on him, and he left the Church; not a spiritual person.
- Now a warrior of sexual abuse, able now to speak up about it; some need to push for change, but he found there wasn't enough support for the victim/survivor and that is what he wants to do; goal is to be at the table; believes picket lines tend to distance us; we can sit at the table with the laity because "we can trust these ladies."

### What defines spirituality for you? What is missing? How do you get it back?

- Spirituality has been a journey, tried before then had to step back; something that has unfolded, something lacking in my life, big hole trying to fill; hard to define but has found something to latch onto, not organized religion; it's OK if it doesn't cost them anything—Pope; anger and rage still in me; they took my spirit; how can I have a spirituality? told my parents in 1995; 2001 in drug treatment; feel like I've just been surviving; tough definition for me; second treatment centre it went from head to heart, found out the distance is only 18" but it's a struggle; last week feeling grateful, now not so pissed off with my life; I'm glad I'm here; I believe something can be done.  
*Side Comment:* The Church urges us to find the truth - unless the truth causes harm to the Church.
- Mother instilled in us the need to pray; associated spirituality with the Church building; with abuse, lost his faith, then just spoke to the universe; couldn't send message out, but with sobriety a few things happened, brought me back to the building—seared me, but got an answer; sent out question and watched for a sign; with spirituality, always received a message, wasn't always clear, but sobriety has allowed clarity; now embracing what is in my heart and receiving back in whatever form, what's been missing is place where I worship; need to speak to people, the management people, they need to hear and see how the spirit has been

broken; will take courage; that is the last healing, to face them, then will get back what has been taken from me; at rehab had spiritual event, a pastor from there was present when it happened; spirituality has strengthened this past year and a half, Supreme Being watching over me; shouldn't be here for what I have done to myself; I'm going to share this.

- Knows now it's the management of the priests, not every priest is a pedophile; they need to see the pain of victims; they don't realize how it has affected society; young priests need to hear this. But haven't experienced it for years; my spirituality is getting through life, relationships; What could be done about it? Training is essential. How do you weed them (pedophile priests) out? Would like there to be signs. Have zero friends, he took that away from me; adopted age 5, had been in foster homes, finally had parents, dad-drinker, high pressured; mother also drank secretly, couldn't tell Mother or Dad of abuse, spirit left me after abuse, didn't know what it was, didn't feel right, if there is a God, why would you do this to me? Angry, but now not as angry at my abuser, anger at Church for putting him in parishes where he abused several others, know of five others. How do you make that right? How can they preach about good things when this has been going on? How can good come out of Synod when they're still fighting us with lawyers? Would love to have what (other person who spoke of finding God) has, to have a hope of spirituality; need them to say yes it happened, and we're sorry. Don't know how to respond to the question of "what is spirituality?"
- Lost security in every aspect in the Church. When I walked into Church it was home. I could sit in there in safety and security and love. Then I got a chance to be on the altar. When abuse happened, Church became a threat, home became a threat. Everything that was established came crumbling down. We can't tell anyone. They won't believe me. It was God who raped me, he had a collar on. Found alcohol from age 16, could breathe again. Became alcoholic till age 58. Couldn't trust anyone. Absolutely no trust, became self-reliant, this is the carnage he left behind. In 2010 went to AA, felt at home. Found spirituality at AA. Read Dr. Jung – how do I perceive the world from deep down inside? Worshipped alcohol: religion is man-made thing. Spirituality – no one can touch. Recent trouble with wife, went back to self-reliance; that caused problems. Church took away my faith; loved ceremony, incense; that man took it away. Don't know whether he could go back into Church. Went into Church, felt physically ill.
- Would like to be able to walk into Church and feel that feeling of peace, comfort, etc. It is fear, rage, disgust now that I know what they did? Diocese allowed him to continue when they knew what he did.
- Don't preach to me, show me. Fighting them hasn't worked. Want action to match words.

### Final Comments

- Wants apology for Mom, very upset.
- For me, I've seen how negotiations happen. Church is a corporation. Apologies don't mean anything, want action and clear road map for solutions. They need to recognize that they need to re-invent how they preach the Word of God.
- Church is paying lawyers to fight us, want to be sure charges are genuine, laity giving money for lawyers and laity need to say people are hurting, time to clean it up, laity should stop giving money. Money doesn't help victims, all words, no action.

## Victims/Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse and their Families – April 8 (Session 2 of 3)

### Introductory Remarks

- A Catholic, has hard time understanding why the Church hasn't dealt with this. In my husband's case it was completely preventable. (Priest had been moved to husband's parish from another parish where he had previously abused a child.)

- Never spoke about my abuse, but Mt. Cashel brought it all back. My Mom got me in touch with R. at the support group.
- One of the wives says she is also an abuse survivor (not by clergy)
- She is a survivor, abused in grade 7 by parish priest; thought she was responsible; when she told her family she was disciplined, minimized the priest's physical contact; she went to parish priest to ask for forgiveness; they have priests and nuns in the family. Asked to meet with the bishops but they refused. Need people in pews to say it has to stop; she refuses to support the Church financially; runs peer support group, and also one for families.
- Mother of an abused person; was devout Catholic, lost faith in all priests; long road; didn't know what happened until son was 30 years old; the whole family suffers, alcohol problem.
- Need trauma counselling to deal with the abuse; support of other survivors is helpful.

**How would you describe either your relationship with the Church/God or your spirituality before the abuse took place?**

- I always went to Church, felt at peace; devout Catholic; the day my son became an altar boy, I was proud.
- Cradle Catholic, worked for the Church; when I found out about friends (who had been abused) very disappointed.
- Very active in Church, husband Grand Knight; when Church refused to meet with me my husband decided to resign from the Knights. He told them the reason was because of the way the Church treats victims; only one other person walked out with him. Article in the newspaper identified her as a victim of clergy abuse but not one person from the Knights called her husband. That's what the Church did to him. Later her husband was in a severe accident, and she refused to have the priest anoint her husband; husband wanted to be here to share what the Church took from them both; we've lost a significant part of our lives.
- When it really hit me (husband's experience of sexual abuse) was at our grandson's baptism, husband had a panic attack. Her father is still a devout Catholic but wants his son-in-law to win big money from lawsuit, he is able to separate the two (Church from priest who abused.)
- Didn't grow up in the faith, has friends who were abused in Buddhism. Now puts faith in people and relationships. I'm not religious.
- Family of five - all practicing Catholics; offending priest was a guest in our home.

**When you learned of the abuse how did that impact your relationship with the Church/God or your spirituality?**

- Felt like an outsider not having a religion. Victims and family are outsiders; my form of spirituality is about supporting others.
- My friend who was abused decades ago is totally separated from the Church.
- Some friends say they're ashamed to say they're Catholic (because there is the reputation of abuse).
- I came home from work one day and my mother said "He abused you didn't he?" I said yes, but couldn't talk about it with her; she passed away about a year later; he feels guilty not talking to her about it, but at the time didn't want to talk about it; now he thinks of his mother's (guilt) that she didn't protect me; priest came to their home groomed his parents; has compassion for another survivor's mother because she has gone through so much; he has so much guilt about never being able to console his mother.



### Did anyone offer anything or was there anything that happened at the time or since that has helped you spiritually?

- Mother still goes to the same Church, but I don't; I feel guilty; I have lost connection, it's a true loss, lost community. Told Mom this week, I'll go Easter Sunday, but won't give money. It was my go-to place, prayers— huge loss, bankrupt. My son's 4-year-old daughter was abused by sitter, told her mother what happened, she trusted her enough to tell her. If it changes (the Church), I'll go back.
- Nothing has helped; still has spirituality; went on retreat, told about the abuse in confession, but that priest dismissed what she said to him; has been nothing from the Church.
- Powerful to draw on the lives of the saints – heroes; women victims who have stayed in the faith inspire her; I want to stay to be with them; that's her purpose for still being in the Church; enjoys the Way of the Cross for survivors; my faith is very different from what it was.
- Admires her dad's faith in God and the Church; stopped going to Church as teenager, didn't make sense; going through it with my husband has helped me understand it's the people in the Church, not the Church; doesn't stop the problem; friend is done with God.
- Why is he letting this happen? (God). I do believe in a higher power; done with God. I can't completely shut that off – member of the Catholic Church but can't support the institution.
- Went through Discovery information session with someone from the courts. Took 7 hours! Why are they doing this to us?

### If you could say something to the lay people in the Church, what would it be?

- I have a daughter whose son is going to Catholic Church. I told her to keep the dialogue open with the child, tell him what can be said or done, notice any behaviour problems. Her grandson is everything (to her); if anything happens to him!!
- Practice unconditional love. If anyone is left out in Church, go to them.
- Wake up! We have to get over this idea that it's something from the past. Listen!
- The laity need to know the lives of the victims and what they go through. Church needs to be accountable.
- Wants to be invited back to the Church and tell it from the altar what has happened. Should be a resume in the Church as to where the priest has been and for how long. Should be a campaign that for one week out of a year, the laity don't give any money. Instead, direct to supports for victims. Not saying don't give the Church any money-they need to keep the lights on. But this would make a point. Adults are also being abused. Church should be supporting victims.
- Good conversation tonight. Will continue if it's useful. Tired of talk, want action!
- Went to the Church where he was abused, couldn't do it. I am offering my story to the laity, will read it to anybody; there are multiple layers of trauma.
- The only way to change is to teach the people who are willing to listen; I will tell my story as well. They need to see the pain. Forgiveness is the only thing that has worked.

## Victim/Survivors of Clerical Sexual Abuse, their Families, and CLC Members - May 6 (Session 3 of 3)

**Survivors:** What would you like to say to lay people (ordinary Catholics) about your experience as a survivor of clergy sexual abuse? What would you like them to know?

Abuse took place for 5 years in the 70's; have had litigation; Italian heritage has made this difficult because going to lawyers is not done; the chatter is hurtful. To the laity: search for justice is not an attack on the Church, willing to forgive the Church; Court is part of search for justice, want my soul back; being accepted by the Church would be wonderful.

*Comment from another survivor* - I met former speaker 3 years ago; he is one of the most courageous men I've ever met.

Sexual abuse by priest took place for 1 1/2 years in 1973-74; I do hold the Church responsible; my abuser is the same priest who abused another man in this support group; I was an altar boy who wanted to be a priest; laity need to understand how much the abuse has affected everything and everyone; everything changed; trust - don't trust anyone except the woman I have spent 16 years with – I trust her; laity need to know how much it affects everyone in my life, laity need to understand this.

*Comment from female victim* - Abused at age 12 by the parish priest, he had a history with the diocese, problem with hierarchy. I tried to meet with the Pope in Rome but couldn't get an appointment; has been unable to get her records from the Vatican; tried to speak to the bishops, managed to get appointment with a few priests; tries not to confuse the laity with the clergy; lost her relationship with Church. Even with diary entries made by this priest mentioning his meetings with her, this wasn't enough; the agents of the Church dug deep enough to have access to private information given by family members; why aren't they praying for us? They want to discredit us. The Church was my life. I'm hopeful that people like you will stand up for us; I can't even speak about what has been in written in my Discovery; I still mix up the people (of the Church) with the bricks and mortar. I have a letter sent to my husband who is a member of the Knights of Columbus; The author of the letter stated that the issue with the Indigenous residential schools and the sexual abuse by clergy is hindering the work of K. Of C; There was no compassion or caring, but rather the impression that the abuse issue is an irritant. I hold out great hope for this CLC group.

The impact of the abuse – I understand it better now than I ever did; what I have learned is that I had no idea the depth of the abuse; religion was different in 1963, there was never a place I felt more at home than in Church, to become an altar boy was so great, and then at age 11 I was abused by the Church; I'm just starting to understand it all; I never trusted my parents after that because they let me go with him (the priest on a trip); I had no words to explain what happened to me; when God rapes you, how do I trust anyone? Now in 4th marriage. At age 15 I found alcohol and finally could breathe. Real men don't talk about this. The Church was a pillar; it completely destroyed my life. Don't blame the Church for what the priest did. In court, they tried to make them believe I seduced the priest. Southdown told them not to put him into a parish, but they did. Papal nuncio has diplomatic immunity a I can't get records from them; why did they take my case to appeal? I went to my abuser's grave and read a letter of amends; I did that for me. The Church doesn't make this easy. My kids have forgiven me for the hurt I inflicted on them, so I had to forgive my abuser. I want the laity to walk with me, start a conversation. The Church lies, the Vice-Chancellor lied in Court, but they caught him in the lie. I don't want you to feel sorry for me.

Further comments from previous speaker: I need to say I agree with the lack of what the higher-ups are doing. They are lying to us; I don't blame the laity, but there are some who don't want to know. I want to go to my abuser's grave, I have forgiven him, he was a sick man. Forgiving the Church is hard; I shared an identical experience with another member here, by the same priest, only 11 years later! (they continued to place him in parishes). There is a great distance you have to go to get to the level to forgive.

***Guest Concerned Lay Catholics:* What would you like to say to survivors? What would you like them to know?**

You are real lights, we have wanted to listen, to hear you; and for you to have the grace and courage to do this with a group of strangers; you didn't have people to talk to, we're here now, but nothing can replace what was lost.

It 's a privilege to hear you. I needed to get a better grasp of what happened to you; very moving to hear you communicate the depth of feeling, astounding to hear you talk about forgiveness; we always look at those who are marginalized; where can I help? You complained and there was no response, points to the lack of accountability; I can draw attention to this; they want to protect the institution, we must break that lack of transparency. We are the Church!

Echo what has been said, I cried; It's a gift, a blessing to hear you. I've been studying the voices of Indigenous people, but we need to hear your voices too; you're so brave, thank you; given me courage to stay with CLC; glad you were able to reach out to us.

Everything that was said tonight has touched my heart; I have been working on the conservatism in the Church; I thank you for bringing me back to this issue; all of us have been victimized, my faith has been badly damaged, I wonder if I want to be part of this Church. Everybody should hear the stories we have heard tonight; some lay people don't want to hear about this.

We are Church; what is it that we will do? That's why I'm with CLC. Would like members of our Church to hear this conversation; we need a healing ministry in the community.

*Comment from Fiancée of one of the Group:* I have been with him for 10 years and I've seen a change in him (for the better); my heart is broken for all of you, unless someone has been through it. What I don't understand is how these sick people are allowed to be around kids; I have 4 sons, raised them in the Catholic Church, they refused to be altar boys; I was putting them in danger; I want to support this group; I admire the work you do here.

Additional comment from previous survivor: I don't know whether I had an option not to follow this path. My sexual abuse and my prior life are my assets now, they have led me to this; you can't hurt me anymore; let's continue (this work).

We had a priest who was accused of abusing kids; he was sent to another city; someone from our community saw him there saying Mass in the new location and reported him. We need to educate the laity more.

From the time I first met and spoke to a victim/survivor, I've had many encounters with other people who are also very concerned about this issue and who have helped us finally to be together here today. Each have played a part in this, but there is a power greater than any of us who has a plan for us. Let's hope it continues.

Glad you are speaking to us tonight. Found it surprising that the bishops aren't doing what they said they would (in their CCCB document). We need for them to follow through.

In response, I'm so sorry for what you have been through and still going through. I came close to being abused myself and I'm grateful, but why was I spared? when you hear the stories, it puts a face to it, we enter into a relationship. What we can offer is a healing place where you will be able to share the stories with others.

It's the institutional Church, this is where the pushback comes from. I have talked about this with Laurence Freeman of Christian Meditation.

I want to thank you. What I heard is "we will not be silenced." This group represents the informal Church. You are a beacon with your suffering and your pain.

One of the blessings is being able to work with the organizers here. I did a presentation with someone who gave me a new way to understand the gospel story. She described Jesus as a victim of abuse by religious authorities. They handed him over to be crucified. His mother stood by and watched, so the hurt extended to his family and friends. They were all traumatized. But the abuse wasn't the end, there was the Resurrection. The abuse happened but it wasn't the end of the story. Just like the glorified body, the marks of the trauma remain, but there is healing. It's not clear where we go from here. But I believe the next steps will be revealed to us. The people here are the right people.

### **Survivor's Final Comments**

Want to state the obvious, the power of words and people coming together, you don't need to hear the dirty details of the abuse, rather the impact it has had on our life. It's not just children, it's adults. We feel heard. We don't want pity. What I would like to see is to be made whole so I can go back to Church with my mother. I want to see effective change. We're just human beings that want to be made whole. I really want to thank the laity, please don't stop.

I hesitated coming tonight; needed a break; had a meltdown after the last meeting; I came tonight to see the reaction of the laity, to see how you react; I'm not religious; I thank you for putting the time in; without you guys we won't be heard. Thank you.

This is a battle. I'll come anywhere to have a conversation; I want action; I want you to walk with us; I want to go back to Church but I can't stay any longer than 10 minutes. What you're hearing about is not a story but an experience, and the strength it takes to talk about this.

## Lay Ecclesial Ministers/Lay Employees of the Church - 3 Sessions – March 6, April 3, April 24

### Participant Background

I have worked in the Church for over 25 years - listening is so important because it is the only way we grow.

I have been the parish secretary for 9 years... retired 5 years ago... Was able to see some really good stuff happening and also some really painful, sad, eye-opening situations that made me question where Church is going. I would hear from parishioners, could see what was happening in the work environment. I wish I wasn't the parish secretary because it made it hard sometimes to go to the Church, being disappointed in the Church.

I am a lay pastoral associate that is retiring, has been in role for six years. In our position, we hear a lot of voices... you hear so much pain and it can be difficult to be in the role. Past experiences of parishioners trying to navigate the sacramental preparation process. So much depends on who the pastor is. I have been very fortunate... has been in the parish for many years. It has been a very positive experience. As a volunteer before that, I saw that a new priest would come in and all the volunteers would be "fired" as volunteers. The majority of volunteers are women. In fact, the majority of the workers of the Church are women and we are not valued - not heard. I see an opportunity for them to be heard in this synod. I have been involved in the Church since I was 8 years old. The last six years were the first time she was paid. It is actually more difficult being a paid person. Your job is on the line. As a former educator, I know that every organization is a bit like that. It is the lived reality of anyone working. But other places have more protection.

I have been involved in pastoral ministry since 1979. I worked at the Archdiocese level for 28 years. At the same time, I held leadership roles in at least one parish someone in a semi-paid role. I have done lots of work across Canada/Ontario. This gave me the vantage point of hearing lots of people talking about their struggles... most frequently with their pastor or associate pastor. Their articulation was ... I can understand what you are saying but Father doesn't agree and so it really doesn't matter what you do. In pastoral ministry, I worked with people who are all places in the theological spectrum. In the parish, it was my most common experience to give people direction and have them, still ask "father" - that's fine ... but you are not the priest... so we need to know what father has to say. This is reflected visually... where people deliberately will not go and share in holy communion from a woman. It is a reflection of the pain that so many people feel in our Church... they feel invisible.

I have been a Pastoral Minister for 3 years and worked unpaid in the Church for 20 years. As a volunteer, I heard a lot more from the laity than as a paid employee. As an employee, there is a bit more tension between what I can say and what I can do. At the same time, my words don't hold much weight because I am not ordained. My role does give me the opportunity to have a listening ear. I hear people longing for change. It is mostly women who are running our parishes. We are seeking out our equality. I pray to God that we are heard... not to be heard again this time, would be too painful. We are supposed to be a Church of justice. There is a sense of powerlessness, trying to help realize the ideal of justice. There are circles of supportive people helping us on the path to ministry.

I worked for 21 years in a parish and 21 years in this Archdiocese. I have more knowledge than the priest about some things, but he won't listen. Many are not from Canada. They don't understand the culture here. It is difficult and painful. We are given more work in any given week than a human should do. Meanwhile, Father seems absent. We are undervalued and underpaid. Being married and parents, we often can lead to a more pastoral greeting of baptized family. I have had an incredible career but now I have withdrawn from the Church on many levels. I cannot attend Mass in my own parish.

I am a Religious Education Co-ordinator in a Diocese. Before this, I worked in private industry and government. Many people need to wake up to our faith and choose our faith. I see that the problem is not with the youth but with adults and lack of adult faith education. I recently changed parishes because a young priest came, and he is deeply conservative and wishes Vatican II didn't happen. He abolished the parish council. I couldn't go to Church and leave angry all the time, so I moved. I have an MRE. I want to be listened to. I am at a point of frustration.

I am not employed by the Church thus it has no institutional authority over me. But I care about the Church and the flaws of the Church as an institution. I see significant staffing issues. There is a problem with the amount of discretion of the clerics to ignore the laity and do what they want. They ignore the expertise of the laity. I feel unhappy as a parishioner. We have a pastor from a different culture and there is a major language issue, though I suspect he is a good person. The hierarchy is intolerant of the role of women in the Church. There are major transparency and accountability issues. The presbyteral council should actually not be composed only of clerics. At the parish level, the priest should be an observer at the lay-led pastoral council. The laity is capable of forming policies in accordance with canon law and Church principles. I am grateful for Pope Francis launching this.

I am presently retired... almost 80... I was a teacher then a high school chaplain. The last 17/18 years worked in chaplaincy, pastoral care in Hamilton in palliative care. I am involved in synod in my parish. We are sorting out what the issues are. At this point in my life, I have little patience for stupidity. The bishop has an obligation to listen to us and to work for us. I had many good years working for the Church. I could pick and choose to work with priests who were good to work with. I tried to involve all the pastors of the school but gave up in some cases

I was a child of Vatican II. it was easy to retire because it became boring to work for the Church. There was no possibility of helping it to be a living dynamic unity. Indeed, I have not experienced this for many years.

**Listening** **In what way does your vantage point help or hinder you to hear the voices of others in your parish community and wider Church? Whose voices are given greater volume? Whose are ignored? What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?**

- Clerics have a disproportionate voice.
- When it becomes difficult the priest steps back - let the St. Vincent de Paul society hand the difficult person.
- Priests sometimes forget what they are there for... serving everyone... not just the ones where it was easy... not just the ones who come on Sunday.
- I have been asked to lie for the priest. (e.g. when someone wanted a car blessed, he said, "Tell them I am busy.")
- Priests must be flexible. Open up and use every person that comes into the parish welcome them and find them a place.
- There is too much closemindedness.
- There is very little voice for the voices of minorities.
- THE VOICE of the HOLY SPIRIT is being ignored... we are not opening our hands and let go of the old... we are going to be a sinking ship.

- Most of the priests who want to nudge the Church forward, come up against a wall.
- I use my voice now... Joan Chittister has been a huge encourager to do so. I try to do so in a respectful manner
- We as Lay Ministers speak for the underdogs, the poor, some immigrants who come from countries where they are afraid to use their voices, single moms who are just trying to make things work.
- My work in RCIA has helped to meet people where they are at – to welcome and accept them.
- The voices who ARE heard are the people with money
- We MUST provide a deliberate and intentional outreach to those who are experiencing poverty and the marginalized. We sometimes are providing food and assistance but haven't come to realize who they really are.
- Indigenous voices are not heard.
- The voice of those affected by the significant opioid, drug and poverty crisis, the homeless are not heard.
- Greater volume is given in recent years people who are not enamored with the changes of the Second Vatican Council. They are quite loud and their voices are heard. I cannot remember a time before now when a priest or a bishop would think it was appropriate to criticize the Pope but now it seems to be happening a lot.
- People who are on the far right of the spectrum are speaking disproportionately loud.
- This comes through in who we promote on a YouTube video, and how we promote some programs over others.
- These voices are pushing more of those of us who are in lay ecclesial ministry out rather than in.
- The trend is moving more and more and more to voices that are a minority that carry a great deal of weight. The majority voices are being drowned out.
- The new clergy are ultra rule-oriented and dogma oriented.
- Those of us in pastoral ministry are trying to help bridge this gap...
- Young people are not being heard. It is wonderful to see a parish hire a youth ministry... but at the expense of a lay pastoral associate. Can't have both.
- I am kind of done with working with the Church but am saddened by it all because I have devoted so much of my life to the Church.
- I became a religion teacher for 30 years because the faith was so wonderful wanted to pass on that enthusiasm. Then I moved into pastoral ministry.
- There is not a lot of room in the Church for lay people generally. There is not a lot of discussion with us.
- The discussion ends with "I am the pastor and you are the lay person. I get the final say."
- I once led the music ministry and new priest came who didn't like guitars and soon everyone was gone.
- Pastors sometimes bring in their own people. The people who get to stay with a pastor change is the minority.
- I once brought a big issue to the chancellor. He acknowledged that the pastor was problematic. There was a problem with the use of funds that was bordering on criminal. But nothing happened. Clergy are not held accountable. The laity, the volunteer counter and the secretary are but there are different rules for the priests.
- Women's voices are negated on diocesan level and parish level.
- There are no young people at any of the Masses. Youth have a lot more going on than they are getting credit for. They are not always heard. There is a suspicion they want to be entertained... but nothing is filling them up. The Youth have insights we need to hear.
- Who is going to be in Church if we don't make a change?
- Families and youth and women are not heard.
- The major thing where we should keep everyone together is the Sunday liturgy... But many think you have to come up with a program to keep people coming. But it has to be Sunday Mass.
- I had to report a priest who was an alcoholic, depressed, and who had become very, very abusive to me. I reported this with great compassion because I thought the bishop would get help for him. All the bishop wanted to know was if he was gay. That was not the problem. His abusive and self-destructive behavior was. I was told not to speak to anyone. I complied. The priest was enraged with me and poisoned other clergy and the

staff against me. I don't know what he said. I was eventually removed from my position. I had worked for almost three decades without any issues. He has had problems in all of the parish in which he worked. The Church abandoned me and moved the priest to another parish. Women are not listened to. The laity are not listened to. Priests are listened to even if they are caught lying multiple times. Even if their behavior is reprehensible.

### Speaking Out

**In your unique role in the Church, how have you been able to speak honestly and authentically in the Church? What has made it difficult to speak honestly and authentically in the Church?**

- As a secretary, there was no way to say anything. I was shut down and publicly humiliated. I ended up leaving shortly thereafter. With the former pastor, I could speak quite honestly and authentically. I could speak without repercussions. I was able to pass comments from parishioners. Everything depends on the approach of the pastor and his staff. I have been able to speak authentically and honestly and have a conversation. I have also been shut down and put in my place
- I have always been the sort of person to speak mind. I respect every person. We are all baptized, priest, prophet and king. In my experience, in any conversation, if we are respectful and speaking with full knowledge, my voice has been heard and respected. I was educated with seminarians. I took good foundation courses to prepare me for ministry. I always felt respected in a pastoral role and in education.
- Diocese formation has lost its way.
- The new formation of our priests is lacking in human resources aspect. They don't know how to run a staff. They are formed to be mini-kings. Priests think, "This is MY parish, what I say goes." Working with religious orders is very different than working with diocesan priests. They have a better understanding of communality. They have to get along with each other. This does, of course, depend upon the order. Some are individuals living in the same house. The older priests are not as much like this. It is the younger priest who have little respect for women, little respect for dialogue.
- I have never seen a more dysfunctional group. I have spoken honestly and authentically and have been shut down. I used to be able to speak up in parish council... but not with the new priest.
- In our parish, the secretary and the Lay Minister have a pact to support each other. My job feels like indentured slavery. Most of the priests I have worked with are basically lazy while the women were working so hard! Only to see all their work of building community and healthy Church gradually (or quickly) dismantled by a new pastor. It has been like this in my family for a long time. My mother was the parish secretary.
- I have been able to speak depending upon who is the leadership of the time. Many have listened and heard me.
- I do a lot of self-censorship. I also don't want to scandalize parishioners. If we told our truth, they would be shocked. We become co-dependent with our problematic priests. We portray a Church that actually doesn't exist. We act as a buffer. How people were treated by us was not how they were treated by the official Church.
- The newer pastor made it very clear that he was going to bring in his own person as secretary. I still always tried to do what he wanted. I have never had a job where I couldn't get along with the person. I finally decided to leave. When I finally left, I made a mistake by not speaking out the truth of why I left because I did not want the parishioners to know what had happened. I wanted to keep the peace. I should have spoken up. If I had said something at the time, it may have spared other people. We have a tendency to protect Father for the sake of the parish.
- People don't want to hear it, with all due respect. I left a position as a secretary and parishioners stopped being friends with me when I told what was happening. I can feel the vibe very clearly... not everyone wants

to know the truth. Many people don't want to deal with issues in the Church like residential schools. They don't see the urgency of these issues.

- When I am able to speak, my education is acknowledged. I am still guarded. I got called up on the rug for sharing the poster about this listening session.
- I am not afraid anymore. If I lose my job, I will still speak the truth rather than tow the line. I take my baptism extraordinarily seriously. So many people don't want to step up. They don't want to own their own power.
- At the archdiocese there was a priest on staff who spoke out. He supported us to speak out and a few months later he was in a parish. Priests also are silenced
- lay people really object to hearing the truth about the Church esp. about indigenous schools, don't want to hear it... don't see the urgency about it.
- The 2SLGBTQ+ community is very silenced and oppressed in the Church. Though, many people are very vocal about this issue and the movement to reduce a community of faithful Catholics to a sexual act. In my community, openly gay partners are welcomed.

### Speaking Out

#### How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?

- The liturgy is so much a part of being Catholic. Who am I to comment as an ordinary person to comment about how prayer and liturgy has an effect on me? I try to listen in silence and try to be influenced. I try to allow the liturgy and the sacraments... may reshape my internal being so it is more in keeping with Christ. My hope is that I try to carry all that with me out into the world.
- A lot of Catholics think you go to Mass and then it's over, so many don't have an active prayer life. As a minister, I have tried to help people to develop a more active prayer life. Many people are content with what is but it doesn't always seem to lead to mission. It is hit or miss whether liturgy leads people to mission. Prayer keeps me going. Especially Christian meditation.
- For many years we had the most beautiful liturgies. They were full of energy, joy, creativity, inclusion, and contemplation. Now we have new clergy and the liturgy has no life. Everyone is silent and there is no community.
- Being excluded in liturgy so hurtful. Working with altar servers, seeing through the eyes of children helped me see through their eyes. Engaging children in Church inspires all of us. Children watch us and they learn the rituals from us.
- Creativity is important to keep people interested. Good music moves us.
- There are so many different ways of praying.
- One of the problems is that we don't understand the liturgy as well as we should to be inspired by it as we could be. We need to learn more, and we would be more inspired. The liturgy is so rich that it is heartbreaking to not have people understand its richness.
- So many priests do not understand the power of the liturgy to form people to make a difference in the world. Many people still come to "hear Father say Mass."
- As a religious educator, I said to the priest, "I will bring people to Mass but only good liturgy will keep them.
- Good liturgy changes you and energizes you for mission. As it says in the document on music, "good liturgy nourishes faith bad liturgy destroys it." I've witnessed the truth of this.
- One of my greatest disappointments is how little effort so many priests put into making liturgy beautiful. The formation of clergy is vital. They don't have the capacity to do the kind of liturgy that they need to be able to do.
- It should be the very centre of who we are giving us the energy to consider.



- Priests are not part of the community. They think that long as people are turning up on a Sunday its fine. They need more connection with their lives to enrich the liturgy. But they have to be okay with the frailty of the people, which requires insight on the part of priest who often doesn't have a lot of contact with the parishioners.
- For many Catholics Sunday Mass is just the one hour a week for God and they need help to make a connection between the rest of their lives. We need integration of domestic Church and parish Church. We need liturgical catechesis.
- Growing up the priest was up there and the people were down there. One of the priests we had would come down to visit but he would be playing baseball in the community, was more integrated for a while.
- We don't expect the priest to have all the gifts but they have to use the gifts of the laity.
- The revision of the Roman Missal made things more clerical again.
- When liturgy works it is transformative.
- A priest told me that good pastors are discouraged from being a good priest because that would make it hard for the next pastor.

**Identify a celebration experience (Liturgy, Sacrament, communal prayer, retreat, educational event) in your parish/dioocese/Church that inspired you in your spiritual journey and/or your mission in the Church.**

- We had a mission in the parish. The Church was packed for all three sessions. Everyone came. It was so rich. The priest shared so much of himself, he was very theatrical, some of the stuff he did I embedded in my catechetical programs.
- Alpha celebrations have been inspiring.
- National Liturgies in Ottawa, RCIA conferences, brought everyone together from all over the country. There was beautiful liturgical dance.
- Good homilies - Cardinal Collins is an excellent homilist. We are affected by the personhood of the homilist.
- I have experienced good liturgy most of my life. This has sustained me in the times that were so difficult.
- Lay people can really help make beautiful liturgies. Good liturgy has so much power.
- My liturgy professor taught that in liturgy there "needs to be room for everyone to play." They should be inclusive – an old hymn, a new hymn, tradition and creativity both.
- In liturgy you are at home everywhere in the world.

### **Moving Forward**

**How can those of us who are employed by the Church, work in communion and participate in our Church's life and mission? What are the obstacles to mutual dialogue? What structures foster this dialogue? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment? Where do you see signs of hope?**

- Let us go back to Vatican II and immerse yourself in the vision of Vatican II!
- The Church I loved, believed in never existed. I don't know if I can come back.
- I would like the Church to go back to the root of the Gospel. We have lost our way. Love each other as I have loved you. We used to be the way. Vatican II has not been fully discovered and allowed to flourish.
- Allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, to be kind to each other. Put the rules aside and look out for one another.
- The rules are getting in the way of what we are here to do. There are agendas not Jesus running the Church. Agendas and what they want to prove.
- Cast out fear! and live in love.

- Be not afraid to inform people. To re-engage in Vatican II. Fear of losing power and identity. Not only clergy. It is rampant in the whole of the Church. Rebalance of power. Equality
- Lose the egos!
- There needs to be check and balances. We need: a restructuring of the hierarchy so the priest does not have ultimate power, accountability, the priest has way too much power... needs to be more in the congregation, more proper supports for priests, too.
- We don't have a forum to talk about the black marks in the Church anymore. We never hear much if anything from our leaders about that particular incident or the possibility that this phenomenon is a problem. We can't push the dirt under the rug anymore because there is only so much room under the rug. Archbishop Miller in Vancouver decided to investigate a problematic situation in our diocese, he took responsibility pastorally to see what the effects were on people today.
- None of the priests I worked with really understood what RCIA was. They thought it was just teaching people to become Catholic. Because they didn't understand RCIA they didn't understand its role in the liturgy.
- The Church needs to understand that truth matters around here. "We are a Church of the truth" let's pray for an ascertaining of the truth today?
- We need more forums to talk about our hot button issues. Our priest does discuss these issues openly. He brings important issues up at Mass.
- This is not to criticize the priest for being a sinner. We are all sinners, including the priest. But not to acknowledge our problems undermines the mission of the Church at large. The community sees what is going on. (Though some choose not to see it.) The fear of scandalizing people stops the Church from telling the truth.
- After Vatican II, there was a feeling of optimism. But here has been a tremendous step backward. The Church I committed my life to was the VII Church of hope, optimism, lay involvement. My children have not experienced that Church. It is hard to share how exciting it was to be in the Church. There was wonderment, progress, on a journey to something that was going to be life-giving.
- It takes a very strong person to enter into dialogue knowing that he is going to be criticized. Most priests not really able to deal with. There is difficulty dealing with confrontation. The Church is defensive.
- I see a great sign of hope in this synodal process and in some of the movements going on in other parts of the world.

## General Sessions – West - April 10 and East – May 8

### Listening

**Identify an experience in your secular or spiritual life when you felt God/the Holy Spirit speaking to you.**

- Participants in this session shared personal stories of listening to God in profound ways through personal experiences and interactions with others. One shared her story of having a child with spina bifida. She was told that there was a 1-20 chance that each subsequent child would also be born with SB. Every time the baby moved within her, she would rejoice. Then she would worry if the baby was healthy. She knew that worrying was counterproductive to both the health of the baby and her own. So, she just prayed. She asked God to give her the grace she needed to care for the baby he would give her. She stopped worrying. She trusted God. She had three healthy sons, born subsequently.
- Another participant shared his experience as a *Feldenkrais* practitioner. Working one-on-one with clients he often feels the Holy Spirit guiding his approach. He listens and responds intuitively. He doesn't over-plan what he will offer a client in a session, but rather listens very carefully and responds intuitively. No expectations

other than to provide a space of grounded hope and an invitation to grow in the way they are being called. The Holy Spirit lets him know-without words - what the person needs. It's intuitive, being present.

- J. 'listened' to God through the voices of others. The CWL President suggested she take a Palliative Care course being offered at the local hospital. At first, she thought this was not her things- but then two other people said she should. Then, her dad became ill and so she took the course because she thought it might enable her to help him. After taking the course, she joined the palliative care team. Soon she was asked to consider training for the pastoral care team. After 4 months of intensive training, she found the two areas- palliative and pastoral - often worked together as nurses would often call her in to situations where people were facing grave illness. She felt Jesus walked beside her. At that time, the Catholic chaplain at the hospital refused to visit patients with HIV/AIDS and SARS. So, our participant would go in. She also would be called in by nurses in cases of maternal loss. I had my own experience losing a child at birth and so could relate. Later when she worked with youth struggling with mental health issues, she used art therapy - no words, just presence. She was able to help them choose life instead of death.
- Had a friend who was suffering with cancer. A. and her mother attended a special service of healing at the cathedral in her home diocese. Her friend's illness was weighing heavily on her all through the service. At a certain point, the healer who was presiding said that someone in the congregation was very troubled and proceeded to describe her friend's situation so accurately, that A and her mother looked at each other and said, "That's Trish!" The next day, she called to ask the nurse how her friend was. The nurse said she was sleeping peacefully – and that she had been all night. That it was the first time in months that she had slept. A knew she heard God speak to her at the healing service.
- Another time, A. was visiting Rome and stayed at a home for women with AIDS, run by Mother Teresa's order. Very soon after this, Mother Teresa died. When A got home, she was asked to speak at a memorial service for Mother Teresa hosted by the diocese where she lived. Although she wondered why she was asked to do this and had no idea what she was going to say, she agreed. When the time came, somehow, she knew what to say. She felt the Holy Spirit fill her and the words just poured out.
- Another participant talked about the importance of bible study. He and his wife participated in bible study all their lives. This is powerful way to listen to God-and to connect with other people. If you study scripture with an open heart and mind with fellow Christians, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it helps us discern other issues which need to be dealt with. Example: Kyle, a young man joined their Bible Study and then became actively involved in Development and Peace. He had never heard the prayer of the Holy Spirit before. Now he makes that prayer part of his daily meditations, and it has influenced his actions to work on behalf of DPCC. He is working on campaigns to help people in the global south. Scriptures raise questions that people don't expect. The participant is very involved with Development and Peace and finds the scriptures shed light on all these situations.

### **Who has supported and/or encouraged you in your journey to develop your spiritual/faith life in your parish or Church?**

- For one of the participants, spiritual directors were key in her spiritual growth. It began with her French professor who also became her spiritual director; then as she moved to new places, she found new spiritual directors. She has been fortunate to live in three different parishes in three different areas (MAN, BC, ON) and had encouraging pastors in all places. They developed into relationships of mutual support and trust. Unfortunately, subsequent pastors came in and undid everything the previous pastor did. New pastor would not allow her to bring communion to the sick. They were all priests who had difficulty working with women.
- This prompted another participant to share that he felt it was not just women the priests have trouble with. They do not have an understanding of their role. He had a priest who received permission to do everything in Latin. He was a very conservative man but very pastoral in his approach. Then a new pastor came in who was OK with all the new teachings, but he wasn't pastoral at all. He refused to give communion to a young woman

because she knelt to receive - humiliating. He will splash people in the face with (holy) water and think it is funny. Everything is a joke to him. This participant doesn't care about their theology as much as their respect for people and their pastoral sense. Some priests who may be very conservative theologically (Vatican I) can be pastoral, kind and respectful of the laity.

- For another participant a key support in her spiritual journey has been bible study. Over 35 years ago she and her husband founded an ecumenical bible study. It was still going up until COVID. It was a wonderful experience. People didn't try to impose on each other. It was loving and listening to each other as they read the scriptures. At a certain point when she needed support, with 4 children at home, the group showed up with a month's worth of casseroles to put in her freezer. She couldn't believe their kindness. They later explained that she at one time had organized support for a needy family she knew in a local church. So, they were just doing what she had done. This bible study members supported each other not only spiritually but materially too.
- What hinders often is the pastoral leadership. For example, their parish was part of an outreach program to farm workers in the Holland Marsh area. It was run cooperatively by three parishes. They took injured workers to hospital, got them bicycles so they had transportation to run errands, brought them meals, etc. A new pastor arrived and announced that their parish would no longer be involved in this ministry. As their parish provided the largest number of volunteers, the program fell apart. There was no avenue to appeal the pastor's action. No way to appeal to the bishop. There needs to be better episcopal oversight. Laity need to have their issues addressed - publicly. This applies to everything. There needs to be accountability for actions. Can't just sweep it under the carpet. We've seen where that gets you. The pile just gets bigger and eventually it trips you up! Her husband added that what is needed is effective communication and accountability.
- Another participant said perhaps he would not be so polite. He suggested the problem was parish priests with a 19th century attitude. He described a situation where the priests were arrogant and emotionally abusive. These priests were international priests who had very different cultural norms and attitudes. This participant wanted to raise an example of a good priest -because there are some. He named a priest who founded and, for almost 30 years, ran a well-known and highly utilized retreat centre. This priest got things done and he knew how to get the best out of people. He recognized and encouraged people to take advantage of their gifts. He had been planning to establish a lay board to continue to run the retreat centre when he was gone. But he became ill before the process was complete and the leadership of his order overruled the plan. They could not imagine lay people involved on a board, leading and governing.
- A. shared about how her leadership gifts were recognized in her parish in Nova Scotia. As a result, she was encouraged by her pastor to take a course in liturgy at St. FX. It was wonderful and really opened her eyes. She had no idea how much she had to learn about liturgy. She came back with all this knowledge to share. And she wanted to share. Then they got a new pastor and he stopped it all. Two steps forward, one step back. Development and Peace is another example. She was very involved as were many other lay Catholics. Then Bishops decided they didn't like it and it was basically shut down.
- Someone else pointed out that the bishops seem to be trying to fix the relationship with D&P. They have appointed four bishops to the Board which may signal they are again committing to it. Time will tell. More concerning to this participant is the CCCB withdrawal from Kairos. That bothers him so much. Will not forgive them for that.
- Another participant talked about when she lived in Nelson, BC. Lay people were encouraged to take pastoral training courses at Gonzaga University in Washington State. It was a very exciting time with lots of lay involvement happening. Then, their bishop got in trouble over his handling of allegations of sexual abuse in his diocese and he resigned. The new bishop put a stop to the lay pastoral training. The core of the pastoral training was the idea of hospitality being the key to everything else. It is the door to liturgy -making people feel welcome and at home. They had problems too with priests from other cultures- it seemed that the congregation had to adjust to their culture - not the other way around. A new priest came in and immediately started to make changes to everything. Undertook renovations to the offices and the sanctuary. Didn't ask anyone what they needed for the space to work, no listening - just changed it all.

- God listens to me when I pray. I listen for a response. No miraculous communication. My mother encouraged strong faith in me and told us always to “trust in God.” Experience of God is indirect through people around me. An impressive homily lets me hear God speaking through the priest. As a convert from Anglicanism, I loved the passion and the drama of the liturgy. I was excited to go. The Holy Spirit guided me to convert to Roman Catholicism and I felt at home for the first time in a very long time. I had a longing for the ritual and the prayer life of the Catholic Church.

### Speaking Up

**Identify an experience when you were able to express yourself, or not, in our Church. Why do you think that was?**

- People here shared any stories of being asked by their pastor to help out, to use their gifts for the good of the community. Often it was a new pastor who arrived and looked to the parishioners to advise and assist him. People grew into their roles too. Learned how to be “synodal.” In other examples, people mentioned the leadership of the local bishop who encouraged lay involvement by having their own diocesan council. This helped lay people feel supported to speak out. Some participants reported speaking out in support of their pastor when other parishioners were critical. Some in the group are associates of the Congregation of Notre Dame. They feel heard at the General Chapters and have equal voice with all the sisters around the world. The synodal process used was a very special time-framed with a lot of contemplative prayer. Contemplative discussion is different from debate mode.
- Some participants affirmed the value of consistent and committed scripture study to give lay people a grounding in their faith and feel confident speaking out. The example of Acts 13 in Cyprus where a magician named Bar Jesus was confusing the Christians by “twisting the straight paths of the Lord.” St. Paul had the courage to go to Cyprus and to speak out. We need to do this. There are a lot of leaders who dominate in the Church, court secular power and drown out other voices. They “twist the straight paths of the Lord” to serve their own interests. And they drive people away.
- Other examples were shared of being asked to play a leadership role or to speak up. Someone attended a Holocaust and Hope trip as a part of a teachers’ group of 15. After listening to a testimony of a holocaust survivor, this participant was asked to thank the speaker. She was very nervous. This was such a momentous and solemn task. But she prayed and she found the words. When she finished, the survivor told her “When you share time with people, that is a part of your life you will never get back.” So, it is great gift. They embraced and wept.
- Speaking up can have its costs, too. Someone spoke up in the early days in a new parish and her input was initially welcomed. People were glad and grateful for her passion. But when her input began to include critical/prophetic elements, ways the parish and pastor needed to reflect the Church’s teachings better, she found herself shut out.
- Some shared the experience of living in a Quaker town and learning ways of listening and speaking from the Quakers- very different from us! We could learn something from their “Chapter Meetings.” No liturgy - quiet listening until moved by the Spirit to speak.
- There were some strong feelings that people do not feel free to speak out because we have leaders who are inconsistent and shallow -they appear to do all the right things when actually they are not doing anything – like Bar Jesus!
- Why are people leaving the Church? Church’s inability to speak to the complexities of the present day. Too rigid and rule-bound. The daughter of one participant wanted to be a priest- she is now an Anglican priest and a fantastic preacher. She is dearly loved, doing wonderful ministry with the sick and the elderly. Another daughter who is a midwife brought her first child for baptism and took a pre-baptism course for parents. When he second child was born, she asked if she had to take the course again - as she was busy as a midwife and had a young child at home. She was told she had to and had difficulty with the scheduling - there was some unpleasantness, and the upshot was this daughter left the Catholic Church and now attends the United Church.

We are losing people because Church leaders are rigid and rule-driven, not pastoral. There is also a total lack of social justice focus among the clergy in spite of Church's social teachings. Seen as optional or irrelevant. Some dioceses do not have a Social Justice office.

- Other women spoke of trying to make the Church welcoming, offering hospitality which is about everybody. We have a need to hear each other's stories to build community. They have a positive role in the Church.
- It troubles some that they hear more from the secular media about what is happening in the Church (regarding sexual abuse by clergy and IRSS) and it makes them wonder if they would ever have heard about any of this otherwise. A lot of concern about the failed leadership related to allegations of sexual abuse and situations like Kamloops. It is a mistake to close the door on dark moments. Things fester and surface anyway. Rather, we should open up and let the light in. Need a cultural change at the clerical level – they are not equipped to deal with these secular processes of investigations and royal commissions. They are scared but they won't ask the laity (many are experienced in these matters) for help.
- I never used to speak out until I saw there were so many things wrong. It made me angry. So, I spoke up. Cover up? What were they thinking? I wondered how I would I feel if it was my child taken or my friend abused? That is absolutely wrong. Since moving to BC, I have had opportunities to learn so much about Indigenous culture and experience. Who got us into this place? Tell us what you are doing about it! This is why our Churches are empty! Tell the truth. Be sorrowful. Ask for forgiveness. Doesn't the leadership understand the damage that has been done? Our silence is devastating. Makes me angry at the ineffectual way of dealing pastorally with what has happened. Accountability and transparency are what we lack.

### Celebrating

- In this context, some people expressed concern about the demeanor of their pastor. Does not always exhibit appropriate solemnity or even a sense of professionalism. Quirky traits, making everything a joke, refusing to take anything seriously. Examples of inappropriate (possibly racist?) comments. For many years there was never a bishop for confirmation. There is a feeling that this is such an important occasion in the life of a young Catholic, and it is one of the only opportunities when they meet their bishop. To have the priest who is constantly making jokes is a lost opportunity. Recently, an auxiliary bishop came to confer the sacrament and it was a totally different situation. He respected the confirmandi; asked them about their instruction; shared encouraging messages referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The tone was different, and the priest was better behaved. We need episcopal presence sometimes to convey the dignity of the occasion.
- Another participant who attends CND celebrations at Galilee Centre finds them to be well-planned, never rushed, with time for sharing, called to 'stretch' spiritually. Good music is important to celebration- draws me in. My experience of celebration is hindered when these qualities are not present. 'Fire and brimstone' also are hindrances.
- Sometimes it all 'clicks' at a celebration -think it has something to do with the priest's humility. The personality of the priest is so important - feel the unity, community, sharing-then sent out to be our best in the world.
- People described experiences of small gatherings (40 people) as very conducive to feeling the spirit in celebration. Circular configuration, after Liturgy of the Word, invited around the altar, feeling part of eucharist - not a spectator. People who read at Mass (lectors) appreciated going over the readings ahead of time and reflecting. The priest complimented everyone.
- What hinders celebration for some people is shallow and simplistic homilies. We need more and better adult education. Some in these groups grew up Anglican. They converted because of a rigorous intellectual and spiritual discernment. It really meant a lot to them. They wonder why all Catholics don't have access to that kind of rigorous instruction in the faith.
- Another reported how attending a liturgy course at the request of her pastor, kind of spoiled her for liturgy after that. Once she understood every part of the liturgy, what it meant and why we do it, it became difficult to

tolerate the way so many liturgies are celebrated. She feels sad that people don't have the opportunity to experience a truly powerful liturgical celebration.

### Moving Forward

- Most of the discussion focused on how people feel leadership needs to be exercised. Priests need to be freed up to do pastoral work and qualified lay people should be paid a just wage to perform the other tasks. Parishioners should have some input into the choice of pastors. The good thing about COVID is people got to experience liturgies online from other places. Now they know what is possible. We should look at the way other denominations select their priests. EG the Anglicans have a one-year process that matches the candidate to the parish. It is a three-way decision between the bishop, the parish and the clergy. The Anglican Church is a synodal Church - with a permanent synod connected to the people. Roman Catholic Church needs to operate more synodally.
- Laity should be everywhere and have a voice. Not just an elite group. All people should have a say in the decisions that affect them. Be transparent about everything. Ask about where the money goes. Church should not just be about Sunday activities throughout the week. The laity are quite capable of doing more.
- There needs to be more collaboration, more openness, need to be ecumenical. Lay people have lived in lots of places and experienced many different ways of being Church. We have seen places where the monied and the privileged have the 'voice' in the parish, are the in-group. It must not be like this. We should not marginalize people and we need to include the marginalized. We should work with other denominations wherever possible.
- We need more formalized processes at every level. Laity should be able to speak publicly and to question the leadership. In terms of sexual abuse allegations, needs to be an honest, competent, independent investigation, as has been done in some dioceses. If we don't cleanup our own house, we will get a Royal Commission and it won't have the interests of the Church as heart.
- Laity need to enter into dialogue with the powers that be, not to attack the Church but to affirm:
  1. The Catholic Church is the Church
  2. Problems need to be solved
- There are many good priests - what are they going through?
- Laity want an opportunity to be heard. The clergy need to let us in. We think we can help.
- This process of Synodality is a good way to keep going. Lots of work has been done and we are energized. We are going ahead unless someone says "Stop!" The older generation may have been raised to be deferential and intimidated, but we are dying off. Who is going to be left? Unless we get moving on this, in 20 years the churches will be boarded up. Need to modernize the structures. Need the laity to help envision what the Church will look like. Laity need to send helpful messages. Our leaders need to listen humbly. Bishops need to share with their people what they heard and what they submit from the CCCB. Put them online.

## Racialized Catholics - May 10

### Listening

As a racialized person, do you feel listened to and respected in the context of the Church?

- Overall, I feel listened to, as all my parishes have been very culturally and racially diverse. (Toronto Archdiocese)
- I don't feel that there is a lot that I have to offer given what space the Church provides. There isn't an opportunity to give my opinion about things - we are basically told things. There is no give and take.
- Even in RCIA where we have had the same people for fifteen years, if you want to give information or contribute ideas to the people in RCIA you are not really welcome to do so.
- We need to provide more opportunities for people to speak.

- Church is very cold. Was only Black person at first in the Church then a few others came. No one welcomed you. Did Mass and left.
- In context of parish where I am very active, I have had to address a few situations, I was outspoken and feel I was listened to.

### **Do you hear issues of importance to you addressed in the Church?**

- Not really, for the most part when I hear homilies or when I talk to priests, or other lay people in the Church, the focus is often on spiritual issues, but I never hear about social justice or issues in the media about different sorts of oppression or how people are suffering.
- We are told we should pray for people but hear little about concrete action e.g., against racism or standing up for housing affordability or the needs of the working poor.
- Some controversial issues are not dealt with, some issues of importance to me are not addressed in Church - the Church tries to be safe. - they don't tackle issues that might bother parishioners.
- We had a parish advisory council as well as the Knights of Columbus. Even there, there was no forum for discussion of ideas. There was a sense of following a script. However, the mechanism of having an advisory council in the parish was a very positive experience.
- Church does not provide opportunities or the atmosphere for things that are of importance in the community to be discussed. Place I was most heard as a Catholic was in the classroom as a religion teacher with young people.

### **Are there other voices that you think the local Church is not listening to? How do we hear voices on the sidelines?**

- I don't feel like some of the core issues I care about are talked about, especially LGBTQ people. I rarely hear anything about this except to oppose gay marriage and have not heard anything about supporting them and letting them know they are loved by God. Many voices are not listened to – e.g. issue of LGBTQ - as Catholics, we should not condemn, criticize and ostracize. This bothers me, we say we follow Christ yet still we have disdain for people who are not white, straight and heterosexual.
- How do we hear those voices? The lay movement is so important but given the current structure of the Church both universal and local we need bishops and priests to speak up about these issues, so they are not seen as a side project by lay people. They are the concern of the whole Church.
- We need the people who have power to speak out regularly in favour of those who are on the margins.
- We can donate to help people in need but in other issues we are not invited to help, helping people be respected, accepted in life, and live quality lives... these are not addressed.
- Listening to salvation history, it seems to stop at a safe position and not necessarily deal with issues that we are here to look at like the preferential option for the poor.
- Membership in Development and Peace and St. Vincent de Paul offered some opportunity to begin to have a voice; that is important.
- There was no consistency in supporting initiatives that might matter to people of colour and are of concern to people on the margins. Learning about these issues did not come from attending Church.
- In one-on-one conversations with pastor, I asked how come he had not spoken on these issues of injustice. There was no satisfactory answer. He seemed to care more about "playing it safe" There is a lot of protecting the Church, preserving the image and this doesn't speak to the young people.
- I have never heard the Church speak about the preferential option for the poor. I would like to hear this more. It shouldn't be only the Development and Peace groups alone; it should be central.



- Preferential option for the poor - not heard in Church in a homily. Reaching out to people on the margins - like Jesus did. Core element of our faith - heart of faith overlooked. Social justice matters pushed aside versus “spiritual matters”. Would love to see that back to Centre.
- Very little reference re clergy sexual abuse from the pulpit - business as usual while papers are full of it. Safety- protecting the institution. Feels stuck. Preserving image.
- The Church is not listening to young people. It exists only for old people. What is happening in evangelical Churches that attracts young people? Church must move with the times.
- Unpacking White Privilege - not willing to give up power.

### Speaking Up

**As a racialized person, identify an experience when you were able to express yourself, or not, in our Church. Why do you think that was?**

- In a small group study of the Gospels, I had the opportunity.
- The idea of only safe topics, following a script or being able to speak only to a specific point has existed in every parish I have belonged to.
- In the context of Black Lives Matter I haven’t heard anyone speak about that or racial justice.
- W/r to residential schools, I heard one white priest who was upset that the Canadian bishops who were already doing good work were being attacked. He wasn’t as upset about the graves as he was that the media was attacking the Church. He felt that there should be more conversation about the good job that the Church was doing.
- I feel hindered in speaking out about issues that matter to me because I don’t hear it being talked about by the priest or by active parishioners, it is something we are not supposed to talk about.
- There are rosary committees but not social justice groups in my parishes.
- How have you been supported or hindered from speaking out in the Church about matters you care about?
- The structure does not allow us to speak to contemporary issues. There really isn’t an opportunity to address things if you would like to. There is a certain script that you have to stick to.
- When I was doing my master’s in theology people from all various places were allowed to speak. It was a place of diversity where everyone felt invited to speak.
- Despite attending many things at chancery office - no mention of race, politics, etc. had a terrible experience- shut down, rudely told to come to Church and sit at back of Church. Diocese has done nothing about it - wrote to Bishop - no response. The question was - can we serve at funeral Mass of someone close to us. When asked why – was shut down. Can’t even go to communion. Come from family of priests. Then audacity to ask for contribution to One Heart One Soul. One priest called – but even at Easter I felt like a refugee.
- Once had to write chancery office about concerns that were swept under rug. Eucharist was being put in bag on my dresser. Serious issue of canon law. Priest is very busy man was the answer.

**In recent years, how have you heard the Church speak up in the area of race, culture, politics, economics?**

- The pope speaking about the Indigenous children’s graves and his apology really stands out for me. Pope Francis has done more in his time than many other popes. I am glad he is coming to Canada to speak about the indigenous situation.
- When I read American Catholic media there seems to be a lot of negativity regarding Pope Francis, and that is disheartening, but I admire that he continues to talk about it despite the negativity against him.
- A lot of lay people also speak up on social justice Catholic issues.
- Cardinal Czerny spoke about the concept - what does brotherhood mean in Fratelli Tutti.
- Issues of sustainability and disparity - on our doorsteps. Economic inequity - significant in our Church today. Feel like very little awareness of this.

- Wish diocese would have courses to understand things like race.
- Patriarchy and clericalism, hierarchical nature of Church. No accountability. Indigenous issues.
- In our Churches - Replicas of Black saints and Black bishops are absent. In classroom we use diverse racialized images to express the idea of incarnation.

### Celebrating

**Do celebration experiences (Liturgy, Sacrament, communal prayer) in your parish/diocese/Church reflect your culture, inspire you and guide you in your spiritual journey and/or your mission in the Church?**

- Students making 3D video games, scripture murals etc. - very creative - as an artist and theologian - what does it mean to be catholic/ what is evangelization. Creativity and keeping parish life alive. Church is missing out on the richness in the laity.
- An incident that happened many years ago in a folk choir. Everyone in the choir was white but me. I had a function at my home where everyone was black, but the choir attended. The folk members only stayed for 10 minutes and then they said they had to leave because they felt uncomfortable because they were the only people who were white. They decided not to stay. It was a shocking experience.
- I have seen many Filipino or Latin American celebrations that are culturally specific and are given space to share their racialized identity within the Church.
- When asking a priest to have more multicultural art and music to represent our family, I was told that he was busy building a catechetical program and doesn't have time for that.
- During pilgrimages to Ste. Anne de Beaupre, I spent a week with Filipino Catholics. There was a great camaraderie and celebrating one's culture.
- It was very rare to have some Negro spiritual hymns sung during Mass. It brought great joy to some people in our tradition.
- Music could be more inclusive. And it might appeal to people across different ethnic backgrounds. Good music in our parishes really increased membership and participation. Multicultural music made celebrations more involved and engaged.
- I love the celebration of the Mass, that it has a certain structure. Especially Christmas and Easter liturgies. But I have been to a lot of Churches outside the Catholic faith and am impressed by their music ministry. We could have more uplifting music like you might see at other Christian Churches - we could also learn about fellowship from these Churches. Even though I love our celebrations, I do see fellowship and uplifting music lacking.
- In Chicago, I went to a very small African American Church where there are 50 or 60 people, most of whom were elderly, but the music was part of the prayer. Everyone was involved. It was fantastic. After every single Mass everyone went to the Church hall for coffee and doughnuts and get caught up. I was there as an outsider but from the first day I went I felt welcomed and part of the community.
- I know I am not always putting in enough effort to make this happen myself.
- Mass in Africa was a very different experience people felt welcome to sing in harmony, clap and dance.
- At RCIA I dressed in traditional head gear and comments from parishioner were "what is she doing here dressed like that?"
- A Black Jesus in the Christmas creche was surprising and inspiring.
- Celebration still uplifting even though not reflecting my culture. Music ministry did inspire.
- If we played the sitar and tabla in Church what would happen? How would that be viewed? I feel it would not go down well. I brought in liturgical dance when I was a vice principal - it was thought to be scandalous by senior members of the Church.
- Social Justice perspective- most of the priests who have done a good job - would be considered on the fringes - feel they "take chances" to speak out for injustice. Most inclusive and meaningful liturgies I ever attended. These priests speak to people in real situations in the real world.

- If Canada is truly multi-cultural - what about including different cultures to enhance Mass? We live in a global community - need new ways of imagining, how to represent that through worship. Does not only have to be of dominant culture only. There is often expectation of doing these things for free - artists need to be appropriately reimbursed.

### Moving Forward

#### As a racialized person to which issues in society might the Holy Spirit be inviting our Church to pay closer attention?

- The format of leadership in the Catholic Church is priests and bishops having the vast majority of power. It would be different if anyone could be a priest or bishop but since only celibate males can be priests or bishops, it cuts out all women and the majority of men. This issue of leadership in the Church relates to clericalism. Issues about Church structure could also be addressed.
- The Church moves very slowly compared with society. Sixty years ago the role of women was changed and society recognized that they did not have their proper role but the Church seems to be stuck a little bit. I think we should give women more of a voice. There are so many talented and qualified women who would do an amazing job in that position
- I would like to see reading the signs of the time in terms of leadership, who is eligible to be a priest and recognize how much we parishioners contribute, working in the background.
- We also need to move forward in making youth a priority. We need to meet them where they are at. Because they do not adhere to the rules of the Church, they are not treated well. We need to meet them half way. We should not tell them what they are doing wrong when they come to the Church but what they are doing right.
- We don't treat members of the LGBTQ community well. We say they can come to the Church as long as they are willing to change. Reaching out to LGBTQ people is important.
- Consciousness of the climate crisis is missing. *Laudato Si* really moved me. Don't hear much about climate change from the pulpit. I wish that homilies would spend more time thinking about these issues – how could I live more simply, be a better steward, mitigate climate change.
- The pandemic made us look at the way we are living - seeing a need for a simpler, less consumerist life. That is an area where the Church has some very practical values. It could strengthen us spiritually if we were to pay more attention to it.
- The elderly during COVID were waiting for communion. There was no reaching out - no contact from their Church or support. Only contact was for One Heart One Soul contributions. Very little pastoral care - structures of the parish not used to support people. In Trinidad - deacons brought communion to the home bound.
- The Poor. Corporal Acts of Mercy is the constitution of the Church. Shepherd not taking care of the sheep - neglect, being abandoned. Perhaps as lay people we understand role of community better than the priests.
- What decisions at the parish or diocesan level should involve the laity?
- What decisions should NOT involve the laity? Pretty much everything should involve the laity, they should be involved in all decisions that affect the life of the Church.
- Serving on a parish council helped the priest get a sense of the pulse of the congregation, it was not about telling the priest what to do. After that priest left, there was no commitment to hear the voices of parishioners again. It should be more collaborative, needs to be built in structurally even though I don't believe in mandating a structure for leaders.
- It is very important to have parish councils, there are very few mechanisms for people to get their voices heard. This is a common experience that it is very difficult for people to have real serious conversations and input. It is a top-down structure.
- The lack of accountability is a serious problem. In one parish if the priest had an annual performance review, he would have lost his job. We don't have anything like that in the Church, the priest is there, he is in charge, but everything depends on him agreeing or not agreeing.

- Lay people can feed clericalism and not challenge the clergy on issues that are important. Church must be more inviting - at Anglican Church they know my name! Has to come from the top. Nobody talks to you - sit in pew, leave. Church has to reach out.
- Male orders versus female orders - female orders not stuck in function of saying Mass - can deal with environmental and social justice issues.
- ALL decisions would involve the laity because we are the Church. Since Vatican II- we are the Church but there has been resistance. Hierarchical structures are very difficult to change- main concern is moving up.
- What key message do you wish to communicate in this consultation on synodality?
- Social justice issues are central – racial justice, the environment, LGBTQ issues.
- Jesus reached out to the people on the margins and brought them in, we need to do this too, if we are going to follow in Jesus' footsteps.
- We can learn about God from the marginalized.
- As parishioners we feel we need examples that relate to our world and our lives at this stage in history, salvation history does speak to us but we need to speak to people's experience of the world as it is right now.
- A Possible model:
- Create a parish mission statement that is said at each Mass, developed in conjunction with ministers and parishioners - have a parish ministry team.
- Outreach to the homeless. Like the De Mazenod Door at St. Patrick's Church. See the signs of that ministry in Church - bathrooms accessible to the street people in the summer. Can talk to people coming to be fed. Spending money on the homeless. Be a humble Church. The priests share cooking, cleaning. Have dogs. Dogs are in the Church and in the school - make human and relatable.
- Masses streamed, so accessible to all. Co-responsibility of laity and pastors. Visible preferential option of the poor. Involve youth. First communion ceremony arranged informally for Grade 12 students who had not made first communion. Should not be institutional to receive Jesus. Humble and people-oriented Church would stop loss of parishioners to other Churches.
- Need a Global structure that represents the whole world. Need to appoint more cardinals like Cardinal Czerny.
- Fr. James Martin - creating an inviting Church. John The Baptist required conversion first then belonging, but Jesus required belonging first then conversion.
- Pope Francis - Jesus did not exclude people.
- Fr. Bryan Massingale's work on inclusion in the Church. He uses the framework of the penitential rite - first telling the truth about the role of the Church in slavery and racism, then having a firm purpose/ intention re: reparations and take steps to amend the harm done and only then, celebration. Can't gloss over these steps.
- Is there any hope we will be heard??

## Spanish Speaking Catholics – May 11

### Listening

The main support for a solid spiritual life usually comes from parents. For one of the attendees, it came specifically from his mom. She has been the engine for living the Catholic faith. Also, this person believes the partner one chooses for life is essential to keep building one's faith. "With my wife we talk about how we live the faith day by day, and this helps so that the grace of God guides us with the time we are living."

Another attendee shared their life experience and explained how their mother had a time that was lost and visited protestant communities but thanks to her previous catholic foundations this person kept their faith as Catholic.

In my two experiences as a Colombian there were many groups for children, young people, apprentices. Here children are not given a specific focus. We cannot compare the levels of understanding and attention of children

with that of adults. This is the same with young people, there is no focus for them, I feel that their voices are not heard.

Depending on the country, the approach may be different. In my experience in Canada, I feel that the opposite happens. We listen to so many. I feel that as the Catholic Church we listen to many points of view and we become lax, permissive and we lose the horizon of what our faith means. We have been to 3 parishes and they have all been very remote from the community. I want to think that it has been because of the COVID that I have perceived distant.

I feel a shyness or lethargy of lack of initiative on the part of the priest. We limit ourselves to the ritualism of every Sunday at Mass, living the sacraments in a "social" way, and forgetting the reason for the sacrament as such. I feel the Church does not know that or doesn't listen to our need to have a solid community; we don't want to go to Church as silos as if it were all what a Christian need to do.

### Speaking Up

There are many topics that worry me and I don't know how to talk about them or how to understand and handle from the human, faith and spiritual dimension this sexual expression that nowadays has been handled in a more open way... as Catholics we say that we love the sinner not the sin... we do not know how to handle this new expression that is more notorious here in Canada than in my country... it has been difficult for me to assimilate it, talk about it and put it into practice without feeling uncomfortable because of my Catholic faith.

The Church is formed by human beings, and we can fail... Unfortunately, the Church has failed more than once... like my brother for example, when he does something wrong, I can still talk about it... but topics like the subject of pederasty and the medieval age... we don't talk about those topics, and we let that type of experiences pass, we do not talk openly about what happened, what was the reality of the time. Or like in British Columbia... when there were found dead children and although this happened many years ago I feel that as a Church we did not converse and got educated about it. In the future it will be more complicated... we need to understand how things happened rather than defend it.

I feel our Church body have become very neutral. We are permissive, we do not maintain the strength of faith because of the errors in humanity. We think that avoiding these topics would be better than talking about them.

Many times, we are attacked externally by people from other faith or not faith at all and as catholic we are not prepared to explain or we are not working as a Church to be able to talk about these situations, not only about human rights, or race but also political issues, for example look what is happening with Russia and Ukraine... we don't know how to talk about that from a religious perspective.

In my previous country it was the same, we only prayed for the best but we never talked about political issues and I feel that we need to be able to talk freely about any topic and not see our faith as an independent dimension of the human being.

### Celebrating

I feel that Eucharistic celebrations in my parish are very rigorous, and there's a lot of protocol... if they were more flexible or joyful, we could have a different perception as Christians and more people would be interested in joining us.

I feel that here the celebrations are pragmatic and concrete, and the opportunities to internalize have been lost. For example, during the liturgy of the word, specifically during the reconciliation where we recognize that we have failed, here in Canada we are not given the opportunity for that silence and recollection with God. At the end of the Eucharist no homage is paid to the Virgin Mary... no Hail Mary is prayed... forgetting that there is a mother who intercedes for us. In none of the 3 parishes that I have attended have I seen any of those two points. I believe reconciliation should not be left aside, and sometimes the Eucharist is so short that we do not have that moment with God.

In my community we have a space for the Legion of Mary every 8 days, the group has been there for 12 years. I was the president, and it is done every Thursday. I think that each Church has its characteristics. With the only priest we have, we are encouraged to do the rosary, or songs to the Virgin, it is very similar to the Latin community. We pray the rosary before each Eucharist. But what I feel is that we have to remove our fear of COVID and go out like our brothers to harvest souls. We are not afraid to go for walks or to shopping malls, but we are still afraid to go back to Churches and celebrate the Eucharist.

### Moving Forward

I have not been able to see training courses in the Bible, understand the catechism, train ourselves and transmit our faith with criteria and knowledge of the cause. It would be good if this were publicized by the community and thus be more part of our parish.

We need training, in my Church we are trained but on very specific issues, I like to be involved and active with my community and in my opinion, we have to be the ones to look for those opportunities and ask if this exists.

In my country I was part of a training group on how to read the Bible and then we went to parishes and had spaces for conversation, but here we need to be more participatory with our training to solidify our faith.

We need more groups where we learn more about the Church, a homily on Sunday is not enough. We must learn to be educators of faith in our families. How are we going to educate our children in the faith if not even we have our clear knowledge?

### Closing Remarks

Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of building community. Do not allow the changes in our society, and the foundations left by Jesus to be lost. It is okay to listen to everyone but not to be permissive to the point of wanting to change our catechism.

## Interfaith Session - May 16

*The following faith communities were represented: Anglican, Bahai, Jewish, Muslim, Roman Catholic and United Church of Canada.*

### Listening

**From the perspective of your faith tradition, how do you listen to God? Where do you hear God speaking to you?**

- Not ask for things in our lives but to ask God how to implement his desires in our actions- recognize Jesus and Moses and Mohammed and Krishna as equal- Hindus Buddhists- if we deny one manifestation, we deny God.
- Privately. See it privately and see it in collective actions. Hear God speaking to me through people's protests. Obedience detachment, open self through meditation and guidance that comes. Agree with the Bahai- most open view- the Bahai. Loving conversation. Through service- when serve humanity- hear God in my heart. People, things, music sometimes when not expecting to hear God, not always in a formal way.
- Meditation-formal and informal
- Relationships- including ones of service -give a sense of community, loving conversation
- Liturgies, singing, walking
- Nature, walking by the lake, quiet times, looking over my day, when I am falling asleep-can awaken something you did or didn't do at that moment of transition from consciousness to unconsciousness
- Reading something poignant
- Working with people who are trying to make things better
- In service to others
- Meditating and thinking about the scriptures and how they apply to my life

### **Describe some ways that we could listen to God together as people of faith?**

- Listen to how people do social action in their groups
- Eat together
- Interfaith gatherings and shared liturgies
- Liturgy is more than words
- Shared scholarship and study
- Prayer together- take action together, serve humanity together then we hear God. Members of one body.

### **What helps us to listen to God together? And what gets in the way of us listening to God together?**

- Eating together
- Praying together
- Going to Church together-all faiths-experience the joy of being together to celebrate our blessings and prayer
- Joining together in worship
- Elevated conversations based on spiritual truths
- Assuming a posture of learning- not paternalistic towards other groups
- What gets in the way is ourselves
- Every day is a challenge to do what I am asked to do
- Not listening to people who are different from me
- Different values, things that divide us, make it hard
- Politics gets in the way.
- Don't know how to approach -fear of offending

#### **Speaking Up**

**Can you share any examples of when you as a member of a faith community have spoken up or acted with another faith community to address a common concern?**

- Lived in the Yukon in an Indigenous Community. Saw a need among the children for healthy recreation and fun. Sourced 200 pairs of roller-skates, and gave them to the children. Created a track that they could skate on. Real community effort.
- Supporting Syrian family - working together with other faith groups to serve humanity.
- I watch our refugee family and wonder if my faith would sustain me the way theirs has sustained them; they pray five times a day-such devotion. Their faith is an anchor for them

### **What areas could we be speaking out about together and acting on together?**

- Public policy -advocate for justice and peace
- When we vote -in a way we are speaking out together- inspired by our respective faiths.
- Leaders should issue more joint statements- the way they used to in Canada
- Not enough for the leaders to make pronouncements-the message needs to get down to the grassroots of faith communities. We are quite insular, do not do enough together at the community level.

### **What hinders us as people of faith from speaking up in unity with each other?**

- Tribes/ labels - compartmentalizing ourselves - problem. Don't know how the world can fix that. We find a home where we are comfortable. Call yourself something and then you are not the other? We try to own God.
- Faith is like water - colourless formless and pure however when in a receptacle- takes on colour and shape- we tend to focus on the receptacle than on the water common in all our faiths. We tend to look at the receptacle not the water.
- Sometimes we don't speak out because of differences; we need to find points of unity.

- I am reading a book called *Circling the Elephant* - everyone is holding a different part of the animal and all think they know what it is.
- Would God really expect humans- who are so diverse- to have one religion that contains all goodness and truth? No one way-many paths

### Celebrating

**Can you identify an interfaith or ecumenical celebration or experience that inspired you in your spiritual journey?**

- Walking into spectacular Bahai temple. Never knew anything about it. Began to explore.
- Growing up in NY - parents took him to all different Churches in town, Jewish synagogue, told about Islam, trying to be fair to everybody. As a result, each of groups thought they were right and the others was wrong. How could that be right when truth was single thing. Rejected religion until in mid-20's and reinvestigated- address ourselves as human beings - there is only one God- do we really have to right to personalize the message and own it? We need to open ourselves. Question- are we sure about God? 1, 1000, none? We all have an instinctive understanding of what is good and of goodness. If say one God- get people saying, no, there is no God. Treating human beings as brothers and sisters. Notion of A GOD- can be potentially divisive.
- Interfaith communities - most commonly when we attend funerals - we don't get into other people's spiritual homes, unless we are attending funerals- opportunity to observe rituals to say goodbye – different and can be inspiring can be deep communication over the death of a member that they love and care about. Death the universal existential experience. You can see the value and depth of the community you are experiencing. Everybody on the same wavelength, connecting and comforting. Can start to build interfaith communities- pet peeve- let the people who are sharing this communion be involved and speak together.
- Bahai community invites people from all sorts of different places. We joined devotional gathering – become best friends - say prayers from whichever background you are. Zoom best thing since the invention of the wheel. 3-4 devotionals a week for people to get together – no judgment- talk freely. Interfaith, all welcome- same thing for junior youth 11–14-year-olds and children of any background free of charge – educating next generation - on the youth. NO proselytizing. Good human beings. Better community. Teach life skills together to build community. Has to be inclusive - Catholic Church can do this - have to be open to everybody.
- Many years ago, with my granddaughter who was in a social gathering - speaking on the topic of God. She said God is my conscience.
- When living in Iran as a young girl, went to England around 18. Walking down street - lady gave pamphlet and asked to come pray – sweet thing! Never invited to go to a mosque in Iran but in a strange country was invited to go into a Church - did not know what was going on - noticed everyone had a little thing covering their head but was not made to feel a stranger - thinking of welcoming other people to what we are doing. If our intention to help people to become more connected to our Creator - what a wonderful idea. Love the openness. We need to educate each other - get rid of prejudices.
- After my wife had to go into a nursing home (MS/Parkinson's), I went on the Camino. 31 days- walking with total strangers and carrying my life with me. Until you arrive at at Santiago - asking God - why was I here? Then joined other pilgrims as they rang the big bell and watch the crowd of worshippers meet St. James to thank him for the spirit of Jesus' mission to Portuguese and Spanish people. That was a walk that now makes me reflect on synodality. I understand the walk of faith. Glad to join in it.
- As a Catholic, I like the liturgy in Latin as it allowed me to feel at home anywhere in the world.
- It's not part of our [Catholic] tradition-never been encouraged. We should be more involved and more proactive.
- The celebrations at Chautauqua Institution provide great ecumenical experience. Worship services that include scriptures, sacred music, prayers, sometimes communion. You don't even know what faith the other people belong to, but everyone is united in prayer and fellowship.



- What we are doing here is a celebration. “Where two or three are gathered.”
- Oneness brings fruits, allows me to share with others. Many rivers, one ocean.
- Two specific occasions when I realized we are all one: a Jewish funeral where I was struck by the singing of 2500 year old psalms; and an Anglican liturgy using Taizé chanting. I discovered the ‘architecture of religion.’
- Sacred space-contemplation and meditation.
- Washing of the feet; singing together; Indigenous Healing Circle; Muslim wedding, Women’s World Day of Prayer; discussion of the Apostle’s Creed; Mandela’s Interfaith Seder in South Africa;

### **What are the fruits we have received from celebrating as we walk together on the path of faith?**

- Fruits of celebrating and walking together are:
  - Knowledge of or oneness - we don’t know about our oneness.
  - Sacred knowledge of all the other faiths which can help us move forward to the future.
  - Personal knowledge from my own investigation - not waiting for someone to teach me.
- As a child of military family, I lived on an air force base. The only two religious buildings were a Protestant Church and an Orthodox/Catholic one. Everyone used them and I learned that every service might be different, but we could celebrate everybody’s holidays.
- Appreciation of how different faiths express culturally, multi-culturally. I attended a Black Pentecostal Church in the US - African descendants.
- World Meditation for Ukrainians and Russians - communal meditation with stories of encouragement from all around the world-experience the ground of being.
- Truth is discovered as we work in the community - when the person we are serving is touched.

### **Moving Forward**

### **Where do you see opportunities for better interfaith dialogue, mutual understanding and action?**

- Hoping world-wide conferences – “building vibrant communities”- service in whatever areas required. Education, economic parity, brining joy. Not intellectual. To share joy and optimism. Mankind is one human family - focus over next 9 years- “Brace Yourself” form Bahai World Centre. Every community has responded. Plans have been going on for almost 70 years.
- We will worship in Spirit and in Truth (John’s gospel) .
- Speak out against injustice. We are people of privilege; we must learn to be generous.
- Stopping authoritarianism and promoting service and justice.
- Welcoming and hospitality, being invited into a community, a sense of being welcome and invitation .
- Any act of service we do for another human being-there is no division.

### **As a person of faith, what are your hopes and dreams for our human journey and what are the next steps in moving towards that dream?**

- Do we see faith as a starting point to a question or as the answer to the questions? Look at it as a starting point rather than to an end point-limiting to be the end point.
- Never know where God is going to inspire the heart of someone.
- Hopes and dreams for humanity.
- Find areas of commonality- move forward in hope and optimism .
- Move out of the vertical theological ideas and listen to the grassroots.

### **If you could say one thing to the bishops who are meeting to look toward the future... what would it be?**

- Openness. Welcoming others in.
- Go in with an open heart and open mind-see what happens-listen to other parts of the world.
- Focus on point of unity with ripples going out.
- Don't let the Church be a stumbling block in the path to the divine.

### **One Word to Conclude**

Hopeful, hope, passion, courage, unison, warmth, grounded, communion, helpful, reflection, love, togetherness, oneness, love and light, outrage, goodness, gratitude, privileged, inclusion, presence, gift, generosity.