

FULL SYNOD REPORT
PASTORATE OF ST. LOUIS AND ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
January 1, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Underlying Principles of the Synod Discussions

Our parishes are a part of a global Synod process called for by Pope Francis: *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*. This process calls for the Catholic Church—at all levels—to engage with Catholics and non-Catholics alike and listen to each other. The aim of the process is to renew our ability to live out our mission and build up our communion in our own particular time and place. As Pope Francis frequently reminds us, synodality is not a one-time event, but an invitation to an ongoing style of Church life.

At the beginning of the synod process, Archbishop Lori encouraged us to keep our eyes on Jesus Christ. He said we strive to maintain *“fidelity to the authentic faith of the Church through which we encounter the person of Christ in a real and a living way. . . . Within the household of the faith, there have always been differences of opinion, and there will always be such, until the Lord comes again in glory. Yet, not one of us, from the best-educated to the newest inquirer, is “above” the faith. Rather, all of us must accept it with the childlike simplicity of heart, while remaining alert to the signs of the times.”* (November 1, 2021, *Catholic Review*)

As Catholics we are all members of the body of Christ, an image that St. Paul often uses (1 Cor 12:27). We begin our journey on the day of our baptism. From that point forward we are all works in progress. None of us loves perfectly, believes perfectly, prays perfectly, or acts perfectly. We are saints in the making!

The Synod Process in Our Parishes

Our two parishes, St. Louis and St. Francis of Assisi, held lay-facilitated synod sessions in February and March of 2022. Parish volunteers wrote down the comments of the synod participants, trying to the best of their ability to capture their major concerns and ideas. In these sessions parishioners and participants shared their life experiences and stories of faith. In doing so, they also expressed a wide variety of comments about the parishes, the Archdiocese, and the Vatican.

Our two parishes held a total of 20 synod sessions over the 2-month period. There were sessions for parishioners at-large, young adults, retirees, teenagers, school parents, and for parents of special-needs children. There were approximately 380 participants.

These comments from the Synod sessions will be used to help guide our parish planning and strategizing for the future.

Three questions were posed to the participants.

- Question 1. What do you find valuable or encouraging in the Catholic Church today?
- Question 2. What do you find discouraging or disheartening in the Catholic Church today?
- Question 3: What do you hope for in the Catholic Church in the future?

MAJOR THEMES

Community Life and Welcoming

Community life at the parishes is characterized as supportive, warm, friendly, and welcoming. The parish offers a variety of parish activities to suit the needs of a diverse community. Synod participants commented on “a feeling of unity in the parish and sense of belonging.” There are many activities for all ages and especially kid-friendly activities, such as Vacation Bible School. The church offers opportunities for participation and volunteerism for all people—all ages—continuing into retirement.

Additional comments included like-minded parents who focus on providing their children with religious education. Parents are engaged in ministry and “our parish has a sense of community and families with shared faith and shared commitments.” It was noted that the “church continues to seek those who are astray.” Also encouraging was the faith of our young people, and for the archdiocesan and high school programs. Activities seem “better for kids than adults, though adult programs are improving.” One remark noted the connection between faith and communal participation by stating, “The more I become involved in the community the more my faith deepens.”

The theme of community and welcoming was evident in what is discouraging or disheartening about the church. The dominant concerns identified include: the loss of parishioners and Catholics, a church that appears to be irrelevant, especially to youth/millennials, and a desire to be more inclusive and welcoming of all people.

Other comments from the groups included:

- *There is not enough community-building after Masses.*
- *We need more people engaged in the pastorate.*
- *Too few young adults, the “20-30-year old’s are fading from the church” and “Not enough young families in the pastorate.”*
- *Not enough focus on children and youth, “Losing kids in transition from high school to college and beyond”*
- *We are not always welcoming of LGBTQ+ persons and offering support for families. Need to include LGBTQ+,” “The non-recognition of gay relationships/marriage is hurtful.”*
- *Parents not coming to Mass, “our kids are not coming to Mass, getting married, having their children baptized.” This should be the number one priority of the church.*
- *Parish is now moving toward more rigidity.*

Synod participants expressed the desire for an increase in “welcome (for) the disaffiliated and those on the margins” and to be more welcoming “even to those ‘not in the clique’.” People wish for us to reach out to help others, re-engage those who have left the church, be more open and inclusive, and “spread Pope Francis’ welcoming attitude.” One group mentioned the idea of having a “drop-in center.” Specific groups were identified as needing additional welcome, acceptance, and support:

- Young families
- Persons with disabilities
- Recent immigrants
- “People that don’t fit (the childless)”
- “People who are missing”

Being welcoming and reaching out to youth and young adults was a high priority. It was noted by many that we need to “bring back 20–40-year olds.” It was suggested that “leveraging technology” and social media might assist with this task. The loss of youth and young adults is seen as a loss for the young people themselves and for the pastorate; and we need to better understand why this is happening.

Building more community is desired by many and is realized in three ways: 1) increase in community-building and personal relationships, and 2) social activities: “socials around Mass times, more fellowship, coffee and donuts” 3) “more people engaged and involved in activities . . . show the church can be fun.” It was suggested to “resume seniors' group” and “encourage everyone’s gifts.” An “Increase in effective evangelization . . . and of missionary discipleship and outreach to the disaffiliated” is included in this future hope that also extends to “diversity, especially racial and economic.”

The aspiration for unity also arose in this area. The connection was made to increase our “unity to help the marginalized.” Comments in this vein include, “Hope for unity in our faith community and that at the end of the day we are called to follow Jesus. We are all Christians. We let too much of the “stupid stuff” come between us.”

The Synod process was named as a hope for the future with some groups expressing their fear that their voice will not be heard. Comments include:

- *“I hope that the pastoral leadership/pastor is onboard with the insights of the parishioners.”*
- *“I hope they know we want to be part of where our parish is going.”*
- *“Hope everyone has a voice, and those voices don’t get “squashed” as it goes up the chain.”*
- *“I am so thankful for this process. It reminds me that I love being Catholic; at a really local level we felt comfortable in sharing our thoughts, and to think that the idea of this Synod started with the Pope!”*

Abuse Scandal

By far, group responses named the sex abuse scandal as the most discouraging or disheartening aspect of the Catholic Church today. Several issues within this theme were articulated such as: the ongoing nature of the scandal, that problems still exist, the often poor care for victims, feeling betrayed, the cover-ups, moving priests, and how poorly it’s been handled. Comments often belied the degree of anger, frustration, and sadness that is still felt today.

While counter-intuitive, the sex abuse scandal engendered some positive comments, some groups articulated that it was encouraging that there has been “some attempt to correct past mistakes,” the church has been “reaching out with humility and acknowledging our imperfections,” and that “it’s good that the Vatican is still addressing the sex abuse scandal.”

Other comments from the groups included:

- *The church/Vatican has unlawful ability to relocate priest found guilty of sexual abuse. Priests (and bishops) found guilty of sexual abuses should be treated as criminals (not just moved around).*
- *Haven’t been honest and open about the sins of our church (pedophilia).*
- *More effort to heal the victims, and to acknowledge our mistakes, and to say we are sorry.*
- *My trust has been broken when a priest I know was accused of abuse. This has made it difficult to trust people in the Church; the cover-up caused a break from the Church for me; I don’t trust my priests today.*

- *The Church was slow in recognizing the extent of the sex abuse problem. This was a failure in responsibility and obligation to deal with the problem.*
- *Lots of processes in place to monitor the parishioners for abuse, but the abuse stemmed from the clergy.*
- *The Archdiocese seems to have an issue with handling cases of abuse. It begins with the stance of guilty first and doesn't keep parishioners informed about the resolution of the case.*
- *There are other scandals in church run institutions (nursing homes and residential schools).*

Participation of Women

The role of women in the church was a theme that often connected to leadership in the church and the desire to provide women with an authentic voice, role, and decision-making.

Group comments included:

- *The role of women is constricted in the church. Women need more ways to participate, like in the Bible.*
- *Why can't women be deacons in the church? Women in the early church served in this role. Why can't women be priests?*
- *The Church is sexist.*
- *This is obviously a Vatican question, leadership roles for women.*
- *We need other ways for women to lead (would this have prevented some abuse?)*
- *There is a lack of women's input within church leadership.*
- *Sexual discrimination.*
- *Women can't move up.*
- *Sexual disparity in opportunities.*
- *"As women have moved up in society in roles, there is an expectation the women have been growing in opportunities in the church.*
- *This also applies to the LGBTQ+ community.*

The role of women rose in the hopes for the future church. Some named the following:

- *"Focus more on role of women"*
- *"Define the role of women in the church"*
- *"Empower lay people, especially women. Ordaining women and married men. Greater women's voices"*
- *"Women deacons"*
- *"It hard to explain to our kids, especially our daughters who have questions on women roles and want to see leadership at the altar."*

Church Leadership

When considering what is encouraging in the Catholic Church today, many groups identified the leadership of Pope Francis and their general excitement of him as Pope. The groups discussed how Pope Francis leads by example, his teaching, communication, openness, and approach to having an open heart for other religions and how he emphasizes the core values of love, joy, and hope; they felt that he "humanizes faith." They found Pope Francis well-spoken about issues; a great spokesperson for the church; and that he is inclusive, cares for creation, and has inclusivity around culture and gender.

More locally, groups expressed their encouragement for Archbishop Lori and his support for the pro-life movement. It was noted that many youth attend the annual pro-life rally. They also appreciated the archdiocese's commitment to new schools.

When pinpointing specific aspects of the church that are discouraging or disheartening, church leadership was named in reference to bishops, the Vatican or Pope, and in more general terms. The strongest of the responses was in relationship to the bishops. Comments include:

- The bishops are creating division in the church, there is division against Pope Francis; concerned with resistance against Pope Francis and the contention seen at higher levels of the magisterium. Lack of unity among Church leaders.
- The bishops lack an understanding and connection with everyday Catholics, they are out of touch, lack of transparency, and there is no USCCB accountability to the people.
- Inconsistent messaging by bishops that leads to confusion. From the top down, too many bishops are not speaking straight.
- Bishops too political. "Our faith is being politicized." Entanglement between communion and politics. "We need more Catholic teaching, and less political talk, inconsistent application of rules regarding reception of communion."
- Priests should make more of a stance and not be afraid of making waves (vaccination, politicians, communion). Our bishops and priests are not acting as leaders today because they are not speaking clearly, the truth.

In terms of the Pope or Vatican, groups shared that:

- There is mix-messaging from Pope Francis ("wishy-washy"), bishops, other leaders about church teaching, homosexuality, watering down of message.
- Vatican need to address sins of the past (i.e., Canadian residential abuses).
- The Vatican has not properly reported or dealt with homosexuality in the church.
- Vatican is trying to please the world, rather than follow the church teachings (catechism).
- The Pope seems to back off on Catholic stances, which seems to dilute our message, in exchange for the "big tent."

And general comments about church leadership stated there is "corruption in hierarchy, hypocrisy in church leaders," a "lack of humility of the church and leaders in a flawed church, a "lack of transparency, especially financial transparency of the Vatican." Other groups discussed dissension in the church and wondered if "we can have differences in opinion and still be united?" Concerns also included the "minimizing roles of the laity" and that "clergy are not supported by their superiors, and it questions the heart of the church or the institutions."

While other groups said they feel "like the Church has become more judgmental and less welcoming." And that "rules and expectations are perceived as strict or closed minded, the Bible is twisted into a weapon to suffocate other viewpoints." Some were discouraged by a perceived rise in "homophobia, sexism, and not accepting other religions," and others want more "diversity in Church leadership (laity, gender, and cultural communities)."

Participants wish that church leaders at all levels (parish-Vatican) are more transparent. Comments reflected a range of hopes from "we need stronger bishops and priests who teach the truth" to "my hope is that we throw out the knuckleheads who stand in the way of Pope Francis. I pray that Pope Francis' way really catches on" to "we need to hear the reasons why the church does not respond to

differing voices within the bishops, cardinals. There needs to be a response to help the faithful navigate.” “Hope the church improves how it get people to do things, heavy-handed, dictated approaches don’t work, pivot to how to accomplish its goals without telling people what to do or telling them they are wrong.” At a more local level, it is hoped that archdiocesan announcements of priest withdrawals “is kinder, more gentle.”

Additional comments of hope in this theme include:

- *“Church leaders need to take their duty seriously and engage with the parishioners”*
- *“There should be an investment in training of priests and lay leaders”*
- *“The Church has to regain its lost moral authority”*

Church

As groups shared what they found encouraging or valuable in the Church today, the institutional nature of the church arose. This was characterized by a strong appreciation for the universality of the church including its rites, rituals, sacraments, and Mass (“the structure is valuable: Mass, religious education, baptism, the sacraments come together to unify us in the structure of faith”). Every country has Mass in the vernacular. In the US, with growth of Hispanics, it’s important to have Mass offered in Spanish.

One group observed it this way “it grounds us even when things might not be going well.” People value that we are a part of a wider community, and that “no one owns the church, it is universal, it is world-wide. We are the church—are the people.” Within this framework the church’s traditions and saints, and role of Mary are meaningful (“the saints bring hope and inspiration”). The Church has strong values (religion, family, and work).

The social teaching of the church is admired. The church is in the world, helping others; people are proud that the church is the largest social service organization in the world. The church “has always emphasized service. The challenge used to be: “what we did for the church. Now it is what can we do for our community.” Groups were grateful that the Pope made Ash Wednesday a day of prayer and fasting for the War in Ukraine, asking us to pray for people of the war.

The Synod Process itself is encouraging. Groups are excited about it and find the process is valuable and encouraging. Some noted that, it “seems like the church is losing followers, so it is encouraging that the church is looking for feedback.”

Sometimes there is a divergence in what groups find valuable or encouraging about the church.

Comments that reflect this diversity of belief include:

- *The “adaptability of the church over time” is encouraging*
- *“Progressive groups are good” (future church, music is wonderful, women in church need to change)*
- *“The church can change but it is careful and deliberate to discern change; does not bend at every whim.”*
- *The “church survived for 2000 years because of the Truths of the church” and “because of strong priests who do not water down the catechism (lead us to heaven, not lead us to sin”).*
- *“For the Vatican, more openness, more accepting to gay and lesbian population, acknowledging that they can be a part of the community, more acceptance.”*
- *Love lay ministry and lay people’s participation in the church.*

Some groups named that the church “gives us a roadmap and a guide,” that it is “an army for prayer, and good, and souls.”

When it came to naming what is discouraging or disheartening about the church today—the church as an institution—as distinct from our parishes/pastorate was identified as a specific theme. What is discouraging is “the church” and what is/ or is not happening within it. Responses here, as in many of the themes, are on a spectrum.

The moral voice of the church is a concern. Groups cited:

“too much focus on single-issue (abortion, euthanasia); politicization of voting on single issue; not enough focus/condemnation on abortion, church has lost moral authority on abortion; church isn’t focused on justice and clarity of beliefs: what’s a sin; church/world is not paying enough attention to child sex crimes; capacity to retain Catholic church values in our institutions; political bi-partisanship had divided the church; the bishops’ silence on justice issues, our bishops should be examples of a moral compass, and above any one political party. Large Catholic family: For years the Mom didn’t go to communion because as a 28 year old mother of five who discussed birth control with her parish priest, he denied it, with the expression, “Men got to have what men gotta have.” So, she used birth control, but didn’t go to communion for year. Parents divorced when they were forty.”

Tension within the church and how the church engages the world is a concern. Groups cited:

“Church is getting in the way of personal faith by its involvement in agendas and certain rules, its driving people away; rules and pastoral accompaniment; ultra conservative churches are not allowing the church to move forward. Polarization in the church (liturgy war-Latin Mass), radical traditionalists, some of the things are tied to sins of the recent past and sense of arrogance of being really Catholic; the division within the church; dissension does not serve the church; the splitting into camps of conservatism vs. liberalism does not serve the church. We need unity in our church, not suppression, strong messaging from the church. The church is not relevant, not traditional enough. Concern that the church is/might change (become more worldly). Concern in renewing the church in a different way; the hypocrisy of preaching love, yet we are anti-gay and anti “Black Lives Matter; this gay person has walked away from the church due to judgementalism. We are supposed to be a church under one leader, so the fact that some bishops are not even participating in the Synod process is a problem; why are some bishops and clergy opposed to the Pope? It crushes me that people get into high positions and don’t get the mission of the church.”

How/if the church is responding to youth and young adults is a concern. Groups cited:

“Failure of our church to meet our young people where they are right now. We do everything in our power to question things, but the church expects them to do what they teach with no discussion. The church is excited about young people, and willing to engage with younger generations. Though there seems to be a resurgence of young adults in the church; LGBTQ+ often feel they don’t belong. Sometimes the church makes youth turn away; the church does not engage young adults; resistance of middle schoolers and high schoolers of the change in the world and the church-especially.

Other concerns cited by groups include:

“Individualism in the church, the archdiocese is remote, distant; need to see more diverse role models in the church. Church needs to be more intentional and focused on diversity. Disheartening that we don’t do enough events/celebrations that are diverse. Need to make Catholic school accessible and affordable to everyone. It’s easy to point blame at someone else. As church we should start with introspection and self-examination and look at others with compassion and love. I have a problem with the wealth of the

church. We could do more good if some of our things were sold. I feel that the church is under attack: churches, statues, and cemeteries are being defaced. Lack of branding, public knowledge for church and all its good and charitable works. Other religions have strange and misguided thoughts about Catholics. Maybe provide tools for us?"

Participants' hopes for the church reflect our diversity as a pastorate, and range from: "Incorporate new traditions from the diversity of our community to engage the wider church" to "we emphasize one true church, return to basics" and "traditional values church needs to change," to "clarity in what the church stands for; get back to Jesus," "hopeful and excited that the laity had a voice through the Synod," and "hope to break the political divide in the church."

Many hopes reflect the social teachings of our church rooted in human dignity:

- *"The church can be a place of healing, refuge, hope; church will lead society"*
- *"Listen to the cry of the poor, marginalized, and immigrants"*
- *"That the church accompanies, ministers to, and integrates children with disabilities/special needs in all aspects of parish and school life"*
- *"Hope the church can offer more for divorced men/women"*

The hopes of the Synod participants also reveal the desire for unity within a diverse church:

- *"Unity in the church from the Vatican to the parish level"*
- *"I hope that the Church grows in a way that represents its diversity and universality"*
- *"Be more accepting and less judgmental about the diversity of opinions and beliefs"*
- *"Get to the point where we are all under the umbrella of all Christian faiths (ecumenism?)"*

Better marketing and communication is a theme touched upon when groups shared the following:

- *"Show why it is good to be Catholic"*
- *"Learn from the good things that are happening in other parts of the church"*
- *"Hope the church better communicates the value of the church"*
- *"Better branding, and better marketing. Social media presence needs to be better, relevant, maybe less serious, self-aware. Leverage the tools of technology to help the Church grow and stay relevant in the world."*
- *"Church needs to be adaptable and give us the tools to explain our teachings."*

Though relatively low, some groups commented on finances and the church.

- *Lack of transparency on financial issues.*
- *Better financial distributions. "Money givers get too much decision-making."*
- *The Vatican seems to have a problem with finances.*
- *Need more ways to donate at Mass, add Venmo.*

Priesthood and Diaconate

Different strains of concerns about the clergy arose from the group discussions. These include:

- *The retention of "a celibate priesthood, the church isn't using married priests. Women not being priests. Should Catholic Church allow women and married men be priests?" "Fifty percent of church can't be priests or deacons." "Priests not being able to marry." "Current system is irrelevant and priests' life experiences are not relatable."*
- *Deeply "patriarchal culture is imploding the church." Minimization of role of the laity. "The clergy has too much power and are acting in self-serving ways."*

- *I hope there should be more diversity especially in priests and deacons (right now we have heavily white priests and deacons).*
- *Priests are not carrying out the teachings of the church more clearly.*
- *“Young priests are being restrained or criticized by the people because of different styles of teaching or saying the Mass that is different than previous priests. Shuffling of priests because of this is disrespectful.”*
- *The fear of burnout for priests and the decline in the number of priests was also discussed.*
- *“Priests seem removed from family life.”*

Participants hope that there will be an “answer to the priest shortage” and increased “preparation for the vocation of the priesthood” and the “family’s role in vocations.” Others noted “more esteem” is needed for priests and religious and “greater support for clergy as human beings. They are not just property to be moved about.”

Other aspirations include:

- *“Ongoing formation and education for priests.” “Formation for pastoral skills, not just theological knowledge.”*
- *“The possibility of married priests and or women priests; Hope the church can explain why priests can only be male; explanations given so far do not ‘make sense’.”*
- *“It’s nice having deacons; Greater power to deacons in the church.”*
- *When priests are accused of things and then exonerated, why aren’t they welcomed back respectfully?*
- *“We need full disclosure on the status of our priests, e.g., the clearing of Fr. Nicodemus Konza.”*

Lay Participation in Parish Life

Groups identified three aspects of our parishes and pastorate they found most encouraging and valuable. These included:

- *The Synod process, “It is good that the church is listening, and we can give input.”*
- *The sense of community, welcome, acceptance, connectiveness within the parishes.*
- *Faith formation for young people and youth programs are strong. “CYM is a plus because it pulls all students together—even those who are already in Catholic school can attend. CYM is a place to worship, to go and learn more about the Word of God. Young people are encouraged to participate in Mass today through the readings and music ministry.”*

Also encouraging are:

- *Approachable and competent staff (priests, homilies that connect life to faith, seminarians). Priests are “important and welcoming which helps parishioner feel welcome, they show up at events, very engaged in the parish.” “Deacons are wonderful additions.” Appreciated “the role that staff played in keeping the church together during Covid.*
- *Working together as a pastorate, “bringing pastorate together, social and volunteer opportunities, programs and speakers, video created by St. Louis, adult faith formation, trips and pilgrimages.” Pastorate is better. Diversity, both ethnically and spiritually. Pastorate’s commitment to the school. Pastorate is trying to get more people involved. Leadership encourages us to get to know one another better. During the pandemic, we were so proud that St. Louis School remained open.*
- *Appreciation for the adult education that the parish does on history and changes in the church. Especially during the pandemic, exposure to resources to grow in faith (materials on YouTube, social*

media, podcasts, etc.). Participation in *Discovering Christ*. Acknowledging that people are at different stages in their spiritual journey.

- The “SPRED” organization – “it accepts all people, makes me feel welcome.”
- “Church is about relationships: they supported me when caring for elderly parents.” “St. Francis Assisi has saved my life.” “Parish is supportive of its parishioners.” “The parish is welcoming, friendly, and open.”
- Food trucks, social activities, and faith-based activities available for parishioners. The parish has a lot to offer, Bible studies, ACTS, etc., is helpful if you are willing to participate

When sharing what is discouraging or disheartening about the church today, many voices shared concerns about their parish or the pastorate. These concerns ranged from “practical matters/pastoral practice” to “pastoral vision.”

Practical Matters/Pastoral Practice

- Discouraged by the lack of school and religious education programs that accommodate special needs children. Lack of teaching special needs kids to be altar servers. Eucharistic Ministers need to be better trained to give communion to special needs children.
- Lack of transparency and what is the basis of decisions that are being made. “Rules. 5-minute eulogies?” “Give reasons for change.”
- Parish staff doesn’t always follow-up; not always friendly over the phone or via email. Lack of communication. Emails have been sent with questions and concerns with no answer back.
- Misallocation of priests for ceremonies.
- Tension and power dynamics within pastorate.
- Lately, one of the priest’s homilies had a condemning tone.
- “Communications needs to be clear and more details (i.e., avoid incomplete information in announcements). Lack of transparency and understanding of the three priests who have left.”
- Cry room needs an update (things for children to use while they’re in the room). We need more children-oriented activities and family-based Masses. Young families seem to be losing involvement in the parish. Not many opportunities for parents with children under the age of 5.
- Believe that in the past, the parish has been ‘badgered’ for money.
- “Covid rules created dissention/division between mask wearers and non-mask wearers (even when the church had signs to wear masks)”
- Size of the parish is too large to feel connected.
- Disheartening that we don’t have more diversity in the community or do events/celebrations that are diverse.
- “Sometimes I don’t feel welcomed. The door is closed. I have a concern that some people can be made to feel unwelcome or not accepted.”
- Little or nothing for divorced Catholics to help them through those times and keeping their faith, they are looking for more acceptance. The course on surviving divorce helped greatly and disappointed that we currently don’t have an active divorce ministry. Other dioceses have more offerings for divorced people. Would like the blessing of our parish and diocese. Divorce ministry was not accepted; who is making the decision in the parish? What is the process for getting a new ministry?
- Need more clarity around sacramental guidelines and we need more empathy around applying the rules (e.g., baptisms, godparents).
- Discouraged by low attendance at Mass.

Pastoral Vision

- *What makes up a parish—People—need more people engagement. There is community participation to some degree, but not enough people participation.*
- *Many people feel good about the parish, less so about the larger church.*
- *Polarization in the church, when we attack one another.*
- *It's discouraging when making money is the priority, rather than putting faith in action.*
- *Covid: made a negative impact on the church, programs went away and did not come back due to abundance of caution. Local churches and schools, CYMs did not take advantage of many Catholic speakers who were willing to come to parishes, but we did not bring them in.*
- *No vehicle to help draw people in.*
- *People want to know more about the Bible.*
- *People have lost their sense of sin, so why go to Mass?*
- **Young people are not coming; they have moved on. Culture change. We are losing our children and youth. We need to be more focused on them.**

A strong desire of Synod participants is that the Synod process and results are incorporated into parish planning with attending goals and pastoral responses. Groups shared that the Synod process is a “great idea,” “should be done often,” and we should “harness the enthusiasm of the Synod.” Another group asked, “Where does the Synod go from here?” Still others were hopeful that “the whole Synod process (does) not lose sight of how to be holy, we don’t lose sight to make sure our clergy is leading us toward holiness.” And that the “the conversations we are having for the Synod will make their way to the Archdiocese, and then to Rome.”

Groups identified the pastorate as a locus for their future hopes by sharing the desire to strengthen the “sense of community in our pastorate,” for “integration between parents, school, and church,” for an “increase in communication within pastorate and . . . better communication at every level.” They hope the parishes will work “together to share best practices,” and others stated the aspiration to “be involved in the local community and to improve pastorate marketing within Fulton/Maple Lawn community - not everybody knows we are here.” Some groups inquired, “what is the process for asking a question or bringing up a concern? Where do I start? Looking or searching for answers,” and “when will we return to communion under both species?”

Many comments involved the qualitative nature of the pastorate and seek an “increase in love for one another,” “my hope is that the church will feel like home, where you feel welcomed, fed, and energized,” we “want a welcoming, accepting, friendly diverse church community,” “we hope for more inclusion and more community building activities,” and “my hope is that the church gets back to the core teachings of Jesus: loving one another.” Another group shared that, “as we emerge from the Covid era, families are encouraged to return; everyone is welcome; and there is respectful tolerance for people’s decisions for health-related decisions.”

Within the pastorate, participants commented on the need for outreach to and engagement with “young people in general, especially young adults,” and “keep trying to reach out to young people.” One group was also “optimistic about the younger generation.” Others hoped that we “will be more welcoming and inclusive to all people: married, single, divorced, separated, or widowed. Reach out to the disconnected – the people we are missing.”

Pastoral Accompaniment and Church Teaching

Small group ministry models were commonly identified as encouraging or valuable. These include, Rebuild, ACTS, Christlife, Discovering Christ, etc. Parish initiatives that allow both “individual and group faith” are appreciated. The emphasis on catechesis and evangelization is valued and people are looking for more opportunities and they appreciate the use of “social media and foster our ability to find resources.”

Youth faith formation was another area that arose. “The process of Confirmation is thoughtful, and care is being put into the process.” It is “transformative to the child.”

Groups also mentioned:

- *“Steadfast in the tenets of the faith”*
- *Church gives an understanding of the true meaning of life; the pursuit of money, power, possessions doesn’t work.*
- *The Church seems to be moving from an emphasis on rules to a personal relationship with Christ.*
- *Church teachings are stable, comforting, and something I want to instill in my children.*
- *Our involvement helps us deepen our faith and supports the teachings of the church.*
- *Back to basics: God is love*
- *The Theology of the Body is a part of the clear guidance from the church*
- *As parents we are called to raise our children to be saints.*
- *Ability to find joy every day; facing a spouse’s sickness with peace and calm because of strong faith.*
- *There is life after death: the resurrection of Jesus is so important.”*

Several issues that are discouraging or disheartening surfaced in regard to faith and church teaching. Many groups agreed that a lack of understanding and knowledge (theological teachings and traditions) of the faith by adults and youth is a concern. For some, there was a lack of clarity about what the church stands for and “too many gray areas.” One group shared, “we Catholics have lost the ability to teach/talk in plain language. There is too much gobbledygook in official church correspondences...we need to speak in a language we all understand. Every homilist needs to be able to articulate the teaching of the church to ordinary people.” Another emphasized that “the church needs to address social issues (not just issues that reflect directly on the Catholic faith) from the pulpit and through messaging and discussion groups. They hope for a more inclusive church that reflects the modern era.”

The following teachings were named:

- *“Need better understanding of the Eucharist and real presence...”*
- *“Keeping holy the Sabbath’ and traditional values”*
- *“Lack of Catholic social teaching and tie-in to rest of the world”*
- *“Church needs a broad discussion on the theology of sexuality; Hope for a reform in teaching around sex and chastity – something that is more accessible and less shame-laden for women; Homosexuals are welcomed in the church, but they should be redirected to a life of chastity. The church is watering down the facts that marriage is between a man and a woman. ...the eventuality of marriage is procreation. Human sexuality issues have not been dealt with clearly and truthfully.”*
- *“Marian apparitions should be more publicly documented and published. “*
- *“Church needs to move on with other topics and issues besides abortion.”*

Pastoral application of church teaching to specific situations and people was also a strong concern. Specific group comments include:

- *“Gay and transgender people don’t feel included in the church. Acceptance of the gay community is very important. Lack of acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. Excluding people is not at the core of what we should believe.”*
- *Divorced people feel a lack of acceptance.*
- *“Seem to notice that after Confirmation, kids stop going, not interested. After confirmation they need other church activities, like roles in Mass or events. There is a loss of involvement (or opportunities for involvement) of young people after confirmation; The younger generations and others have a concern for universal social issues, but do not perceive the church as active, or concerned. These issues could come up in homilies or small group discussion, for example, the War in Ukraine. More opportunities for small group discussions around current social issues. Students even at Catholic schools, do not have the same beliefs; they receive varying education, or poor education in our catechism.”*
- *“Divorced Catholics need to feel more connected to the church: annulments are arduous and difficult; the rules around receiving communion are inconsistently applied; need support groups for divorced and widowed persons. Discouraged by young adults who marry outside of the church, by people marrying someone whose been married before (without annulment); and separated Catholics raising their children without faith.”*
- *“Women are leaving the church to become pastors in other denominations; we need more opportunities for women in leadership.”*
- *“Faith starts in the home, even if the kids go to church formation, but it really starts in the home (weak home reinforcement of religious education)”*

In articulating their hopes, participants discussed faith, church teaching, and faith formation. Groups identified diverse opinions and, generally, would like more or better catechesis or focus on:

- *“Passing on of faith; Improve catechesis cradle to grave; education for young and college age”*
- *“Clarity in what church teaches and why the church believes it,” and “catechesis on moral themes: more authentic teaching on what love should be; a firmer stance on gender confusion.”*
- *“All the social teachings of the church. Prayerfully focus on the common good, even if it goes against the pride of the Catholic church.” ‘Hope that the Church would read and follow Pope’s encyclical Laudato Si on cry of the earth, the poor, and our interconnectedness.”*
- *“Want to know more about the richness of the Catholic faith.”*
- *Scripture, Bible studies, and faith sharing; strengthen adult formation.*
- *“Abortion,” “Catholic social teachings-to teach the entire breadth of pro-life.” “Reframe the issue of pro-life as beyond abortion.” “To recognize that respect for life includes care for the environment.”*
- *More education on Mary and her role in our faith.*
- *“Fostering a personal relationship with God”*

Others talked more about the faith in general, or how the church teaches or engages the world including:

- *“Modernize the message and the way we need to carry out the message of the gospel to meet challenges of modern times.*
- *“The Greek way of looking at perfect is to be flawless; but the Hebrew way of looking at perfection is to walk with God.”*
- *“Church should address societal changes where church is no longer viewed as important.”*
- *“People will embrace and live out the truth of the Scripture and the truth of the church.”*
- *“The church will have a renewed mission of evangelization, sharing the good news of Jesus.”*

- *“The church continues to engage the world, remains open to change as appropriate, and keeps the core of our beliefs.”*

Pastoral care was cited as an encouraging marker of the Church. Groups recognized that people are struggling in life (divorce, sexuality, gender) and mercy should be our response. The Church is here to talk, and that people need support with personal hardships.

Catholic Social Teachings

Our parishes are supportive and appreciate the church’s social justice teaching and action. Most commonly, groups identified the church’s charitable works and direct services (engagement in the world) as encouraging or valuable. Comments included: *“(I’m) proud to be Catholic, social service institutions, and education; community service; explanation and opportunities for Catholic social teachings. Catholic Charities as the largest charity in the world. Catholic Relief Services, its effectiveness.”* *“Our current Pope has seen poverty at its worse and has a perspective on it which has guided his messaging to help the poor.”*

Others named our *“pro-life commitment,”* and the commitment of time and money to those who are less fortunate, e.g., the poor, the disadvantaged. *“Serving others, remembering those who in need and bringing people together and helping, welcoming. Service opportunities at the parish are great, plentiful, and diverse.”*

Prayer and Worship

Groups identified the Mass as encouraging and valuable from a few different perspectives. These include:

- *Education about Mass and rituals and the presider taking time at the beginning of Mass to teach. “Priests are trying to teach from the pulpit. Can see individual passions in the priests. Their dedication to their teaching is amazing.”*
- *“Presence of the Eucharist is awesome, there is enthusiasm of the people.” “People desire authenticity in the Mass.”*
- *Having Mass and ministry during the pandemic, our social media presence, was so important.*
- *“The importance of the Eucharist keeps me with the church.”*
- *The availability of devotions and sacramentals.*

Other comments include:

- *Parish music program has been great, even through the transition, helps get into prayer.*
- *Glad kneelers are back*
- *Love the sacraments and liturgy*
- *The chapel at St. Louis feels like home.*
- *Seeing families at Mass together.*
- *Attendance at Ash Wednesday, stations of the cross each year*
- *Covid has given us the perspective on the importance of communion and Mass*

In terms of prayer and worship, a general concern was fewer people attending Mass. Groups also cited the following:

- *“No special Mass opportunities which cater to youth that promote social aspects. Youth don’t feel connected in the Mass”*
- *“Pope unsupportive of Latin Mass; Rift between the New Order (current Mass) and the Latin Rite”*

- *“Liturgy needs more reverence; Too much concern for ritualism—bowing, striking our chest, etc.”*
- *“Layout of many churches takes focus off the tabernacle, people no longer know what to look for, what they are bowing to.”*
- *“Disappointed that the Eucharist is not open to everyone, especially for people who have been married more than once and the gay community”*
- *“Homilies are not relatable; congregation needs “concrete advice” during homilies so they can apply the faith to their real lives.”*
- *“Church choir: can we have contemporary music?”*
- *“St. Francis community feels divided between kneelers and standers.”*

A few groups commented on their desire for youth and young adults to be incorporated “as liturgical ministers beyond altar servers.” Some hope for an increase in the “invitation and transparency on how to become an EMHC and other liturgical roles.” Additional hopes in terms of prayer and worship include:

- *“Hope to hear homily that is more personal”*
- *“More emphasis on confession and its availability”*
- *“Informal, everyday prayer is more integrated”*
- *“Can our liturgical ministers be more culturally diverse?”*

Groups mentioned that they are encouraged that the “Church promotes personal relationship with Christ.” And that “regardless of sin, Jesus continues to show us how to live. They also appreciate that the “Modern social media gives people access to the national Church.”