

SAINT AUGUSTINE ~ SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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SAINT AUGUSTINE ~ SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER PARISH SUMMARY

PARISH SYNOD FEEDBACK RESPONSE – SAINT AUGUSTINE ~ SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

Method:

Once the parish received the letter from the Diocese (October 2021) requesting that we undertake parish listening sessions to gather feedback for the Synod on Synodality, the Pastor shared all materials and online links related to the Synod with the pastoral associate and the Pastoral Planning Council (PPC). It was decided that the Communications Committee of the PPC would take the lead on the response effort. An in-person listening session was held on December 6th in the evening with all parishioners invited to attend.

The listening session and Synod materials and links were shared on the parish website and in the weekly eBulletin and paper bulletin over several weeks leading up to the listening session as well as announcements after masses. Twenty-five parishioners attended the listening session. After a brief prayer service and introduction to the overall Synod process and purpose, the attendees broke up into groups to listen to each other. The session was facilitated by lay leaders. The pastor did not join an individual group.

Over approximately one hour, attendees were guided to discuss each of the 10 Synod questions provided by the diocese. Each table had an answer sheet and a scribe was chosen at each table to capture feedback. The listening aspect of the exercise was emphasized with open active listening to each other rather than debate or conversation about each question. We did not have each table report back to the larger group in order to save time.

Two virtual listening sessions were held subsequently in January, facilitated by lay leaders and conducted as described above. A total of six parishioners attended. In addition, individual response forms were provided via our website to capture individual responses. Ten individual responses were received. In total, forty-six parishioners provided feedback.

The Communications Committee subsequently gathered all of the feedback and compiled responses into one document. We then summarized themes from responses to each question in order to draft a parish summary for submission to the Deanery and the Diocese. We will post our summary on the parish website to share the report with parishioners. In addition, the summary will be reviewed by the PPC in order to identify unmet pastoral needs and plan action steps to meet those needs.

The following themes were captured from the compiled responses:

1. The Journeying Companions - Who do we envision the “Church” is and how do we share our faith in and out of our community?

Responses reflected a range of understandings of “church” as everything from the Roman Catholic hierarchical structure to all people who believe regardless of religious affiliation. Journeying along with others in lay ministry was called out. The perception of an insular RC church was mentioned several times. Faith sharing in community is represented by verbalizing



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our faith when the opportunity arises. In addition, we practice our faith in church-sponsored ministries as well as secularly-sponsored social justice activities.

2. Listening - Do we feel heard by the Church and do we as a faith community need to listen better?

Many parishioners responded while differentiating between “being heard” by the Church hierarchy and the local parish. There was a fair amount of skepticism and cynicism expressed regarding the institutional church listening to the people. The example of women’s voices not being heard in matters such as women deacons and priests came up numerous times. The variability of the extent to which we feel heard by our priest depending on the particular priest was also a theme. Most respondents did not address the second part of the question regarding the people of the church needing to listen better. Where this was addressed, discernment was a theme i.e. active listening and prayerful Spirit-driven response.

3. Speaking Out - Do all feel free to communicate their feelings with those most involved in the Church? Why do Catholics feel uncomfortable about speaking about their faith outside of their Church?

There was a generally negative response regarding feeling comfortable talking to a priest or the hierarchy. Many referred to church teachings being inconsistent with their life experience e.g. full acceptance of LGBTQ persons, “right to life” issues, birth control, and the role of women in society vs. in the church. They also referred to obstacles to sharing their faith externally in regards to their own beliefs vs. church teachings and behaviors of the hierarchy (e.g. around the sexual abuse crisis and the cover-up) as reported in the press. “Having to explain what kind of a Catholic” they are to those outside the church was mentioned as an obstacle to verbally sharing beliefs.

4. Celebrating - How can the Church and its people be more inviting to those not celebrating the Mass and Holy Eucharist with us?

Many expressed the feeling that the church presents itself as too “rules-based” and exclusionary (e.g. LGBTQ persons, those who use birth control, those who are divorced) to portray itself as inclusive. Both spiritual and secular events open to the public have been held at our worship spaces in the past (pre-Covid) and have drawn non-church members in. It is not clear that those attending have then joined us for mass. Many respondents mentioned ongoing and continuous invitations to join us can have a positive result.

5. Co-Responsible in the Mission - Do we as a Church people foster communion and unity within our church amongst different cultural and economic backgrounds and within our larger communities with different religious denominations? Do we support the Church and surrounding community?

While many examples of diversity within our parishes and contact with other religious groups in the community were cited by respondents, the main barrier mentioned was that efforts



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at outreach must be promoted by the pastor. Individual pastors do not necessarily value these efforts enough to promote external outreach. Lay leadership is not empowered to undertake these activities, the pastor must be willing to take part.

6. Dialogue in Church and Society - How does the Church and its people fit in with the whole of the greater society in which we live, culturally, politically, civilly, and economically?

Many found this question to be confusing. In general, respondents felt that there are ways that the church should not fit in with the greater society e.g. with commercialism and consumerism, bigotry and political divisiveness but that the hierarchical church should do more to fit in with the surrounding culture and society e.g. the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons and women's leadership.

7. With the Other Christian Denominations - How do we find in other Christian denominations a common purpose and vision that can bring our faith communities together?

Most respondents understand our common purpose with other religious groups as based on social justice efforts. This requires dialogue on the local level which is lacking. The laity are not empowered to lead these efforts. Willingness to reach out to local congregations is not always supported by parish clergy.

8. Authority and Participation - Who do we see as the person in charge of the parish church? The diocese? What is our role in keeping the parish and diocese vibrant and full?

Both clerical leadership and lay leadership were called out equally by respondents. The barrier to lay participation and leadership most often mentioned was the variability of approach among priests leading to a lack of consistency over time. The one constant that was mentioned that maintains and nurtures ongoing participation was the presence of strong leadership by religious sisters who have remained with the people as priests come and go.

9. Discerning and Deciding - How do we see ourselves as part of the decision making process on a parish level? On the Diocesan level?

Very few respondents felt they have any say on the diocesan level. On the local parish level, understanding of decision making processes was not at all clear or consistent. Most feel they have no role in this.

10. Forming Ourselves in Synodality - Does the Church offer us enough to help us grow in our baptismal call? Does the Church remind us to grow in our faith continually?

In general, respondents feel as if the Church provides adequate opportunity for ongoing faith formation. However, based on responses captured from other questions, formation in lay leadership is lacking.



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