



Synod Synthesis - Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Diocesan Listening Phase - January to May 2022

Overall, the Synod process in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon brought forth feedback that reflected the great love and concern that many people have for the Church and its role and mission in the world. The Synod process revealed a great longing for authentic and respectful relationships grounded in the love and mission of Jesus Christ. It was also clearly evident that past and present hurts and tensions are keenly felt – by those who personally participated in the Synod as well as in their observations on behalf of many “absent” others who have walked away from their faith or rejected the Church. In their Synod reporting, many parishes, groups and individuals identified a great need for conversion, formation, and closer adherence to the gospel, as well as a need for greater collaboration, for a culture of love and inclusion, and a deepening of authentic relationships to bring about greater “Communion, Participation and Mission” in the Catholic Church at every level. Simply having a chance to gather and to reflect together in the Synod process was a blessing for many. At the same time, when it comes to listening, speaking out, and dialogue in the Church, in parishes, in families and in the wider society, many identified the increasing polarization we are experiencing: a source of division, strife and conflict.

The timing of the Synod in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly impacted participation in the Diocesan Synod Process, just as it has impacted relationships, attendance and participation in parish life. The anxieties, uncertainties and polarization created by two years of pandemic were raised in a number of Synod discussions about journeying together, listening and speaking out, and/or engaging in mission and dialogue, with some expressing disappointment in Church leaders for “giving in” to government restrictions during the pandemic, and others questioning how continuing strong divisions over these issues can be reconciled with the call to be a listening, inclusive, caring, faith community. Many participants expressed serious concerns about how to reach out and engage those who have not yet returned to active participation in parish life, even with the pandemic restrictions lifted.

The Synod process itself was welcomed by some participants as a much-needed effort to consult and listen to the laity, and some expressed great hope in what the Synod might bring about in terms of future directions. However, other participants questioned whether the Synod would ultimately have any impact or effect any change, suggesting that it was a meaningless undertaking since in their experience, the Church and its bishops would do what they wanted regardless of input. Some expressed concerns that the Synod process was being introduced in order to change or undermine orthodoxy / traditional Catholic teaching. Some said that there was too little focus on Jesus and the sacraments in the Synod questions and in the focus of the entire process.

Concerns about the Church’s structure of hierarchical leadership were raised throughout the Synod discussions, with many groups noting the lack of women in leadership and in Church decision-making – while many also noted that it is often women who are most active in parish life. Some voices in the Synod process were actively calling for the ordination of women and married men. Others strongly stressed the need to even more closely adhere to Church teachings, most especially on marriage, sexuality, and a greater focus on traditional liturgical practices such as the Latin Mass and Gregorian Chant. Others said that they felt inadequate or intimidated by an idea that there is a “right way” to be a “model Catholic,” and that they feel they are being judged by others in the faith community, and are not accepted. Others said a perception of Christians and the Church as judgmental and condemning is wide-spread, leading many to reject the Church.

The desire for community was a recurring theme, with some participants indicating that they do not find a sense of belonging and community in their parish. Many identified a need to create a more welcoming Church that warmly accepts people with respect and without judgment, and with love and care. For instance, many parish and other groups noted that those whose background, orientation, situation or lifestyle differ from “the norm” – for example, LGBTQ+ persons, divorced people, those of other cultural or racial backgrounds, and youth – often do not feel invited or welcome. The treatment and pastoral care of those who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, etc.) was raised as a major concern in a number of groups, with some especially questioning the “intrinsically disordered” term found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #2357. This perceived unjust exclusion / rejection was an especial concern for those participating in the Synod at Catholic high schools and at university (although a number of other parish and group submissions also concurred). Another group also said: *“The young people dream of a Church in which everyone truly feels welcome and cared for, and in acting on behalf of those whom they feel marginalized, they see themselves not as rebellious but as prophetic voices committed to speaking for those, they perceive to be voiceless, persecuted, and silenced.”* A number of Synod submissions expressed deep concerns about how people identifying as LGBTQ+ have been unfairly and even cruelly treated by Catholics and by the institutional Church. It was repeatedly suggested that the Church should set aside judgmental attitudes in order to embrace people as Christ would. Some groups, however, insisted that this would be a dangerous direction, indicating blessing or approval of lifestyles that deviate from Christ’s teachings – or as one submission stated: “sins against God’s commandments cannot be declared OK because of hurt feelings.”

Another great concern often raised during the Synod discussions was the devastation caused by clergy sexual abuse, and also the harm done to Indigenous Peoples by Catholic participation in colonization, particularly in running residential schools where children were deprived of their language, families, and culture, and where many were subject to abuse. Some Synod participants expressed disappointment that they hear little or nothing of these issues in their parishes. Some participants were very passionate about truth and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and were adamant about the need to actively address ongoing injustices. Others expressed a lack of understanding or competence on how to forge ahead in addressing the issue. Some very few did not feel the issue involved them or their parish.

***Discussion summaries: “Companions on the Journey”*¹**

Reflecting on the theme of *Companions on the Journey*, Synod participants recalled experiences in their parishes, with faith groups and movements, and in private moments on their own personal journeys towards Heaven. The journey itself was described by many parishes as a spiritual journey that contains a common direction and involves evangelizing, worshipping, and serving together. How these aspects of the common journey manifest themselves seems to be different depending on the size and location of the reporting parish. One group defined journeying with people as *“encountering each person regardless of differences.”*

Synod participants noted that companionship was vital for the spiritual journey as it provides a sense of belonging, togetherness, love, and mission. Submissions stated that companionship is often derived from participation in the Mass and through various other programs and services, such as RCIA, Alpha, marriage

¹ NOTE: the diocesan Synod committee proposed addressing seven topics adapted from the Vademecum: 1. *Companions on the Journey*, 2. *Listening*, 3. *Speaking Out*, 4. *Co-Responsibility in Our Common Mission*, 5. *Dialogue in Church and Society*, 6. *Discerning and Deciding*, and 7. *Truth and Reconciliation especially as it relates to Indigenous Peoples (given the importance of that topic in our local, Western Canadian situation.)*

preparation, lay formation, faith studies, and outreach to others. Other examples listed included the Synod itself, retreats, various forms of prayer, pilgrimages, liturgies, social justice work, working in Catholic schools, and living in community. One parish submission remarked that *“The importance of the Liturgy, as a place to express our communal journey together, cannot be overstated.”* Responses also indicated that those people who consistently participate in the sacraments and volunteer their time are those who are closest together on the journey.

Groups also reflected on who in their parish or community is *not* walking with them, and who seems further apart on the journey. One submission observed that anyone who is *“marginalized in our communities is marginalized in the Church.”* Groups shared thorough lists of those whom they believe are marginalized (these same lists were often repeated in other Synod sessions on other topics) – including the elderly, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, divorced Catholics, young people and families, single parents, new Canadians, non-Catholics, and Indigenous peoples. A number of Synod participants said the Church should provide a public and verbal apology to those it has excluded and accept them. *“The Body of Christ is incomplete without those on the margins,”* summarized one Synod submission.

Indigenous participants noted that *“We are far from walking side-by-side,”* and said that the Church needs to *“invite and integrate Indigenous men and women into religious and consecrated life.”*

Synod participants shared their perceptions of how journeying together is being challenged by many factors, including: decreasing attendance, lack of formation in the Catholic faith, the ongoing fallout of the pandemic, the end of “Christendom,” privatization of faith, the hidden harm of traumatic experiences, liturgical changes – or the lack of them, as well as the pain, anger, mistrust and disappointment caused by clergy sexual abuse scandals and residential school revelations.

Looking forward to how they could journey with others in healthy and life-giving ways, Synod participants shared the following:

- We need to share our faith through invitation, acceptance, and by reaching out to those on the margins.
- We need to listen, dialogue, and understand.
- We need to help each other develop our spiritual lives and focus on our personal relationships with Jesus.
- We need to forgive one another and the Church for the hurts that we’ve experienced.
- We need to recognize and utilize connections to Indigenous ceremonies in the Mass.
- We need to create meaningful avenues for our parishioners to connect and build community.
- We need to be open, intentional, and courageous in our interactions with one another.
- We need to passionately live our faith, set good examples, and attract others to join us on the journey through authentic witness to the love of Christ.
- We need the sacraments, prayer and collectively reliance on the Holy Spirit for guidance and wisdom.

Discussion summaries: “Listening”

Many groups identified the need for parishes to intentionally create a safe environment in order to build authentic relationships and trust, where people can speak freely, knowing that they will be listened to and heard. Barriers to speaking out include a lack of trust, and the tension between different cultures and differing world views. Some people also expressed frustration with “political correctness.” which they said does not allow them to speak freely.

Groups noted that at times some perspectives and some people are ignored by Catholics, parishes or the Church as a whole, and are not being heard / listened to, including newcomers, fallen-away Catholics, those who take issue with Church teachings, the elderly, homebound, sick, people of other cultures and races (including Indigenous Peoples), the poor, the addicted, the isolated, children, women, the separated and divorced, those who identify as LGBTQ+, and others. Several groups stressed that instead of “closing our ears” or ignoring others, we should be a witness through our faith, and give our attention to voices that are often silenced, voices we don’t agree with, voices that are not necessarily affiliated with our Church, voices of those who suffer and struggle with life, and voices of difficult people or those who are angry at the Church or who have been wounded by the Church.

On one hand, many participants said they personally felt listened to at their parish, particularly in small communities where there are close-knit relationships, or when a person has an active role in the parish. At the same time, participants in other Synod groups said they did not feel listened to at all by their parish or by the wider Church, had never been asked for input, and experience being “shut down” rather than heard. One group said bluntly: *“We are not listened to. The clergy always have the say.”*

A number of participants reported that they felt ignored because of age – whether they were deemed as “too old” to be heard, or “too young.” A significant number of women and young people in groups throughout the diocese strongly expressed that they are *not* listened to, and that their opinions are not wanted or are discounted by the parish or the Church. At the same time, some women said they do feel listened to and valued in their parish and in the Catholic Church – especially when it comes to involvement at the local parish level.

Some felt that listening is difficult in a Church culture where vulnerability is not fostered or valued. One group posed the question, *“Do all voices need to be heard?”* and wondered if voices who are sincerely against the Church are ones that should be listened to, especially regarding change within the Church. This group emphasized a need for forming our followers— saying that fruitful discussions about change in the Church could not happen without good faith formation. Another group emphasized a need for the Church to keep its core values, but also suggested that listening, adaptation and change are needed in order for the Church to thrive and to grow. Listening to people who are doubting or challenging the faith can be helpful in bringing awareness to “blind spots” or areas of potential growth in the Church, noted another submission.

Daring to question or disagree with Church teachings brought a greater feeling of *not* being listened to, while some said their deep spiritual desires and needs are not heard by parishes or Church leadership – for instance, in the longing of some for more tradition and orthodoxy. At the same time, some participants indicated that they feel particularly ignored by those who are determined to protect (or reclaim) a pre-Vatican II ecclesiology. Others indicated that they are viewed with suspicion by other members of the Church for simply asking questions, ostensibly because they are perceived as dissenting. One submission observed: *“People who resist change aren’t listening to those who see the need for it, and vice versa.”*

Discussion summaries: “Speaking Out”

When it comes to what “speaking out” means for participants, there were numerous Synod responses that described speaking out as an opportunity to dialogue, to be witnesses of truth, and to grow and journey together as a community. Groups identified that these things occur when speaking out occurs in safe spaces created by the Church and when there is mutual respect among laity, clergy, and the Church as a whole. Prayer, passion about an issue, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit were identified as factors that give participants the courage to speak out. One submission said : *“The Holy Spirit is calling us to see people’s hearts, seeing people for who they are, not for their ideas, angers, or passions, but to allow people to share*

hurts so they can find healing and truth." Some participants also shared several other factors that enable them to speak with courage and charity, including: trust, respect, being empowered, safe spaces, small groups, education or an understanding of the topic.

Complicating the laity's ability to speak out on issues in the world is an often-hostile relationship between secular media and the Church, according to a number of submissions. Rural participants reported more productive and respectful relationships with their local "small town" media, although often limited to Mass time advertisements and occasional event reporting. Participants expressed their appreciation for Church efforts to keep people informed. Others suggested more effort was needed for Catholics, parishes and the Church as a whole to communicate effectively.

When describing who they felt speaks on behalf of the Christian community, participants shared answers such as the bishop, pastors, parish pastoral councils, Christian organizations such as the Catholic Women's League or Knights of Columbus, the pope, and the laity. There were differing responses on the role of the laity in speaking for the Christian community. Some participants felt that the laity should be empowered while others felt the laity should defer to the authority of Church leaders.

Discussion summaries: "Co-Responsibility in Our Common Mission"

Discussions around "Co-Responsibility in Our Common Mission" included the ongoing problem of clericalism, and the need for lay people to be empowered in real ways. There is still a *"misperception that only consecrated and priests can share the faith,"* groups noted, and one group summarized: *"Some priests seem to want to journey with the rules of the Church more than (to) walk with the people."* Synod groups across the diocese said there is a need for all the baptized to *"have courage, commitment, and the excitement of their faith,"* with sound formation in Catholic teachings and an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ, grounded in a pursuit of holiness – saying this is vital if people are going to step up as missionary disciples. A recurring theme among many groups was the need for women to have a greater role.

Assistance is needed to help people prayerfully discern the gifts / charisms that the Holy Spirit has provided in order for them to take up their full role as disciples and evangelizers, said many groups. Some identified the need for a process such as the "Called and Gifted" program in intentionally identifying and calling forth the gifts of the baptized. At the same time, a number of submissions said that pastors, leaders and the structure of the Church must make room for the baptized/ the laity to actually exercise their God-given gifts fully.

Participation in the mission of the Church does not necessarily involve formal ministry in a Church setting, many pointed out, but is often a "personal" matter of responding to the Holy Spirit; providing outreach, witness, care and concern to those in need; and offering a "ministry of presence" lived in the world. Building the kingdom of God involves a re-orientation of priorities, grounded in the gospel and love of others, various groups noted. *"All members are called to participate. Our mission is to work with those excluded, the poor, inmates, black, and Indigenous. Let's build anti-racism by walking beside people, letting them know they are needed, let's work for common justice,"* urged one group (echoed by many others).

One individual submission called for: *"Helping those that are hurting from all forms of abuse heal, find their voice, be believed and listened to. Find tools for healing for both victim and the perpetrator. I do not believe reconciliation between abuser and the victim is always possible or safe for the victim."*

Sometimes, being a disciple means being "the lightning rod" another group noted: *"When people have an issue with the Church or there is a wound, they might unload on you, and in those moments, you are*

a lightning rod. It can be uncomfortable but simply listening and receiving what they are saying can go a long way in helping them to feel heard and become open to healing."

A number of groups said the reality is that not everyone is willing to make the effort to take up their faith and take co-responsibility for mission; some people have been wounded, while others feel shut out or unacknowledged; many don't even know where to start or would rather leave the responsibility to someone else.

Barriers cited by groups included a lack of prayer; fear; laziness; distractions; a lack of time; a lack of formation; feeling inadequate; pressures related to health, family life or economics; a loss of connectedness; conflict between faith and science; a consumer mentality of "what's in it for me"; and the pervading secular culture that insists on keeping faith private. For those who do get involved in mission and outreach, getting "burnt out," can end participation. Others pointed to the barriers caused by clergy sexual abuse, residential schools, the focus on money and accumulation of wealth within the Church, and broken promises (for instance, the TRC Bentwood Box promise to help Indigenous parishioners in Saskatoon obtain their own church building).

In the pursuit of our common mission, a number of different groups also identified various areas of concern that they said need more attention and intentionality by the Church and by all the baptized, including ecumenism; care for creation; effective faith formation for all (with many emphasizing this need for families, children and youth); greater participation in the sacraments; greater reverence for the Eucharist and in the liturgy; a need to support marriages; pro-life issues (abortion and euthanasia); justice issues; the scourge of mental illness and isolation; issues facing rural areas; reaching out to those on the margins (including LGBTQ+, divorced, elderly, poor, newcomers, Indigenous Peoples, shut-ins, prisoners); and finding ways to increase intimacy with Jesus Christ. Another submission said: *"Honor Indigenous ways. The Church is so rigid, they don't want to change. My ceremonies mean more to me than my Church... Combining both ways would build our relationship. We would then be more open to participating and teaching our children our faith."* In discussion of co-responsibility and common mission, many groups also had a range of concrete suggestions for the diocese and parishes to undertake to encourage co-responsibility and help people live out the call to mission, including formation programs, spiritual direction and changes to leadership structure in parishes and the wider Church.

Discussion summaries: Dialogue in Church and Society

Synod discussions about dialogue in the Church and in society in some cases touched on local parish happenings as well as within the wider community. Some groups were not certain what was meant by "diverse peoples" or even what actually constitutes dialogue – asking is it simply conversation or even gossip? Some groups addressed general methods of communication – bulletins, websites, phoning trees, group texts, webinars and online Zoom meetings – as part of the dialogue discussion. Several groups observed that their parishes had "very little diversity and very little dialogue." Asked about dialogue, parishes noted conversations in meetings or before/after Mass, during adult education programs, church functions, informal meetings, ecumenical events, sharing circles, as well as discussions held informally, at home. Groups noted that dialogue also happens "where people are at" – at the food bank, music festivals, community events. Faith-based or secular community groups providing outreach and working on social issues are often places of encounter and dialogue for Catholics who get involved with causes that "build the Kingdom of God," groups noted.

Although a number of groups noted that COVID has had an impact on ability to dialogue, even before the pandemic there was a need for improvement – given society’s increasing polarization. Another group noted that coming out of COVID could be an opportunity for new beginnings and a new, welcoming spirit in parishes that could seek to intentionally encourage more dialogue and discussion.

As for the reasons why there might not be authentic dialogue happening in parishes, a number of reasons were noted, including:

- Indigenous people have always been told what to do and were not asked for input;
- Fear cripples dialogue;
- We don’t know how to dialogue – thinking it is apologetics or debate or requires agreement;
- *“Authority can give the appearance of dialogue by using manipulative ways that are supposedly dialogue, therefore, it is not authentic because the outcomes seem to be decided beforehand. We call for more integrity and honesty;”*
- *“Catholics were not brought up to have ideas or dialogue at Church. They fulfill their obligation and leave;”*
- Not everyone wants dialogue;
- Often in trying to avoid conflict, we avoid dialogue;
- *“The Holy Spirit is inviting us to pay closer attention to many issues, but apart from an unwillingness to have them (discussions) in the first place, perhaps the problem is that some of the conversations feel too big and we don’t even know where to begin.”*

Addressing what authentic dialogue is, one group summarized: *“Dialogue is sharing of hearts and experiences,”* noting that it involves deep listening and authentic speaking. A number of Synod groups pointed out that authentic dialogue comes from authentic relationships. Without that trust, dialogue does not occur.

“The Church needs to pay attention to us as Indigenous people,” one submission. *“Meet us at our house, listen to our stories, sit with our people, walk with our poor, and accept our culture, beliefs, values, and spirituality. Be respectful of what we bring to the table.”* Another parish Synod group noted: *“We would do well to learn from our Indigenous brothers and sisters, particularly our Elders, who teach us that relationship is critical: by speaking to people instead of about them, by discussing lives and stories instead of concepts, by putting faces and names on abstract ideas, we can engage with one another on a level at which we can learn from one another as brothers and sisters and journey together.”*

The perception of dialogue at the parish level appears to depend on people’s experience with their pastors – some pastors are reportedly more willing to engage and encourage dialogue than others are. One synod submission questioned why Small Christian Communities are not encouraged by the Church as a place to build relationships grounded in faith and prayer. Synod discussion groups had a range of suggestions for promoting collaboration with neighboring dioceses, religious communities, lay associations and movements. *“Pray and witness! It is about being Christ to the other. Follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. People will forget what you said but they will remember how you made them feel,”* noted one group.

Discussion summaries: Discerning and Deciding

A common refrain among Synod participants was the central role that prayer and the Holy Spirit must play in discernment and decision-making. Many highlighted how the Synod is one of the first opportunities they’ve had to participate in Church discernment, because all too often the Church hierarchy makes a

decision and then communicates it to the laity. Many participants said that meaningful consultation should be more frequent, to obtain input and feedback, to collect and present information, and build community.

There were several comments about the persistence of clericalism in the Church today. While some participants said the laity should defer to the power and authority of the Magisterium, the majority said that the laity needs to answer the baptismal call and serve in the mission of the Church alongside the ordained, in a complementary manner. In closing, participants shared a number of ideas about how parishes and the diocese might grow in communal spiritual discernment. One parish Synod group shared: *"We need to trust the voice of the faithful, the Holy Spirit speaking through the Sensus Fidelium. There is great wisdom in the stories, experiences, lives, and encounters of the people."*

Discussion summaries: Truth and Reconciliation

The question of Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples was introduced by the diocesan Synod Team to the Synod process given its importance and priority in our local context, and given the Church's historical involvement in running residential schools. Some groups expressed that addressing this subject was difficult or uncomfortable because of participants' varying levels of understanding, knowledge and proximity to the subject. Some felt the Canadian government and society-at-large needs to take more responsibility in efforts toward reconciliation, while observing that most of the blame for the damage of residential schools has been placed on the Catholic Church. A small number of participants expressed a sentiment of "enough, let go of it." Other groups said that the Church needs to take more responsibility and have more transparency regarding Truth and Reconciliation efforts. The overall sense of these conversations was that reconciliation is greatly needed, and current ways of moving forward are not enough.

One parish Synod submission reported: *"These discussions were the most passionate ones, and there was a great deal of engaged dialogue, revealing a vast disparity in the understanding and perception of Indian Residential Schools and the harm done, as well as in the ways in which parishioners view Truth and Reconciliation efforts, and the responsibilities to which we are called."* Pervasive feelings were expressed by many about the Church's involvement in residential schools, colonization, and the Truth and Reconciliation process – feelings that included disappointment, frustration, anger, guilt, confusion, shock, and sorrow.

Input from one parish stated: *"reformation is needed in the Church"* and that *"reconciliation is not possible without healing; you need Creator God in your life to heal."* Indigenous participants noted: *"Our culture was strong; the settlers didn't understand us... We became lost and some are still lost."* A need to help each other through reconciliation was identified: *"Look deep within yourself for that spirit, reflect on your beliefs and values, learn with us and walk with us. Open up your minds, listen, let's walk together."* Bringing Indigenous languages and culture into the celebration of the Mass was also identified as a need: *"Let's treat each other as equals, and together let's change the mindset of others."*

To build reconciliation and live reconciliation and healing, participants identified the need to be inviting; to be open to listening; to pray; to walk in humility; to forgive and say sorry; to be vulnerable and honest; to acknowledge trauma and pain; to avoid prejudice, blaming and condemning; to show kindness; to work on ongoing personal healing and growth; and to recognize and overcome *"deeply-seated colonial attitudes."* It was also noted that *"love is stronger than past hurts."*

Groups said that to become more welcoming and open to Indigenous Peoples will involve building relationships -- visiting Indigenous Peoples, going to their communities and learning from them, and extending invitations to them as well. It was recognized that more education is needed for more Catholics to learn about history and Indigenous culture. Many said that they would like their parishes to be more

purposeful about reaching out in solidarity and friendship to the diocese's Indigenous parish, and to Indigenous Peoples, and about finding ways for meaningful inclusion of small but significant ways of bridging gaps and collaborating with Elders to ensure authenticity and respectability. Other observations and points were:

- *"We are called to learn how to be sensitive to the cultural ways and values of Indigenous people; this is a long and intentional learning journey for all, requiring time, patience and humility,"* noted one group of consecrated religious women.
- A university Synod group stressed the need to take action on recommendations presented in the Truth and Reconciliation process (Calls to Action).
- *"We need not to transmit anger and hurt but transform it and give it back as love,"* said another parish summary. *"Healing is required on both sides, and both parties need to do it together."*
- *"We have to live up our commitment to the survivors. Until that happens the past hurts will not be healed. We have Metis in our pews who have been hurt too,"* said one participant online.
- *"Participants shared how they really appreciated that the Synod convened a discussion on this issue that is so important for our Church and that similar discussion should continue to take place,"* stated another parish summary.

Conclusion – Summary and Next Steps

The Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality says: *"The purpose of the Synod is not to produce more documents. Rather it is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people's hope flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission. Thus the objective of this Synodal Process is not only a series of exercises that start and stop, but rather a journey of growing authentically towards the communion and mission that God calls the Church to live out in the third millennium."* This hope was echoed in responses about the Synod on Synodality as experienced in the diocese of Saskatoon.

Synod participants and groups across the diocese reported that many good things have come about because of the Synod process. Some group commented that there was a renewed spirit of coming together as a community; an experience deeper sense of unity; opportunity to pray and work together led by the Holy Spirit after being so separate as a result of the pandemic. Others were grateful to find a safe place to speak out without being judged. Another response indicated: *"There is hope and solidarity felt in knowing that so many people around the world are participating in this Synod process and trusting in the Holy Spirit."*

However, as another group observed: *"While being greeted with hope, this synodal process has also been met with a not-insignificant amount of skepticism on the part of the participants. Given past experiences with Church leadership, or even the feeling of insignificance, the question arises:*

- *"Is this synodal process just lip service?"*
- *"Is the Synod just to help people let off steam, will there be changes?"*

In many ways the Synod process has proven to be a call to action, with participants generally expressing a desire for change, improvement and renewal in local parishes, diocese, and the universal Church. One participant said: *"Vatican II was a breath of fresh air, and yet change is slow"*. People who participated in the Synod now ask the Church more practical guidelines. As another clearly stated: *"what we now need is compassion and less dogma."*

Areas, issues, and questions for "next steps" that were highlighted in the diocesan Synod consultation include:

- **The post-pandemic response of the Church** – How can the Church provide spiritual support and healing to those very affected by the pandemic—those who have left the Church hurt by the division caused by the pandemic, in particular between vaccinated and unvaccinated Catholics? How do we bring people back to Sunday Mass?
- **Providing pastoral care and support to those identified as marginalized** – How do we welcome everyone in a loving and non-judgmental way, while holding to the truth of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church?
- **Responding to polarized views of the Church**, traditional and progressive, that often creates division and confusion among the faithful – How do we reconcile different views of the Church?
- **Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples** – there is a call to a deep experience of conversion, healing and reconciliation. The local Indigenous parish submission said: *“It’s difficult to get others to participate in the dialogue. I sense apprehension from some people that I had asked to participate. I think many are still angry at the history of the Catholic Church and the unwillingness to learn about Indigenous ways. Many are still in pain and are broken because of past experiences I can relate to the generational trauma that has caused so much pain for our people. The words of the Pope were reassuring to many but not to all. I think this becomes a first step to building a pathway toward the road of reconciliation.”* Another question was: How can the Church find ways to integrate Indigenous spirituality into liturgy and Church life, including land acknowledgment?
- **Clericalism and empowerment of the laity** How do we create collaborative, diversified, accountable and transparent leadership? How do we create active participation of the laity and decentralize power of Church hierarchy? How do we achieve a shift from power to empowerment?
- **Role of women and the Church** How can women have greater representation within the Church hierarchy and as an institution, with a greater voice and more participation in the decision-making in the Church?
- **Youth, ecumenism, care of creation** How can the Church better hear the voice of youth and increase youth engagement and role in the Church? How do we increase awareness and attention to the at-times-neglected calls of ecumenism and care of creation?

Finally, throughout the diocesan process, synodality itself was highlighted as a new paradigm and new culture for the Church. One group said that this Synod experience has proven to be a catalyst for building community, forming connections, and showing people the joy that comes from journeying together, on a path of listening, speaking out, discerning and deciding. Many people were heartened by having the ability to be involved in something that deliberately and intentionally includes the laity. Another participant said: *“this is evidence that the Church is still living and breathing!”* One coordinator said *“There was a deep desire among many participants to carry this spirit of synodality, dialogue and journeying together forward in our parish culture”* – and *“that we need to start gathering again outside of Mass to build stronger relationships with one another.”*

This Synod has indeed offered insights into a new way of connecting us with God and with the Church. It has offered a way of moving forward together as a Church and therefore, many Synod participants would like to see much more consultative participation such as this in the Church, not only locally and in our own diocese, but nationally and even globally.

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon – Diocesan Synod Synthesis – Appendix A – The Process

In the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, parishes, groups and individuals were encouraged to participate in the Synod on Synodality through meetings, announcements, homilies, website and social media posts. After the launching of the Synod during Mass Oct. 17, 2021, celebrated by Bishop Mark Hagemoen at the Cathedral of the Holy Family and live-streamed online, a diocesan Synod committee began to work on materials, including introductory videos, a Synod handbook, and training sessions. Three online introductory / training sessions for coordinators and for all those interested were held (Jan. 5, Jan. 27, Feb. 16, 2022) introducing the process, the goals and the suggested questions compiled in a local [Synod handbook](#) adapted from the materials from the Vatican's Vademecum .

The diocesan Synod committee suggested addressing seven topics: 1. Companions on the Journey, 2. Listening, 3. Speaking Out, 4. Co-Responsibility in Our Common Mission, 5. Dialogue in Church and Society, 6. Discerning and Deciding, and finally, 7. Truth and Reconciliation especially as it relates to Indigenous Peoples, given the importance of that topic in our local, Western Canadian situation. A simplified version of the Synod questions was also developed for youth under 18.

Parishes and groups presented the Synod in a variety of ways depending on their size, context, and ability to coordinate – some parishes held only one or two in-person sessions, others held up to eight sessions, both in-person and online; some smaller rural parishes also had written surveys sent home with parishioners to fill out and return. The diocese also set up an online version of the Synod questions, permitting individuals to answer electronically.

Some parishes and participants found the entire process and the wording of questions difficult. Attendance at many Synod gatherings was small, and although the Synod process encouraged identifying and inviting participation from marginalized groups, in practice this was difficult to achieve. One parish reported that they took the process to a community hall rather than holding it in the church building in the hopes that this would invite participation for those who might not feel comfortable in a church – in the end, the only ones in attendance were active members of the congregation. One urban parish encouraged individuals who were actively attending the Synod meetings to go out to others in the community who were not in attendance, to talk about the questions being discussed and then bring back their input.

Of the 94 parishes in the diocese, 50 parishes participated in the process to varying degrees. Three groups of consecrated religious undertook the Synod process, as did the monastic community of St. Peter's Abbey, Muenster, SK. Other non-parish participation included groups of seniors from St. Thomas More Chapel worshipping community and from Columbian Manor residence, as well as participation from the local Emmanuel Community and OSG and St Mary's Hispanic community. Student / youth participation came through St. Therese Institute of Faith and Mission at Bruno, SK, as well as from some 100 high school students in the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools system, and from both St. Peter's College and St. Thomas More College campus ministry. There were 45 individual online submissions from those over 18, and four individual online submissions from those under 18. In addition, 12 responses to Synod questions posed during the three online coordinator training sessions were also collected.