

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

a. In the Diocese of Thunder Bay, who are the people journeying together?

In the Diocese of Thunder Bay, Ontario; we have a variety of people who are journeying with us. Ranging from our Bishop, priests, congregation, the baptised, most professed Christians and people who acknowledge a living God, his Spirit and his son. Over the past three years (since covid) a very small group are visibly journeying in faith and prayer at mass. We are all involved in the journey; Catholics, non-Catholics & those with no faith.

b. Who are those who are journeying with us from outside the Church?

As mentioned above we believe that we are all involved in the journey and in our community that involves members of other Christian sects, people who no longer attend mass (lapsed Catholics), First Nation/ fringe communities. People who don't self-identify as Religious however they respect our belief system and share similar philosophies & moralities of life. Concerns have been raised that with individualism and materialism on the rise it seems as though religion is becoming proportionately less important which leads to less people from outside of the Church willing to journey with us.

c. How can we grow in our common companionship with one another?

We grow with one another through positive communication, love, respect, friendship and by embracing the spirit of the Peace Prayer of St. Francis. We acknowledge that sometimes those seeking companionship are often reluctant to do so because of a fear of judgement or rejection, its our responsibility to have informal conversations to gain understanding of each other. Some Catholics are lacking in knowledge and an ability to explain their faith without sounding morally elite, we need to be more self-aware of what mentality we bring to the table in order to create a stronger bond. We can also grow together by asking the community to participate in our existing groups/initiatives; retreats, CWL, soup kitchens, food banks, women crisis centres and Knights of Columbus.

2. LISTENING

a. How does God speak to us through those whom we sometimes ignore?

For the majority of the time God speaks to us through our conscience and our personal reflections. Sometimes we tend to ignore those who disagree with us, including our priests when they are burdened with preaching hard truths.

b. How are the concerns of the laity listened to (especially women & youth)?

Ideally, we listen to their concerns by engaging in open dialogue however this question has shown light to a pattern of how many women don't feel like they are being listened to at all, especially as it applies to abortion & women in the priesthood. That being said we do have structures in place that's sole purpose is allow for women's concerns to be heard by our Bishop. We also have various groups that exist to support and assist any lay person, regardless of gender or age. The same could be said for the youth growing up in a secular world without any real interaction with religion, but we do have sport activities, food and chat times in hopes to get them more involved and talking.

c. What helps or hinders the listening process?

Our parish priests are with us at meetings and is a part of the discussions, this openness/ working together as a parish community helps people to feel safe speaking about their concerns. Even with our efforts there are still aspects of life that hinder listening such as being negative, being distracted, being closed minded to certain topics and the 'social media' mindset.

d. How do we integrate into our Diocese the contribution of Religious Orders?

We integrate by being supportive, giving financial assistance, recognizing their contributions/ values, and accepting them. We also distribute newsletters, involve women and youth in various committees. Religious Orders should put a very heavy emphasis on a prominent and productive school presence.

e. Do the marginalized have an opportunity to raise their concerns?

Our Bishop and priests are always open to discuss the concerns of any, however we can't help but feel like even their hands are tied by limited resources. We are also aware that a large majority of the marginalized aren't always receptive to the assistance they seek due to personal reasons like being too proud or assumptions that the church can't help beyond food banks. We acknowledge that sometimes the ones that speak out aren't always heard because depending on the topic we are not ready to 'walk in their shoes'. We are concerned that parishioners who feel marginalized might be the ones leaving and we need to have more outreach programs to help them.

f. What limits our ability to listen in our Diocese, especially to those who have differing views than our own?

There are a few things that have always limited us: for instance, the distance between our churches in the outlying area. There currently is no forum to hear different views so it might just be something we aren't even aware that needs to be addressed. There are also the strict, unyielding, and uncompromising doctrine within the Catholic Church that limits our ability to actively listen when we have no ability or leeway whatsoever to deal with concerns that are that are diametrically opposed to Church doctrine. We also all agree that there is personal level of responsibility among the parishioners to acknowledge when we get stuck in our own thoughts and are not open to listen to others; through the pandemic we have become more inward and haven't been reaching out to others like we had in the past.

g. How can we learn from the cultural context in which we live?

We are in the world, but not of the world. We need to know the culture well enough to avoid the dangers while taking advantage of the helpful aspects. A thirst for learning and critical thinking are required we can achieve this by getting together with others, sharing scriptural readings, being transparent, showing a valid concern for others, try to understand others' opinions and cultural values, be aware of cultural changes around us (world events) and attend cultural events as a group. Some parishioners wanted it to be mentioned that we no longer live in a cultural context where males dominate, and women fill inferior roles, so we need to learn from the cultural changes that have already taken place.

h. How well do we listen to those on the margins of society?

Essentially, we do listen to those on the margins of society however we have self-awareness to know that we might not be actively listening, do we parcel that active listening into concrete action to deal with the raised concerns? Probably not as much as should which was broken down to one of two reasons- our own agendas have taken priority and we have closed our minds or are our hands tied due to a lack of resources.

3. SPEAKING OUT

a. What enables us to speak up about our concerns in our Diocese & in society? What hinders us?

Our beliefs along with the bonds that we have with our Bishop and priests we know that our concerns have merit enables us to speak about them. Although those resources are

instrumental, we also are aware of many factors that hinder us such as misunderstandings, fear of backlash, moral issues, lack of faith/interest, fear of judgement, laziness, and a lack of courage to challenge the status quo. Technology falls into a grey area where it could either help or hinder us depending on the use of it.

b. Is there a forum to express what is important to us? Is it easy to express our concerns?

We have a lot of sub forums for people to share their concerns from our newsletters/ bulletins to our 'open door' mindset (many parishioners remarked that they feel very comfortable bringing any concerns forward to our Bishop or their priest. Parishioners from the outskirts of Thunder Bay have remarked that they feel distant from the "big city" but also mentioned that they enjoyed the 'New Evangelization Summit' in Thunder Bay because it was a great opportunity to have open dialogue.

c. Is the local media helping or hindering our progress as people of Faith?

Our progress as people of faith is not being helped or hindered by the local media. The opinions of some parishioners are that the unyielding, uncompromising & inflexible doctrines of the Catholic Church as well as the actions of unscrupulous & deviant clergy has hindered our progress as people of faith. Whereas others have remarked that the local media present both positive and negative stories, sometimes it is how we present ourselves. We always have stories about our soup kitchens and the good we do for the community yet sometimes we are represented in a negative light due to historical events.

d. Who speaks to the media on our behalf & how are they chosen?

Everyone agreed that our Bishop is usually the one to represent us regarding media coverage. Some mentioned that it might be a good idea to have a someone who has taken education courses in social media relations so that we can have a more direct input.

4. CELEBRATION

a. Do prayer & liturgy inspire & direct us in our Faith lives?

They do, especially when practiced. Most parishioners agree that they give us greater insight and a stronger mutual bond. When the liturgy is reverent, focused on worship/sacrifice, and

addresses the saints our prayer life is enhanced. Some remarked that when the efforts are lacking in sincerity it leads people to think that they are repetitive/boring or not meaningful.

b. Do they help us to make difficult decisions?

Of course they do, they inspire, direct, counsel, and provide opportunities to reflect which strengthens our faith. Sadly, through the pandemic there has been less opportunities to participate with others.

c. How can more people be directly involved in the Liturgy?

There are many ways we can get people more involved but we all agree that it starts with an invitation. We should make people feel comfortable with us through team building which we can achieve by asking them to volunteer with Church community programs. It should also be mentioned that the opinion of some; were that moving to include women into the church more is a big mistake however more people mentioned that they thought that was a great step in the direction of inclusion.

d. Are the Ministries of Lector & Acolyte active in our Diocese?

Yes, locally. The lay ministries have been active in our Diocese and we have lectors, however since covid there have been no adult acolytes or altar boys.

5. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

a. How can we get more baptized persons to participate more actively in the Church's Mission?

We could see an increase in participation by providing a more welcoming and informal dialogue, offering support, hosting retreats, while adhering to church standards & teachings. There also needs to be a more concerted effort at the Catholic School level; our schools should be playing a stronger role in the faith formation of our children. Some also mentioned using our existing tools/resources to generate more interest in the Church by adding a volunteer form attached to the memos and bulletins.

b. What hinders the baptized to be more active?

There are many factors that hinder the baptized from being more active, whether it be that they have a lack of confidence, faith and courage or they could simply have too many distractions day to day. There were also remarks about how the stereotypes of the church could have a negative effect, for example some people might fear that we will ask too much of them or that service will be 'boring' which could cause reluctance to defend the faith.

c. Are there areas of the Church's mission that we are neglecting as a Diocese or Parish?

Yes, there are areas that we should focus on a little more; everyone agreed that we should have a stronger focus on young children, youth and families. We are concerned that our families are in a faith crisis because we are not properly utilizing Catholic schools to properly reach our youth. Others discussed having a formal outreach program to Catholics who use to attend mass but no longer do so, this would help us figure out why people are being pulled from our faith. As much as we have our soup kitchens and drop inns, sometimes we have a capability to neglect those in need through our reluctance to talk about our faith with others.

d. How do our Parishes support their members who participate in the Church's Mission by serving society in various & sometimes secular ways?

Our parishes do well in this area, we have contributions to the food bank, clothing drives, Christmas gifts for those in long term care and giving flowers to homebound seniors. We also wanted to mention that our Deacons do a great job by visiting the sick, Holy Communion to the homebound and encouraging parishioners to talk and support each other.

e. How does our Diocese/Parish help these persons to be part of the Mission by serving in their own specific way?

As already mentioned, we have a lot of opportunities for parishioners to serve in their own way. We also have sacramental preparation at school, announcements in the bulletin and Facebook posts have been supportive and helpful. We would also like to see more resources available so we can reach out to more of the community.

f. Who makes decisions about what services we support & how are these made?

I think we can all agree that our Bishop does, when he is led to. There is also the parish council, CWL, all in coordination with the parish priests. We would like to see our pastors more visible in schools, hospitals, manors, blessings and other sacramental provided.

g. How do we cooperate & support the efforts of other non-Catholic Churches & especially the Orthodox?

In the past we have had inter-faith gatherings and we could probably benefit from having more of these as it seems to be the census that cooperation is better than mistrust. These differences are adopted, integrated through open dialogue and agreement.

h. How does collaboration work in our Diocese with the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite (i.e., Ukrainian Catholics, Syro-Malabar Catholics)?

While some are aware that the local churches have ecumenical meetings annually and collaborate on some initiatives within the community, a lot of the responses seemed to imply that they were unaware that we do.

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH & SOCIETY

a. Where & how can we dialogue about our Faith within our Diocese/Parish?

Our church hall continues to be our meeting place. Our hall enables us to be together, to talk & learn about our faith, to support each other, to celebrate together, to welcome newcomers. In reality the answer to where is anywhere: over meals, on a walk, at home, at Church. We need to get past the old adage that one doesn't talk religion or politics in polite company. If we are to talk about our faith, we need to consider how to do so in a prayerful, loving, and truthful way. We also need to grow a thicker skin as we need to be prepared to meet increasing resistance to our beliefs as society becomes more "woke". Deep faith is needed. In the diocese, there is the occasional presentation in Thunder Bay designed to feed the Faith. Sometimes we in small towns are aware of these, but it is not always possible to get to Thunder Bay for these gatherings. We know that there are deanery meetings with pastors, deacons and Our Bishop however we can provide informal get-togethers on a parish level where faith topics and homilies can be introduced. It also might be a good idea to try and achieve an open dialogue with Catholics that no longer attend mass in order to bridge that gap and to seek out the truth as to why they are no longer attending.

b. How do we address conflicts & divergences of vision in our Diocese?

Conflict can be addressed by individuals that have received private sector training or group committee settings that allow for dialogue or the leadership from our Bishop and his staff to discuss the reasons for the conflicts with those affected & engage in meaningful dialogue to resolve them. Any conflicts need to be met head on & in a timely manner utilizing professional conflict resolution consultants if need be. We can't let conflicts fester as this just escalates the conflict & negatively impacts everyone. We look to our priests for direction on issues, but lack of training and resources sometimes hinders this process.

c. How do we collaborate & work together for the common good with neighbouring Dioceses or with religious communities/orders?

We currently have a good standing relationship with other orders and our Bishop supports Indigenous ministries. We co-operate whenever possible, sharing resources, finding common issues in order to find common solutions.

d. What issues in the Church & Society are we neglecting & need to give more attention to?

We are neglecting the drug addictions, the opioid overdoses, mental health issues. First steps have been taken but more needs to be done. More emphasis on assisting the poor, the disabled & the disadvantaged. Less emphasis on Catholic dogma. Most of us prefer to fly under the radar. We simply don't want to challenge the status quo. A few bravely support pro-life causes. Our parishioners are aging out and we should be supporting palliative care by being the ones to run the hospice centres, keeping that in mind we also are neglecting the fact that we need to be engaging our youth more so our voices stay relevant.

e. What experiences of dialogue or collaboration do we have with other Faiths? What experiences of dialogue & collaboration do we have with those who have no religious affiliation?

We collaborate as much as possible with other faiths. In end of life, we offer assistance for palliative care. Prior to Covid, there was more interfaith dialogue, but now it seems to be less. 'World Day of Prayers' is a great resource but we could have more events based around the idea.

f. How can we dialogue & learn from other sectors of secular society?

We have certainly already adopted many secular concerns such as climate change, immigration, no walls, vaccination and processes like missions, goals, and objectives. Listen actively to learn & adjust where appropriate with concrete action plans going forward. Encourage good moral values that are bible-based. Maybe we need to start with ourselves. Open minds & hearts are a good starting point.

7. ECUMENISM

a. How does our Parish/Diocese work with other Christian communities/churches?

This question seemed to raise a lot of differing of opinions, some stated that we do so through friendly cooperation, funeral luncheons, 'World Day of Prayer', joint bible studies and working together to run local thrift shops. Whereas other parishioners seemed to be under the impression are non-committal, defensive and tend to stand alone.

b. What do we share in common with other Christians who are not part of our Church & how do we accomplish the Church's mission together with them?

We share a lot of common ground with other Christians like values, morals, strength, baptism, services, stations of the cross, celebration of the mass and we pray together and funerals. There are differences between Catholic & other Christian communities that make collaboration & unity difficult. However, we have the universal Christian mission in line with the Prayer of St. Francis and Jesus in common.

c. What good things have resulted from collaborating with them in the journey of Faith?

Only good things can come from working with others on the journey of faith we have many examples, food banks, thrift stores, hot meals, shelters, support, friendships and most importantly a deeper understanding of the other belief systems and from that being able to see our faith in a new way. One parishioner made this statement and we felt it was important to include it as it speaks to having an inclusive mindset. – "Before I came to Canada I was involved with an Ecumenical group; I learned a lot about other Christian religions. It opened my eyes to the similarities & differences. I do not regret being a part of that group"

d. What are the difficulties that hinder effective collaboration?

Although the benefits are plentiful the difficulties are just as vast. We tend to see a lack of communication, leadership, willingness (not my job mentality) and an overall reluctance to focus on the external. People tend to disregard the views of others if they don't perfectly align with your own for example; views on abortion. The media tends to hinder us by creating a lack of trust with the Catholic Church. Also, it should be mentioned that again the pandemic has hindered us from having face to face meetings for some time now so we really have to put ourselves out there to strengthen those relationships again.

e. How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?

Perhaps we should be more intentional with talking about the faith as a parish goal & then implementing an actual plan. We parishioners are pretty good at talking but someone needs to take the leadership initiative to call the parties together to explore possible joint ventures. During those meetings or events, we should be compassionate, share our resources, be patient and have some self-awareness to the barriers we bring to the table in hopes of having a more unified front.

8. AUTHORITY & PARTICIPATION

a. How does our Diocese/Parish identify the goals we hope to pursue in our Mission, the ways to reach these goals effectively & the steps to be taken to get there?

The parish council takes the lead at the parish level in this regard. Our parish works closely with our parish priest to identify goals & plan steps to be taken. Priests ask many for opinions and ideas before acting and we were actually on track with this before covid hit. Three steps were initiated by discussions after the New Evangelization Summits through the Parish Council. We use websites, newsletters, Monday memo, bulletins and we had a 'Ministry Fair' after Mass in the past which was successful. We need to enter into dialogue with the Community & Social Groups to identify these goals, communicate clearly the extent of participation & resources required.

b. How is authority exercised in our Diocese/Parish?

All communication and direction are received through the Bishop's Office, but the parish council under the leadership of the parish priest also has this responsibility. Parish & Financial Councils act as advisory boards. This approach works well when the Pastor explains decisions & both the clergy & laity are responsible. Hierarchically in matters of faith & morals (as it should be with

Christ as the Head) and with lay involvement in financial issues & maintaining the parish. All plans are made together with our priest. He is 'our shepherd.'

c. Are teamwork & co-responsibility practised in our Diocese/ Parish?

The diocese seems to have great teamwork between our Bishop and priests however at a parish level it is lacking. The main problem at the parish level is that it is left to a few individuals who have the best interest of the church at heart but need to strive towards better teamwork.

d. How are evaluations of the well-being of the Diocese/Parish measured & by whom?

We gather this is part of the deanery meeting with area priests, deacons and with the Bishop evaluating. There are financial reports but not much by way of meaningful spiritual reports. That said, it would be hard to produce the latter without deflating or angering parishioners who are unused to hearing the truth. We expect our pastors do an evaluation that guides their decisions, but this evaluation has not been shared. Parishioners from the outskirts of Thunder Bay stressed that they are concerned about the well-being and short-term viability of their church.

e. In our Diocese/Parish how are lay ministries & the participation of the laity promoted?

The Diocese works with all lay ministries and promotes unity, but the problem at the parish level is the dwindling & ageing laity with too few to do what is needed to be done and the burn out of those trying to make sure everything that is needed to be done is done. Participation in lay ministries is encouraged & welcomed. It is an ongoing effort to take in new participants in the ministries & in our parish structure.

f. Can we name some positive things that have resulted from the practice of Synodality in our Diocese/Parish?

For a few years we were blessed to take part in the New Evangelization Summit that locally involved people from different towns, faiths, & parish groups. It was wonderful. The parish councils listen to the lay ministries a lot more now and have periodic, fruitful discussions but it does not encompass a broad enough representation of the church.

g. How do different consultative bodies function in our Diocese/Parish?

These councils meet regularly; have discussions and find resolutions. Parishioners are advised of plans but don't seem to be that interested in what happens at meetings, the silence may be because matters are running so smoothly there are no grounds for concern or conversely, because there is a lack of interest in what is happening. It is difficult to find people to serve. Otherwise, within the committees, matters run smoothly.

9. DISCERNING & DECIDING

a. How do we discern & make decisions together?

We discern and make decision through regular council meetings and specific meetings when specific issues arise where we can address the issue with open dialogue, consultation with the parish council. Informal conversations with our priests at coordinated activities allows for him to gather the opinions of his people and bring them forward to the council.

b. How can these be improved?

Perhaps the end of covid measures would be a good time to reboot the system with better communication, active listening, flexibility and more transparency. We need to start compromising where and when it is productive to do so and by making timely decisions cognizant of the current cultural environment in which we exist in, in order to improve our decision-making skills.

c. How is participation promoted in our hierarchically structured church?

We promote participation with opportunities for meetings, developing relationships, surveys, questionnaires all with reasonable time lines for achievement. Participation comes from the heart and we promote it by leading by example, the Pope is doing it already; something we can all work on.

d. Do our decision-making methods give us the opportunity to listen to God's People?

If we are being honest, probably not as much as they should. But then, people would have to be interested in the decisions & in having a voice; they have to speak. It seems that the only ones interested in talking are those seeking to change the Church & God' word. There are surely voices that are not heard within the parish, but there needs to be opportunities for dialogue in order for there to be relationship & listening.

e. What is the relationship between consultation & decision making?

Consultation is essential to decision making. Traditional hierarchical decision making without consultation and active listening is counterproductive and part of the reason for dwindling parishioner numbers and closed Churches. Decisions are made when all agree to conclusions. It is always recommended that we consult with people before we decide, however we need to establish parameters so that people are not disappointed when it is not.

f. How do we promote transparency & accountability in our Diocese/Parish?

At the diocesan level we have quarterly or semi-annual meetings with the parish priests & parish council representatives to hear what is working & what is not, where there are problems & how to best proceed. On that note credibility goes a long way. Explaining to lay people what is going on & why the changes are being made, maybe through bulletins & announcements. Another way to remain transparent would be to have regular nominations to parish council or if we need more feedback then maybe we should bring back annual retreats.

g. How can we improve communal spiritual discernment?

We will improve communal spiritual discernment when we sincerely beg the Holy Spirit for the grace to guide us. Maybe have more retreats, spiritual prayer sessions and invite everyone to participate. We could make use of “youthful” things like the internet; YouTube, Facebook and various Catholic websites. Now that the pandemic is subsiding, we should be holding regular parish meetings open to all parishioners centred on prayer & spiritual development.

10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

a. How does our Parish/Diocese promote synodality?

This is the first time most people have heard the word, however after learning the term I would say that we promote it by our social gatherings & community involvement. We also have study groups & our pastoral team does an excellent job welcoming people to the parish. In discussion, there is a lack of understanding as to the expectations and general reluctance to engage (For example, when invited to offer feedback, people have said: What for? Nobody is going to listen to me. It will get changed). By encouraging active participation, but low numbers of parishioners is still a major obstacle.

b. How do we teach our people about the importance of synodality?

It should be said that this process has been hindered by the pandemic but all of the communication and efforts made by our Diocese do not go unnoticed. Aside from that we teach by example, explaining the process, stressing its important, developing plans to promote it. Parish service activities such as benediction, adoration, 40-hour devotions, bible study are all the building blocks of synodality. In a world already filled with confusion we should really drop the term and say exactly what we mean, it's a slippery term that can be interrupted too many ways.

c. How can our style of Church be relevant in the society in which we live?

How was Jesus relevant in the society of His time? He was a shepherd, he prayed, instructed and loved. Our parish must model Jesus, we have to invite, welcome and involve others. The need for spiritual direction is natural but we need to make sure we are actively listening, communicating, leading by example, be visible, be respectful so that we can properly model the faith and speak the truth in love. We must be the ones to stand up for the word of God but in total love for all the people.

Additional thoughts

In our local gatherings, there were long discussions & questioning of points brought out. Everyone was encouraged to contribute, the people represented different levels of society/ education were listened to. As much as the process was interesting the census behind the format of the questions was negative. Many people who participated complained about the structure of the questions which led them to feel like their input wouldn't be as impactful as they would hope. "This 'Synodal Questionnaire' process was instrumental in leading me to this fundamental revelation, yet it was repetitive in its format & difficult for the laity to follow"

We have to be open to the Spirit's calling first and foremost of "journeying together". This call is through the celebration of the mass, homilies (very important) and the reading of works by people of faith. We should know our faith & not stay at a child's level of knowledge. There should be sources available for this & more opportunities to meet and talk.