



## Summary of Synod Responses from St. Rita Church

17 sessions; about 200 total participants

February - March 2022

### I. JOURNEYING COMPANIONS - WHO IS OUR CHURCH?

Participants responded with EVERYONE - from priests and clergy to those who actively participate and those who participate virtually. Some responses indicated specifically those who are baptized.

*What are issues that prevent active participation, or that contribute to the growth in numbers of those left on the margins?*

The church presents the image that only those who "follow the rules" are welcome. This image forces many people to the margins. Baptized LGBTQ persons are not made to feel welcome. Racism still exists within our church. The elderly and young, unmarried adults often do not feel included. Doctrine is not clear regarding those who are divorced. The church's approach to women is outdated. Pastoral associates used to be welcome to give homilies, but not anymore. Women cannot be ordained. The Pro-Choice vs Pro-Life stance that our church takes is not clear when it involves medical issues/concerns. Often, leadership changes at the parish level will cause people to move from parish to parish or leave the church all together.

Our church needs to be a place where all those who crave God and the Eucharist are welcomed into our community with fellowship. We need to be a supportive family to all.

Doctrine needs to be presented and explained so that all can understand and appreciate the truth and beauty of our church.

### II. LISTENING - WHO DOES OUR CHURCH NEED TO LISTEN TO?

Many participants stated we need to listen to God, through the Holy Spirit. We need to see more of Christ in our neighbors. Pope Francis has stated "Who am I to judge?". Participants feel that anyone who wants to be a part of our church should be listened to. We should be more accepting of those of other faiths, different races, divorced persons, the LGBTQ community, elderly, house-bound, incarcerated. If the voice of women were more welcomed in church, we would hear points of view that differ from a pastor or deacon. Women are critical to the operation & survival of our church, whether as ordained priests or deacons or more visible in the current allowed capacities. Allowing priests to marry would be of benefit to the church community in multiple ways. They could provide true, real-life counseling to families/marriages in need, & would help solve the shortage of priests in our church.

Fellowship, hospitality, & being made to feel welcome provide opportunities for listening. Outreach programs are important if we are to truly hear what people have to say. Greetings, family activities, & social functions make church more relatable & relevant. Participants feel that our church needs to be less "political". Social media has brought to light much negativity. Many feel that we need to hold on to traditional truths, but education of doctrine should be a focus. Information from this Synod must be taken seriously. Many worry that input will be watered down, & nothing will change.

### III. SPEAKING OUT - WHO SPEAKS ON BEHALF OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY?

According to our participants, the Bishop and the priests are the mouthpieces of the Catholic Church and in the best position to speak out with input from laity of the parish. The Catholic Church is universal but appears to practice exclusion in many cases. For example, the LGBTQ community and those who have been divorced cannot fully participate. The earthly Church is making judgements, when we know there is only one Judge, our heavenly Father. The Church needs to be more inclusive in finding ways for others to preach for a variance in the interpretation of the scriptures.

The Bishop needs to get out to the parishes he oversees and communicate more, such as through Diocesan Letters which address timely social issues of the day and our Catholic response. Lack of this provides tacit approval of some of today's social problems.

We need serious outreach to those who have left and understand why they left, if we really want to bring them back into the fold. This could cause serious reflection regarding the cloistered management style of the church. Many lay organizations e.g., (Knights of Columbus, March for Life and EWTN) appear to not be supported by many Bishops in the USCCB, although they seem to be an accepted voice of reason by many Catholics. There seems to be significant time spent on protecting the "brand" of the Church then growing the Church through message and various forms of media.

### IV. CELEBRATING - HOW DOES THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY DIRECT OUR JOURNEY?

The responses to this theme represent two major views: Contemporary and Traditionalist. Common responses related to the variety of music being offered appealing to different tastes, women needing to be involved in more roles, celebrations needing to be more inclusive and inviting to diverse groups of people. Some suggested that to reach the younger generations, the Mass needs revamping somehow so that it's more upbeat and interesting. However, it was also said that the reverence of the church and sanctuary need to be reinforced and re-taught. The Mass, the Eucharist, the sacraments, and the sacred rites of the church are central to our faith and our music selections and efforts to create fellowship should not take away from those things.

### V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION - WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL AND WHAT CAN WE IMPROVE?

Overwhelmingly, participants like the idea of the Synod and appreciate the opportunity to be heard but are concerned that ideas will be distilled down or not even get to Rome and doubtful that this will create change. Participants believe we are doing well on some social issues and we welcome people to church, but we also need to find ways to do more. Pope Francis' leadership is seen as refreshing, but it needs to get to the local church, which often seems like it can only be done through the local Bishops.

Again, we are hearing that people want a more active role for nuns & lay-women at parishes (communion services, female deacons, etc.). One way to do this could be to separate out the role of ordained and administrators, which would give priests more time to focus on their sacramental and spiritual role.

## **VI. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY - HOW DO WE PROMOTE COLLABORATION?**

Responses are varied with some participants agreeing with the focus on social justice from the homilies, and others express that they would like to see that separated from homilies to avoid being "political". Two participants suggested partnership with inner city parishes and making them our sister parish(es) both spiritually and financially. There is a need to educate people on the consecrated life and encourage it. There is good dialogue in the parish around racial justice issues.

## **VII. WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS - HOW IS OUR MISSION ENHANCED BY JOURNEYING WITH OTHERS?**

The perception of the church is that we are rigid, inflexible, unwelcoming, closed off and not relevant. We don't invite other faiths in. We need to be more welcoming. Jesus didn't put up barriers to sharing the Body and Blood. More than one participant felt there is more that unites us than divides us, and Jesus didn't turn anyone away.

## **VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION - HOW DO WE IDENTIFY THE GOALS OF THE CHURCH?**

Responses repeatedly say that the Church is too institutional, judgmental, slow to change, not inclusive, and not transparent. Some respondents would like to see more separation of church and state, with less participation of the church in politics and topics that are seen to be "political". Respondents want Church leaders to lead based on the Gospel and to teach the reasons behind the doctrine. There is a sense that too many "rules" limit participation in receiving the sacraments, some of which may be based on misunderstandings or a single negative experience (often with a priest; often many years ago).

The priest/pastor is seen to have almost universal power in the parish; this hierarchy can make people lose confidence about having/sharing their opinions. People want a way to discuss issues, ideas, and ask questions (town hall, suggestion/comment box, etc.). More people are getting involved in our new ministries - more participation depends on publicizing opportunities, personal invitations, and being able to work around responsibilities at home.

## **IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING - HOW DO WE PROMOTE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING?**

The perception is that parish decisions are limited to council members who are selected by unknown methods and of which little information is shared with the parish. Some suggestions for improved participation include giving people more ways/opportunities to share their thoughts with leadership, highlight committees in the bulletin and share what is going on more frequently, share more about the decision-making process and the general congregation's role in it, follow up with information on the impact of donations, and help people understand that their responses/donations/participation make(s) a difference.

## X. FORMING IN SYNODALITY - HOW DO WE FORM PEOPLE WHO LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER AND ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE?

Participants stated that there needs to be more faith formation for adults. There was concern that scheduling issues sometimes keep things from happening, such as Adult Bible study groups and concern that people aren't asked their opinions about faith issues. Using collaborative techniques, such as used at work meetings, can help promote dialogue and understanding.

St. Rita School is a wonderful way we are forming young people and the reason some people come to the parish. It was suggested to engage older parishioners in volunteering in the school - such as chess club at lunch, teaching a language, etc.

### WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

Opportunities for catechesis and spiritual growth have improved over the last 10 years, especially with online options.

New faith groups and ministries, such as Men's Group and the Reach Out Ministry, are appreciated.

Fr. Tim and Deacon Jim are easy to approach.

There are many options to care for the poor.

We have beautiful music at the Masses.

St. Rita School is a blessing to our parish.

The ability to live stream Masses helps to maintain community even when we are physically separated.

Many activities were recognized, including CYO, ChristLife, Racial Justice Ministry, Fish Fry, Night Prayer, and Bible Study.

### WHERE CAN WE IMPROVE?

We could recruit more leaders and provide more training and support for lay ministers.

We could provide more opportunities for people to get together, share fellowship, and build connections/relationships.

We could look at the structure and organization of the Church to see where it can be more welcoming and inclusive.

We can look at ways to increase the participation of youth, teens, and young adults.

We can help those at all faith levels to better understand Church teachings, including Catholic Social Teaching.

