

## **St Michael Parish Synod Listening Sessions Final Synthesis**

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**Synod Session Coordinators: Lou Volpe & David Post**

### **St. Michael Parish Synod Listening Sessions:**

Advent Session (11-30-21) 28 Participants

Rosary Community Session (12-7-21) 22 Participants

High School Youth Group Session (1-9-22) 12 Participants

Parish General Assembly Session (1-25-22) 17 Participants

Middle School Youth Group & PSR Session (1-30-22) 7 Participants

Christian Life Fellowship Session (2-9-22) 10 Participants

Parish School Faculty Session (2-18-22) 26 Participants

Christian Mothers Christian Women Session (3-9-22) 40 Participants

Filipino-American Community Session (3-24-22) 13 Participants

Christ Renews His Parish Session (4-4-22) 37 Participants

**Totals: 10 Synod Listening Sessions, 212 Participants**

### **Summary Per Synod Question**

#### **Fundamental Question Part I: A Synodal Church “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our St. Michael Parish?**

- We are “journeying together” through the continuous development and spiritual strength of our different Ministries and Faith Formation Groups such as Christian Mothers Christian Women, Saturday Scripture, Pro-Life Ministry, Eucharistic Adoration, Music Ministry, and Rosary Groups. We need to get more people involved in these “Spiritual Enrichment” opportunities and establish some new small group formations especially a new “Men’s Group”. The Christian Mothers Christian Women is a great example of a Faith Formation Group that is successfully growing in numbers (including younger women), faith, and community.
- There are many significant and successful young adult group opportunities such as Youth Group, Children’s Liturgy, PSR, and Children’s Choir. These youth activities keep our children involved in their faith and keeps their enthusiasm at a high level.
- Our faculty and students have morning prayer together. This helps get the day started spiritually and brings daily intentions forward right away. The Mustang Mass, weekly Mass, community events, faith formation opportunities, and service projects all help our children develop and strengthen their faith and they keep our school and parish moving forward.
- This overall Synod Listening Session endeavor at our Parish has been a big part of our “journeying together” and has had a positive effect in bringing us back together again with group discussions and discernment.

- There were several comments that said our Parish is very welcoming and hospitable in many ways (though we have room for improvement) but some of our parishioners said that we need to be much better with and focus on the inclusion of all of God's people including LGBT, people who are divorced, those who have walked away from our Parish, and people who have turned their back on our Catholic Faith. We need to reach out to and welcome in or welcome back all God's people.
- Our Pastor and his Support Team are always open to new ideas and were very creative in keeping our parishioners involved during the pandemic with "Streaming Masses" and "drive through events". Our Church is always beautifully decorated during appropriate seasons which comes from a very good "Team" effort of our Parishioners. We have also noticed Mass attendance is coming back including growth at the weekly morning Masses and at our Sunday evening 6:30 PM Mass. We want to continue to invite our parishioners to physically come back to our Masses and promote our Parish and School as much as possible.
- The new Church Monitors have been effective in keeping us current with updates, activities, and community events. These Monitors give us a great opportunity to creatively promote our Catholic Faith to our parishioners through modern communication.

**Fundamental Question Part II: What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take to grow in our "journeying together"?**

- Through increased "Welcoming"—to people inside and outside the church—St. Michael can develop a greater, broader **community consciousness**, especially to those not participating or on the boundaries of the church.
- Young Catholic people in the parish really want to know their faith, but they want to be free to ask questions—difficult questions—and not be criticized for asking them. Through more contact and interaction with priests and "older" St. Michael parishioners, a greater relationship of trust, learning, and deepening of the faith can develop.
- There is a greater need/demand from St. Michael's parishioners—older and younger—for small group interaction: faith and bible study groups, community action projects, social events which bring people together, etc.
- To increase harmony and participation between school and parish, St. Michael can and should work with parents, teachers, priests, and others in the parish to meet and collaborate on projects (a school/parish mission, for example) for greater unity.

**Topic 1: Companions on the Journey: In our Church who are those with whom we walk on our faith journey and what can we do to be a more welcoming community, especially to those who feel left out or are less involved in the life of our parish?**

- St. Michael Parish is basically a hospitable, friendly church; people from different nationalities, people from different economic and social backgrounds, etc., have never been turned away.
- Our school community (parents, teachers & students) continue to learn how to walk with each other and build up school and parish life.
- However, there is need from growth and improvement. Creating an attitude of meeting people where they are (with all their faults, troubles, and idiosyncracies) without judgment, would encourage more people to "try our church" and "investigate their faith" in new ways.

- St. Michael Parish has many small groups where people, old and young, are involved. The Youth Group, the Children's Liturgy, Community Rosary Groups, Bible Study Sessions, etc.
- Greater communication and compassion on all levels would gradually inspire people and reinforce the conviction that they "do belong" to a parish community. Suggestions such as friendly greeters before Mass, socials after Mass, volunteers who would pick-up elderly or infirm people and take them to church, minutes of all council meetings published regularly, etc., were offered as ways to increase a sense of companionship and belonging in our parish.

**Topic 2: Listening: How is God speaking to us through others we encounter and how is the laity listened to in the church, especially women and young people?**

- God is speaking to us through others in many ways: Christian Mothers/Christian Women; a vibrant music ministry; Rosary groups; processions on certain feast days such as Christ the King and Corpus Christi; and a welcoming community attitude.
- Listening to the laity involves more face to face encounters where we recognize people, listen to their lives, and call each other forward. Creating this atmosphere of relations would assist all of us in realizing that God is speaking to us.
- A great deal of damage was done by the former diocesan administration. Attitudes of cynicism, distrust, and worthlessness were cultivated by authorities who seemed not to care about listening to ordinary people.
- Real listening means hearing another's point of view without preconceived notions. Young people can and want to find common ground with older people, but without argument, intimidation, or preconceived notions.

**Topic 3: Speaking Out: What barriers do we face when speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our Parish and Community?**

- The more confident we are in our Catholic faith, the more willing we are to speak up positively and more often about what we believe is just, right, and moral or when we want to see a positive change. We need to accept everyone as themselves and help them on their faith journey. We also need to help set higher standards and be very particular about what we say, do, or post.
- Some people find it challenging to speak up due to the fear of losing friends, political correctness, or their position, and some simply wish to avoid confrontation. The Priest and leaders of the Parish and School always need to be approachable and willing to accept, listen, and guide our parishioners, teachers, and students. It would also help if our Leadership Councils would periodically extend an open invitation to the Parishioners to attend a meeting and give them some time to speak and ask questions.
- **(From our Youth on this question):** Some expressed a desire to learn why negative things happen like death and suffering. They would like to talk with others about Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and grief and be able to ask questions regarding these types of challenging subjects. They don't want to hear a standard reply like "there is a plan for everything".
- Though it is challenging to speak up on a scenario or issue that others say doesn't exist, if you don't speak up nothing will change. We need to address all concerns and situations that are brought to the Parish or School's attention.

**Topic 4: Celebration: How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy and how do we convince or witness to others that we truly receive Jesus himself in Holy Communion (the Eucharist)?**

- Some expressed they feel and seem closest to God when they receive Christ in the Eucharist. It is a very positive and powerful feeling. We need to continue to educate our Parishioners and Students, so they believe and receive in reverence the true Body of Christ. We also need our Parishioners to truly understand the Mass, the Sacraments, and liturgical celebrations.
- We want to continue celebrations such as socials and stewardship activities within our Parish as this strengthens community and personal involvement. Celebration and recognition of new Parish Members and RCIA Candidates welcomes them into our Church and Faith Family and lays the groundwork for their participation in the liturgy, ministries, and stewardship opportunities.

**Topic 5: Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission: Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What might be some reasons that keep someone from participating in the mission of the Church?**

- A number of people over the course of this synod experience expressed the need for St. Michael Parish to reinstitute a Stewardship Director who would facilitate greater communication, awareness, and responsibility among the parish members, thereby increasing the number of people who participate in the Church's mission.
- All of us should—and often do—share in the beauty that is the Catholic Church and the truth that is the Holy Eucharist. Greater emphasis and education on both the beauty and truth of our Church and the Eucharist on the part of our church leaders but also the people in the pews would draw others to greater understanding, love, and participation.
- The mission of the Church has been greatly hindered by our former bishop, his style of leadership, and some of the behavior of his associates. It has influenced many of the laity to abandon—whether temporarily or permanently—active participation in the life of the Church.
- For the Catholic parish and school to be responsible, there must be a sense of a mutual relationship. Families, teachers, the pastor, and all others need to prioritize their values in order to work together. Greater communication and support in the midst of challenging family schedules, negative past experiences, lack of connection and recognition with others in the church, a proliferation of gossip and negativity, can only be lessened by a great reliance on God, commitment to the Eucharist, and a greater realization that we are journeying together, not individually.

**Topic 6: Dialogue in Church and Society: What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention?**

- There is a strong desire among the laity to call church leaders more deeply to live their faith in order to guide us through example.
- The church's guidance, especially in response to certain trends or elements of society seems weak or ambiguous. We require more emphasis and direction on moral issues. (i.e., abortion, euthanasia and the right to life, homosexual clergy, sexual license, etc.).
- On the other hand, others expressed the failure of the church to adapt to social changes (i.e., non-inclusion of the LGBT community, women in ministry, an extremely heavy focus on purity culture and abstinence-only sex education, etc.).

- The parish and the church at large should display more continuous interaction with the community, especially with the poor and other religious denominations, being very careful and humble in our actions—remembering how and what we **say/do/or not do** is perceived by the larger community.

**Topic 7: Ecumenism: What relationships do we have with members of other Christian traditions and Denominations? How can we come together with them to continue the mission of the Church?**

- We need to reach out to other Christian denominations and gather to discuss important issues such as Pro-Life, etc. We should also look at pulling our local resources to team up with our charitable programs such as Catholic Charities, Food Kitchen, House of Carpenter, and possibly buy in bulk and team up our volunteers.
- Our Parish leaders should meet with different church denomination leaders on a regular basis to hold meetings on critical and impactful topics that will help our area Christians continue the mission of our local Parishes and Churches.
- We should invite other Christian denominations to attend and participate in any special appropriate events we have within our Parish.

**Topic 8: Authority and Participation: How is authority displayed—or not displayed—through the hierarchy, and how does their leadership—or lack of it—aid or hinder the laity’s participation?**

- Lay formation within the parish should be encouraged by the pastor, through his training of talented lay people to manage and direct the parish and through balancing his God-given authority with trust in his people. This approach will require a fuller, more well-rounded education of priests in seminaries.
- A pastor can be greatly served (and his stress reduced) by a trained and cooperative laity. He can concentrate on his sacramental duties and the pastoral love of his parishioners.
- Our consciousness needs to move from associating a parish with its pastor to associating a parish with its people. This is way to move away from clericalism.

**Topic 9: Discerning and Deciding: How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures and do our decision-making methods help us listen to the whole People of God?**

- Though our Pastor bears the ultimate authority and responsibility within our Church he also needs strong leaders, support groups, and the gifts of the laity for the service of our Parish Community. Our different Leadership Councils need to team up to discuss, discern on, support, and help execute appropriate Parish decisions and projects and they should always receive necessary training on a regular basis. We should focus on developing our younger generation to become our future Parish Leaders.
- We need our parishioners to be vocal when they have a new suggestion or idea for our Church. We also need to make sure we have transparency with our plans and projects through effective communication to and from our parishioners and we should make sure we utilize the talent we have within our Parish Community and have meetings with effective “problem solvers” for appropriate challenges and issues.

**Topic 10: Forming Ourselves in Synodality: How do we create a Church community that promotes inclusion, listening to one another, participating in the mission, and engaging in dialogue?**

- Several different members in our Synodal discussion expressed a need and desire for a deeper, more relational community. In these uncertain, often anxiety ridden times, there is a yearning to participate in a Catholic-Christian community which binds people together and gives them a sense of belonging and hope with other human beings to accompany their own belonging to and hope in God.
- Our Parish will be looking for good follow-up regarding the Synod Listening Session information and effective action plans resulting from these discussions. We need to continue with these small group discussion sessions for different topics or challenges that come up within our Parish Community.
- We need to promote inclusion including all faiths, races, the LGBT community, divorced people, and those who have left our Parish or our Catholic Faith. We must accept others judgement-free as God wants and welcomes all people at Mass.
- Our Pope has a great vision of unity and wants to find Christ in all parishioners, but some believe we should not move away from the traditions of the Church. They feel we need to stick to religious focus and fix our own house first before concentrating on the world.