

Summary of the French Catholic Vitality Report

August 2022

This document serves to provide information regarding the key points that stood out in the responses received to the questionnaire regarding the vitality of the French Catholic community. In total, 171 individuals responded to the anonymous questionnaire, and 5 group discussions took place. The main goal of these questions was not necessarily to find the answers to ensuring the vitality of the French Catholic community within our diocese, but rather to focus on the questions that we need to look at when embarking on the next steps.

1) How do you live out your faith today? From a personal, familial, community, and global perspective.

Highlights

- A large number participate in the Mass (in person or virtually) and mentioned the importance of being able to attend in French.
- A regular prayer life was common.
- It was important to pray with others (family, spouse, children and grandchildren).
- A large number are involved in their parishes and mentioned being an example of Christ through their actions.
- For the respondents in the 60+ age group, financial donations to the parish or to charities are an important means of living out their faith.

2) In your opinion, which aspects have the greatest impact on your ability to continue living out your faith in French in Manitoba?

Highlights

- It was important to the faithful to have a priest who could speak French and who was easy to understand. The importance of a priest understanding the local culture and being able to meet people where they are at was also mentioned often.
- Providing or having the opportunity to participate in cultural activities.
- Respondents who live in the urban region also noted the importance of welcoming those who have newly arrived in Canada.
- Regularly offering French gatherings, activities, and resources related to the faith.
- The importance of keeping the French language alive and active, bilingualism is not necessarily the perfect solution.

3) In your opinion, what are the greatest obstacles to overcome in order to continue living out your faith in French in Manitoba?

Highlights

- The lack of connection to the reality of young people, which leads to their absence and lack of participation in our churches was mentioned repeatedly.
- A lack of diocesan leadership concerning the question of language and the vitality of our parishes.
- Lack of women in leadership roles.
- The current cultural reality (materialism) threatens Catholic values and can lead to religious indifference.
- The welcoming of priests, new priests and those from abroad, as well as being welcoming toward everyone, including those newly arrived in Canada, those who have distanced themselves from the faith or who are simply different.

4) Project yourself into the future (5-10 years). What does the French Catholic community in Manitoba look like? How did we get to this point? What has changed?

Highlights

- There will still be francophone Catholics, but less than before because there are fewer young people; the elderly will have died and there will be no one to take their place.
- We will have to close churches and priests will need to serve many regions.
- There will be greater collaboration between parishes, and between the priests and lay people.
- There will be even more English in the diocese.

5) How do we ensure the continued transmission of faith to future generations?

Highlights

- Evangelization to reach the young people, as well as the parents so they can reach their children.
- Continue to offer courses, formations, retreats, and French resources.
- We must have the ability to change and adapt as a Church in order to listen to others and better reach them where they are at.
- Create active and vibrant communities for all. Be very welcoming of others (newly arrived in Canada, those who speak a different language.)

Key Questions

The purpose of this section is to provide a synthesis of the different ideas that emerged. The strengths and weaknesses identified are taken into consideration to identify the important issues. The questions are not listed in any particular order. It is important to note that some responsibilities will fall specifically to the parishes or the diocese, to lay people or the clergy, but it is ultimately a collective responsibility. It is only by addressing these questions together that concrete actions can be undertaken.

Relationship Between the Archdiocese and Its Parishes

We should discuss the types of support the Archdiocese should offer its parishes and provide clarification concerning the support it can offer. There seems to be a misconception surrounding the work and what the Archdiocese can accomplish. It would also be important to better understand the real needs of francophone parishes, allowing the Archdiocese to better serve its parishes.

According to the answers received, an evaluation of the organization of the deaneries or the distribution of parishes should be considered. Parish realities seem to have evolved since the initial distributions. Would the reorganization facilitate collaboration between parishes of the same region?

In the past, through a diocesan initiative, the francophone parishes collectively participated in the ALPEC movement. Even today, many people refer to this movement and the spirit of collaboration that it had created within francophone parishes. There seems to be a desire among many to find a way to have an experience that would promote similar results.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is also something to reflect upon. How can we better live out bilingualism during diocesan events or in parish communities? It is at times necessary to have bilingual events, but that is mostly in the case of special circumstances, such as at weddings, funerals, ordinations, or other diocesan celebrations.

In addition, we see that there is a certain proportion of francophones, for various reasons, belong to anglophone parish communities, and vice versa. That being said, it is often the francophone parish communities who are first asked to include English or to say a Mass in English. Would it be possible to include French in the anglophone parishes when many francophones are present?

Is This a Question of Faith or Language?

When we look at the obstacles to overcome in order to continue living out one's faith in French in Manitoba, the impact of contemporary culture on Catholic values cannot be ignored. We live in a world that is becoming more and more materialistic, where the ideology of thinking only of one's own needs, rather than those of the collective, is

prevalent. This pushes us to ask ourselves whether the question of vitality is simply a language question, or a question of faith as well. The francophone community continues to exist and is thriving, but this tendency does not seem to carry over to our parishes.

On the other hand, there is the question of succession. One possible avenue of ensuring this relief seems to be the evangelization and catechesis of young people and their parents, but it is unclear what form this would take. How do we foster this awakening or thirst? How can we reach these groups of individuals?

In connection with the question of evangelization, we could also examine our responsibility, as Catholics, for the evangelization of non-francophones who are seeking the Lord. Especially if these people have strong ties to parishioners of our francophone parishes.

On the other hand, it is important to reflect on the role of religion in the cultural identity of francophones in Manitoba. In the past, francophones were automatically associated with Catholicism. Today, this is no longer necessarily the case. Do we lose part of our identity when we stop practicing the Catholic faith?

[Evolving Francophone Community](#)

Another question to explore is the changing reality of our francophone community in Manitoba. In the report published for the États généraux in 2015, the definition of a Franco-Manitoban was discussed. It was explained that a Franco-Manitoban can have many different identities and the community is not strictly composed of “pure” francophones. Is our local Church truly welcoming toward these people who are not born here or who have learned French as language a second?

It was also noted that the composition of families has greatly evolved. There are more and more exogamous couples. How do we welcome these families for whom English is a necessity? It would be interesting to see how other francophone organizations, such as the Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobain, navigate this reality.

[Collaboration](#)

It is important to consider greater collaboration as this came up many times when respondents were asked to imagine what the Catholic community would look like in the years to come. What does collaboration between parishes really look like and what is true collaboration? How can we create a culture that promotes collaboration between parishes, with the diocese, and between priests and lay people?

[Shared Responsibility](#)

Several different spheres were mentioned as pillars for ensuring the vitality of our francophone Catholic community. The Church, or more specifically the parish community, is one of them. The schools, where catechism takes place in our French schools, are another place where this vitality could be fostered.

The family plays an important role in faith formation, but also in the blossoming of the francophone identity. Parents are recognized as their children's first teachers. It is the parents who form the family identity and transmit values. We must identify ways in which our Church can create an environment in which the family is allowed to take ownership of its role. Further, how can we equip parents with the confidence they need to take on this role of ensuring the vitality of the francophone Catholic community?

It is very important to recognize this shared responsibility. It is in working together, priests and families, parish and school communities, toward a common goal that we will produce momentum. We must ask ourselves how we can ensure that each group plays its respective role, while supporting each other. On the other hand, we must also take into account that our francophone schools are secularized. It is only at the request of parents, and with the support of the parish community, that catechism can be offered in the schools.

Conclusion

In short, the many responses received have made it possible to write a report that offers an adequate representation of the current reality. People were given the chance to reflect on this question of the vitality of the faith in French and to have conversations with the people around them.

This report was not intended to find the perfect solution to ensure this vitality, but rather to foster an awareness of the current situation within the community. This report is just a promising start to future conversations and actions to be undertaken.