

For a Synodal Church:
Communion, Participation, and Mission

Synodal Synthesis

Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface
Manitoba, Canada



Archidiocèse de
Saint-Boniface
Archdiocese

June 2022

Table of Contents

Quick Facts Regarding the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface	2
Process of Synodal Experience	2
Questions.....	3
Synthesis of Contributions.....	4
Listening.....	4
Speaking Out and Companions on the Journey	4
Dialogue in the Church and Society.....	5
Co-Responsible in the Mission	6
Role of the Priest	7
Conclusions.....	7
Appendix.....	9

Quick Facts Regarding the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface

- Located in Manitoba; the Cathedral is in Winnipeg.
- Historically a French diocese (established in 1844 as the Vicariate Apostolic of the North West, and then eventually became the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface in 1871), currently a diverse ethnic group with many ethnic parishes (Polish, Korean, Indigenous, Vietnamese, Chinese, South American, African communities...)
- From the 2019 Statistic Canada numbers, it is estimated that 254,801 individuals live within the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface. From those numbers, it is estimated that 127,887 would be Catholic; 40% of these individuals would belong to French parishes, whereas 60% would belong to English or other ethnic parishes.
- There are a total of 23 urban parishes, chaplaincies and Catholic communities in Winnipeg and a total of 64 rural parishes, chaplaincies, Catholic communities, and missions. This makes for a grand total of 87 different groups.

Process of Synodal Experience

The main efforts of the synodal consultation were led by the Director of Pastoral Services with support of a variety of individuals, such as the Archbishop, priests, religious, and lay faithful. Following the review of the preparatory document and *Vademecum*, it was deemed important that this synodal experience be lived out at the local level by as many individuals as possible, with the main desire being that the outcomes would serve the local community. It was decided that each parish would host a minimum of one listening session and submit the key insights that came out of that dialogue. These insights would be the material used to create a final synthesis for submission. The parish listening sessions varied in format. Some gathered a few individuals and others involved the whole parish and more. It was important that a dialogue took place, rather than the questions be simply used as a survey.

A supporting resource was created and presented during the meetings of the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) as well at the Council of Priests to facilitate the execution of these parish listening sessions. Two general information sessions were also organized to equip anyone else hoping to facilitate a listening session.

The presentation to the DPC should be considered as a first major turning point in our local endeavour. Lay leaders and a few priests that were in attendance from across the diocese had the opportunity to understand the essence of synodality more fully and what it means to live it out. Special attention was given to the attitudes that enable genuine listening, dialogue and finally discernment. Having received this information, participants had the opportunity to live out a dialogue similar to what they would be living out in their respective parishes. They experienced firsthand how powerful mutual listening and courageous sharing can be.

A total of four DPC meetings were held to accommodate French and English speakers and to offer in-person and virtual options. In all four sessions, there was a similar sense of more fully grasping what was to be experienced during this synodal process and a desire to share it with others. Comments from the participants were shared following this experience and people mentioned how they felt genuinely heard. The notion that the sharing was not meant to lead to a decision seemed to relieve pressure and people were more open to sharing without hesitation.

There were no hidden agendas, people were simply sharing what was on their heart and receiving what the others had to say.

As mentioned above, general information sessions were also given to facilitate the hosting of even more listening groups. In fact, these sessions sparked an interest to hold listening sessions with the elderly and with religious congregations. From what was shared during the information sessions and following the reception of the syntheses, conversations included questions surrounding the kinds of changes in the Church synodality would bring forth. Some doubted that this communal experience would indeed change aspects of the Church, whereas others feared the potential changes that it may bring, that the Church would no longer be truly faithful.

Parishes and groups were asked to organize listening sessions from January 2022 until the end of April 2022 in a variety of formats. Some were smaller groups; others were a large parish event. Some sessions were held online, and others were held in person according to the provincial health restrictions surrounding COVID-19. All documentation to organize these listening sessions were available in both English and French. Parishes could submit their response in either language. We received over 30 synthesized responses from parishes and other groups, which would be considered a fair representation of our diocese.

Furthermore, a local health services organization with Catholic ties led listening sessions among their board members and their staff that work in 15 different health and human services agencies. Their findings have been added as an appendix to this document.

Questions

The main questions that were being proposed by Pope Francis and the suggested questions received from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, inspired our local questions. The first theme that was touched upon was listening. We asked people to share **how God is speaking to them in their parish and what enables them to listen to one another, including the voices of those who suffer**. We then combined the themes of speaking out and companions on the journey. The question asked was: **“In our parish, what hinders parishioners and those who suffer from speaking openly and being accompanied on their respective journeys?”** The next theme we touched upon was regarding the dialogue between Church and society and the question was: **“Through the parish’s Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), committees, and groups, how do we dialogue and learn from other sectors of society?”** Another theme that was important to touch upon was co-responsibility in the Mission. We presented the questions as follows. **“Since we are all missionary disciples, every baptized person is called to participate in the mission of the Church. What hinders the baptized from being active in the mission? What areas of the mission are we neglecting?”** Finally, we opted to include a question regarding the unique role of the priest within the synodal process. **The question was specifically directed to clergy, inviting them to discuss it among themselves and to reflect on how they are facilitating the creation of a synodal community.**

The intention behind this was to encourage priests to see the role they have in promoting synodality within their local communities in communion with all the baptized. The letter received from the Congregation for the Clergy on March 19, 2022, was also shared with all the priests since

it summarized so well the role of a priest when practising synodality today. Much of what was found in the letter were reflections we hoped would feed the conversations the priest would have.

Synthesis of Contributions

The following paragraphs are an outline of the most common ideas that stood out from the syntheses received. It is important to note that it is impossible to express every single thought and comment that was shared during each one of the listening sessions. Choices had to be made to respect the requested length of this synthesis. There was also an effort in this synthesis to raise common threads of responses and new ideas in a concise way.

Listening

The foundation of fully living out this synodal experience was to base it in prayer and to be attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Understanding where people were able to recognize God's voice is an important key if we are to continue to communally live out synodality. It is safe to state that God speaks to everyone in a variety of ways. Most responses received mentioned how they hear His voice by attending mass, especially through the liturgy of the Word. Scriptures and even the homily seemed to be some of the main ways people hear God's voice.

God also seems to speak through other people. Some responses received mentioned how this is done through one person and others mentioned how this is done through a larger community; a few mentioned that this was done through both.

Another common way that people hear God is through sacraments. The Eucharist and Reconciliation were specifically mentioned quite a few times in the many syntheses. This could indicate that an awareness of the sanctity found in the sacraments does exist among those who participated in the listening sessions.

Speaking Out and Companions on the Journey

As much as it is important to listen to God when practising synodality, it is just as important to listen to the other, including those who suffer. According to the responses received, the main way of achieving genuine listening is through personal encounters and developing meaningful relationships. These relationships can be built up through group or personal settings. Furthermore, it was noted that the building of these relationships must be done with great compassion, humility, and empathy. The importance of outreach communication was also stated. Outreach communication refers to emails, phone calls or even text messages that are explicitly directed to an individual. Rather than a general announcement made after mass or in the bulletin, outreach communications are specifically directed towards another individual for the purpose of connecting with them.

As mentioned above, listening to God and the other are parts of the synodal process. Another important part of this process is the opportunity for individuals to speak out while being accompanied on their respective journeys. From the responses received, fear of judgment from the other was the most mentioned reason as to why someone may be dissuaded from speaking out. There is something to say about the fact that people do not feel comfortable in sharing their needs, questions, or different thoughts because they fear the people listening will in fact judge

them. This may imply that people won't be honest with where they are at, this would then suggest that they would not be accompanied to the full extent of their needs.

Another challenge mentioned as to why individuals are not speaking out and being accompanied was the lack of sense of community or belonging to the community. Without personal relationships and connections with the group, people are not willing to be vulnerable and share their respective journey. In connection with this challenge, it was also highlighted that there is a lack of feeling that one belongs to the group unless they firstly feel welcomed, seen and accepted within a group. There was a common need that was suggested that would help remedy these challenges. The need for simple gatherings to offer opportunities to take first steps in building those relationships to help people feel that they do indeed belong.

It was also suggested that people hesitated in speaking out and being accompanied because when they did so in the past, they did not receive the needed support. It was also mentioned how at times there is a lack of support available, or individuals did not know about the support that was accessible which lead to them not being accompanied as needed. Some of the support that was requested or needed varied from faith development, relational support, to more basic living essentials like food, lodging or transportation.

A different reason that individuals are hesitant in speaking out may in fact be due to cultural realities. In certain cultures, it is viewed as shameful to speak out or request to be supported on one's journey. This embarrassment in speaking out and being accompanied is then transferred on to the next generation and the cycle continues. Tied to this idea, language can sometimes be a barrier. It is difficult for someone to share their needs if people are not able to understand them, especially when the main language used is not one which the individual is comfortable in.

A final important point to mention regarding speaking out and accompanying each other on the journey was the global lived reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenge was mentioned a few times. With the recent lockdowns and recommended distancing people have not been able to see each other and be present to the daily lived challenges which makes accompaniment that much more difficult. It was mentioned that the pandemic also seemed to have created a heightened fear of the other and at times, a sense of distrust. These barriers do not promote a space for people to be present to the other. It can be hard for a person to think of the other and to listen to them when the person themselves are not in a space where they can feel at ease to share.

Dialogue in the Church and Society

To journey with the other more fully, it is also important to maintain a dialogue between the Church and Society. Many syntheses received noted the important opportunity that exists through social media and the use of technology. This seems to be a way to reach those who are not connected to the Catholic Church. Other opportunities do exist through organized events. The most common ones highlighted were through community and prayer events, especially those during the Week for Christian Unity. Possible outcomes from connecting with the other is that it can lead to new and insightful ideas that can in fact be brought back to the community.

There were also a few syntheses that mentioned how there is a lack of dialogue, and that the opportunity to share faith with the other is in fact not being seized. This would suggest that much work is still required in this area of dialogue.

Co-Responsible in the Mission

Practising synodality is part of the responsibility of the baptized when answering the call to the Mission. Challenges exist when one chooses to answer this call. Over half of the parish syntheses received mentioned that there was a challenge in fully understanding the Mission. This would in fact hinder the baptized from being active in the Mission, not being aware of what it is. A few also noted that there was not only a lack of understanding concerning the general Mission, but also the personal Mission of each individual. The distinction between these two is important to note.

Another common challenge that was mentioned in over half of the syntheses was the lack of confidence in the knowledge of the faith required to respond to today's reality. When the faithful do not feel well grounded in the teachings of the faith, they feel ill-equipped and are less likely to share in the Mission.

It was also suggested that the baptized are not active in the Mission because there are too many other distractions or they are exhausted by everything else that takes time within their lives, for example family and work obligations. Pushing this thought a bit further, the reason for this challenge may in fact stem from religious indifference or even apathy. Not taking ownership of one's faith was another common challenge that was mentioned in the syntheses received. Religious apathy is a lived reality within our current culture that influences the desire to embrace the Mission.

A final noteworthy common theme that emerged regarding why the faithful may not be living out their baptismal call is that they do not know where to serve and think the mission is not meant to be lived out locally. The idea that being active in the Mission is only something that can be done outside of the home or the community in which one lives goes to show a lack of understanding of what each baptized person is called to. Responding to the Mission does not only mean to be a missionary elsewhere, but where one finds themselves.

Regarding the areas of the Mission, that are being neglected, a variety of responses emerged. One notable area is how the Church is not acknowledging the hurt from the past at both the local and wider level. Some syntheses referred to cases of sexual abuse, and others to the role the Catholic Church played in the Indian Residential Schools. It is important to note that much of this synodal experience was taking place while a Canadian delegation was preparing to travel to the Vatican to meet with Pope Francis and share the history and the continued lived reality of the effect the Indian Residential Schools.

There were also a few remarks made surrounding the challenges that exist due to the inability for women to be ordained priests or deacons and priests being unable to marry. Some individuals found that by not permitting this, the Church was in fact hindering itself from responding to the Mission.

Another area that is being neglected is the building of connections with the youth and families. In regards of lack of connection both groups were mentioned the most often among the syntheses received. It was suggested that there is a lack of activities that simply gather families and young people.

Role of the Priest

Not all parish syntheses included comments for this specific theme since it was directed more precisely to the priests. We did receive some response from certain parish groups and deaneries. It was noted that the role of the priest is first and foremost to lead by example and to listen to the people. These two certainly go hand in hand with the desire of being a synodal Church. Some syntheses stated that the priest was there to call upon the gifts of the individuals and to help organize people accordingly. In one synthesis, priests were compared to a conductor of an orchestra. Without someone directing, the symphony cannot take place and it can lead to chaos. The final two common themes that emerged were that the priest was to be part of the community and bring unity within it. This connects once again with the importance of building relationships.

Conclusions

Upon reviewing the syntheses and highlighting the key themes, it is possible to recognize that building authentic relationships in both the individual and the communal context is important to fully embracing synodality. Through those relationships individuals can practise genuine listening and communal discernment. When one can truly know the other and trust them, the fear of being judged can dissipate which leaves room for the Holy Spirit to be welcomed.

Moving forward, the Archdiocese is putting a special emphasis on the creation of strong relationships through a multitude of faith sharing communities formed of about 6 to 8 individuals. It is presently developing an initiative that would inspire the faithful to build and deepen relationships with each other all while being attentive to the Word of God. The goal of this initiative is not to simply be a program that is completed, but rather a movement that encourages the faithful to be Church.

A final note to make regarding our diocesan experience with the synodal process. In the same Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) meeting where we introduced the documents on the synod and facilitated a dialoguing experience, we also took the time to hold a listening circle to share about how people felt regarding the question of Indian Residential Schools, colonization and the efforts surrounding truth and reconciliation. Living out the synodal experience first created a secure atmosphere where the participants shared vulnerably what was on their heart, with no judgment or fear that one's thoughts may be challenged, in that moment, a sacred space was created. The attitudes for participating in the synodal process found in the *Vademecum* were instrumental in facilitating this experience. Continuing in the promotion of these attitudes at the level of the parish leadership will remain an important effort.

At the following DPC meeting that took place in late April, time was taken to reflect on the many recent lived experiences that the local church faced and the importance of not letting these lived realities pass us by. Putting into action the process of the synod was not meant to be

done simply to say that it was completed. The responses received should continue to serve efforts led by the churches. Most importantly, the practice of synodality should continue to be part of the lived experience of the community. Through the many experiences shared, an overarching sense was perceived that practising the synodal process does indeed bear fruit.

Throughout the process, it was mentioned many times that the goal of this synod was not to create more documents as it is mentioned by Pope Francis in the Preparatory Document. Rather, the goal was to live out an experience and to continue to practise synodality moving forward at all levels of the church. This is where the focus of the diocesan initiatives should lie. To encourage and create space to ensure that listening and communal discernment are present in today's Church.

Appendix



Réseau Compassion Network Synodal Reflection Report

Réseau Compassion Network (RCN) lives its mission as a contemporary expression of the healing Ministry of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic and dynamic world. As a legal extension of the Catholic Church, RCN contributed to the Synodal process by hosting four (4) discussions and an online survey of community members associated with RCN. Those

“Le processus synodal présente un moment opportun pour l’Église d’écouter et d’entendre ce que les laïques ont à dire. Elle ne doit pas rater sa chance.”

Répondant

involved included the board and staff members from RCN and network agencies. The purpose was to collect views and voices on important considerations for the Catholic Church today and in the future.

Synodal discussion participants spoke earnestly of their distress for the future of the Catholic Church in Canada. This concern was heartfelt, and stemmed from a profound caring for the Church. A sense of urgency for change was great, prompted by a belief that the Church was slipping into irrelevance. This was painful

and difficult for those who strongly value their Catholic faith.

Allow Hope to Flourish

Change is urgently required so the Church can move forward hand-in-hand with the community. With a clear voice, those consulted emphasized the need to move away from clericalism, which was described as hierarchical and non-inclusive. Returning to traditional Catholic values of helping those who are marginalized and spiritually, physically and materially in need was vital. They wanted the Church to visibly live Catholic values such as human dignity, caring for creation and impacting social inequities.

“To listen with compassion and understanding [to] the voices that are calling for equality and change towards creating together a universal church inclusive of all persons.”

Respondent

More specifically, critically important change fell into two main themes – inclusion and engagement, as well as reconciliation and reparation for past harms.

Weave Together Relationships: Inclusion and Engagement

“La contribution des femmes, et des laïcs en général, et une décentralisation du processus décisionnel sont les points les plus importants que je constate.”

Répondant

Creating an adaptable Church which is welcoming, inclusive and respectful of all was mentioned frequently, stressing the inclusion of all touched by the Church's ministry. A prerogative regarding the inclusion of women in all roles in the Church was emphasized as an important consideration in inclusion. Women and those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ should participate equally in leading and decision-making within the Church. Meaningfully

engaging and including youth was seen as important to the Church's future and relevance.

Healing Wounds: Reconciliation and Reparation

Reconciliation and reparation for past harm, particularly with Indigenous people, is essential. This entails identifying, naming, and acknowledging past harms, followed by change and reparation. Not only will the Church understand and take responsibility for how its past actions impact community members today, but will engage in restoration and reparation.

“How its past actions have negatively affected people and make reparations for these wrongs!”

Respondent

Inspire Trust

Inclusion and reconciliation for past harms will only be possible through becoming more transparent in Church decisions and directions, as well as by expanding participation in decision-making. The Church must ensure its decisions and actions are transparent and easily understood. Restoration of trust in the Church is critical to moving forward. The Church must build trust with communities through willingness to listen and act on the recommendations of community.

“...We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but ‘to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, and give strength to our hands...”

FRANCIS, Address at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People (3 October 2018).