

St. John the Evangelist

Synod Input to Seattle Archdiocese

May 6, 2022

Questions posed on the Archdiocesan form are *in italics*.

1. *Ministry Identification*

- *Ministry name:* St. John the Evangelist
- *Ministry location:* Seattle
- *Ministry type:* parish
- *Parish ID #:* 0022
- *Name of person filling out this form:* Jim Russell
- *Email address of this person:* russelljim12@gmail.com

2. *What were common or important themes that emerged from the listening sessions?*

Themes:

- Thirst for more faith formation and in-depth adult education about our faith.
- Enhanced roles for women in the Church.
- Need to better engage with teenagers, young adults, and young families.

Concerns:

- Shortage of ordained clergy.
- Diminished attendance at mass, especially among young adults and families, aggravated since Covid.
- Perceived exclusion of marginalized groups. LGBTQ most frequently cited. Others mentioned: immigrants, elderly, poor.

3. *Which particular stories or real-life experiences were shared related to the way our church currently journeys together? (Give examples with identifying information, but without names – e.g., a young Hispanic woman shared a story of her faith in God increasing as a result of her First Communion, or a middle-aged African American man saw his faith grow through participation in a faith-sharing group.)*

- A young man came to our parish from a vibrant parish in Chicago, excited to join a new faith community. He is frustrated at the apparent lack of information and opportunities for quick integration, both in our parish and more broadly in Seattle.
- A cradle Catholic had abandoned the Church while at college and became a Buddhist. When he married and became a father, he realized that he wanted to raise his children Catholic, and returned to the Church.

- One faith sharing group in our parish recently did a readthrough, on Zoom, of the Gospel of St. Matthew. They accessed a number of on-line resources to enhance their study. They have since watched *The Chosen* and are now reading *Jesus Shock*.
- Our St. Vincent de Paul organization inspires us all. They serve men and women of all ages, backgrounds, and needs, and often goes beyond our nominal parish boundaries. The pandemic has aggravated the depth of their clients' problems. They truly do as Jesus would do.

4. *What dreams, desires, and aspirations for our Church were expressed by participants?*

- Sustainability: People in the pews, inspiring leaders on the altar, a clear future.
- A faith community that is welcoming to all.
- Full churches and robust participation by a vibrant community.
- A rich understanding and appreciation of our faith.
- Deep conversations about challenging issues with other Catholics who are prepared to forgive another's ignorance or doubts.

5. *What challenges or opportunities do these reflections pose as we journey together?*

- Any change the Church makes will pose implementation challenges. Messaging will be important to convey the intent of the change and its significance.
- The shortage of ordained clergy can be viewed as an opportunity for roles of laity and women to expand. But we still need many more priests.
- The shortage of ordained clergy can drive reevaluation of priests' duties, with an eye to sharing or shedding altogether some functions that lay men and women could arguably do as well. The objective would be to free up scarce priest time for greater focus on faith formation and spiritual guidance, where the priest's training makes his involvement uniquely valuable.
- Electronic communications technologies offer tools for better communication and evangelization. Putting these tools to their best use requires thoughtful consideration and careful implementation.

6. *What did participants share related to the question of "What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together"?*

We have divided this input into four categories:

- A. Actions that our parish could take.
- B. Actions that the Archdiocese could take.
- C. Actions that the USCCB could take.
- D. Actions the pope could take.

Within each category, we sorted ideas by decreasing frequency of mention in our groups. Ideas receiving more mentions come first.

- A. Actions that our parish could take now.

- Faith formation:
 - Establish a structure for adult education, and resource a program that many parishioners would find attractive and engaging.
 - Establish and resource evangelization efforts, both to former Catholics and to non-Catholics.
 - Reinstitute and resource small faith sharing groups.
 - Provide real staff support. Either hire an effective and dynamic Parish Director of Faith Formation, or relieve the pastor of enough other responsibilities so he can fill this role.
- Retaining young adults and young families:
 - Schedule masses at times more convenient for them. Sunday afternoon/evening? Weeknights? Survey them.
 - Provide contemporary music at mass. It need not come from live performance.
 - Hire an effective and inspirational Parish Youth Programs Director.
 - Make better use of the communication technologies young adults use, including social media, video projection at mass.
 - Truly welcome LGBTQ+ to our parish. This is particularly important to our young adults.
 - Survey young adults to learn why they stay away.
 - Model best practices of churches (often Evangelical) that effectively attract and retain young adults.
 - Organize more service projects where we can all live our faith.
- Marginalized groups:
 - Go out of our way to welcome and include all minorities, but especially LGBTQ+.
 - Include divorced and immigrant Catholics in our community.
 - Proactively welcome and embrace Catholics who have wandered away.
- Parish and Community Building:
 - Laity recognize the limitations of having only one priest, and step up to cover functions that do not specifically require ordination.
 - Be creative in engaging attendees after mass. Help us truly meet one another, especially new parishioners.
 - Reach out to parishioners who never came back to mass since Covid.
 - Provide a warmer environment at masses: greeters, ushers, others.
 - Invite individual parishioners who rarely volunteer to step up for specific opportunities.
 - Be more public in all we do. Don't keep our lamp under a basket.
 - Bring back altar servers. This might require more involvement of our school.
 - Make our parish organization more transparent, so new people can figure out who does what. Could involve a Web site upgrade.
 - Pastor is very well liked, but could more actively support working groups and parish programs, primarily by more frequent presence.
 - Repeat these listening sessions periodically, perhaps annually.
- Theology:

- Aggressively promote and adopt Pope Francis' teachings from his encyclicals, especially regarding climate change.

B. Actions that our Archdiocese could take now.

- Develop a structure and resource faith formation programs for the parishes.
- Provide more mentorship for young priests. Help them become competent pastors.
- Survey departed Catholics, especially young adults, to learn why they stay away.
- Improve our ecumenical outreach to other local faith communities.
- Structure and resource a statewide effort to advance *Laudato Si*. Appoint a director.
- Repeat these listening sessions at regular intervals. We need to be in continuous dialog with ourselves.

C. Actions that USCCB could take now.

- Refrain from politicizing the Eucharist.
- Avoid the appearance of active involvement in partisan politics. Be like Jesus.
- Present opposition to abortion in the context of a broader set of other important issues, such as immigration, health care, and protection of the weak and marginalized.

D. Actions that the pope could take.

- Open the diaconate to women.
- Open the priesthood to women.
- Allow priests to marry.
- Quickly bring women into important positions at all levels.
- Update teachings on sexual morality.
- Allow non-Catholics to receive the Eucharist.
- Open more priestly functions to laity. For example, preaching occasional homilies.
- Consider introducing these non-doctrinal changes selectively, in cultures that want them, rather than all at once for the global Church. Make their adoption optional.

7. *How many listening sessions did you have?*

Two. We divided the participants into eight small groups of seven or eight people. Each group met twice for 70 minutes, a week apart. We thought the process would produce best results if our participants had some time to digest, consider, and pray over the ideas expressed by others in their groups.

In the first session, we addressed the question: "A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, 'journeys together.' How is this 'journeying together' happening today in our Church?"

In the second, we addressed the question: "What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?"

8. *Did you have different listening sessions for different groups?*

No. We assigned each volunteer participant to one of eight groups of seven or eight people each. Their assignment was random, other than to deliberately separate spouses, close friends, and members of specific parish constituencies. Participants remained in the same group for both sessions.

9. *Did you seek to invite unrecognized voices? If so, how?*

Yes.

- We deliberately invited LGBT participants. We were able to get one that we know of.
- We invited several immigrants who are relatively new to our parish. We were not successful in that effort.
- We invited a parishioner who generally dresses in 'outlaw biker' attire. He did not attend.
- We sought to attract two older students from our pre-K to 8 school. We were not successful.

10. *What other methods, structures, or approaches did you use in your plan?*

- Leading up to our meetings, our pastor frequently mentioned the Synod from the ambo and encouraged parishioners to participate.
- We ran announcements in our bulletins (paper and on-line) for a month prior to our first meeting, encouraging participation. The announcements contained a link to the Synod page we established on our parish Web site, which in turn contained more detailed information and a link to a short video on the Synod.
- With our pastor's verbal support, we spoke at all weekend masses, two weeks prior to our initial meeting. We explained the historical significance of the synod and encouraged especially parishioners who do not normally volunteer to join us.
- We identified minorities that are not well represented in our parish, and made an effort to attract members to our meetings.
- We scheduled two meetings rather than one, to build in some time for reflection and prayer.
- Participants wore name tags, to enhance familiarity within the small groups.
- Our pastor attended the opening meeting and led us in prayer, and then left, so as not to influence any comments by participants.
- We held a brief regathering after the small group meetings on both days. Each small group moderator announced a couple of the key points that had been discussed in his/her group. We thought this would help to give participants a sense of the larger momentum of the effort.
- Following the second (concluding) meeting of small groups, we held a brief wine-and-cheese social to thank and congratulate the participants.
- We committed to sharing our report to the Archdiocese with all parishioners.

11. *How many total people participated in all of your sessions.*

We had 76 participants. This represents 4% of our adult population of 1,955.

12. *How many session participants were from each of the following age groups?*

- 0-13 none
- 14-17 none
- 18-23 1
- 24-30s 10
- 40s-60s 32
- >65 33

13. *How many participants were from each of the following ethnic, race, or culture groups?*

- Caucasian 73
- Filipino 1
- Hispanic 2
- All others 0

14. *How many participants were from each of the following gender groups?*

- Female 46
- Male 30

15. *What other groups were unique or notable in their participation?*

We deliberately reached out to our school to invite staff, teachers, parents, and former parents. We were successful in attracting representatives of each group.