

St. Mary Magdalene Parish-Wide Synodal Report

Participants

In March, 2022 over 130 parishioners participated in at least one Synodal Session, most in the parish-wide sessions at St. Bede, St. James, and Mother of Good Counsel worship sites, and on Zoom. Some participated in the sessions conducted in parish organizations including the LGBTQ group, Social Ministry & Community Outreach, Spiritual Enrichment Ministry, and the Cultural Action Team. Of the 130 participants, two-thirds were women. Participants' ages spanned 7 decades from the 20s to 90. Our racially, economically, and culturally diverse parish was reflected in the participants.

Some came to the sessions with great hope for what the Synodal Process could contribute to the wider Church and to our local Parish. Others were skeptical that anyone would really listen. Most participants valued the process that emphasized listening and uninterrupted sharing of each person's perspective, as well as the stories and experiences behind those perspectives. The energy level at each session was high and the vast majority left encouraged, glad to have met with fellow parishioners and expressing interest in future opportunities for further synodal conversations.

Stories

At all 3 worship sites, participants shared their commitment to the Church, often despite deep hurts stemming from a variety of experiences, including the abrupt changes resulting from our parish merger, the clergy abuse crisis, judgmental or harsh treatment by clergy during painful life situations, and disrespect toward women or other marginalized groups. Many people indicated the need for continued help to deal with the pain and grief openly and honestly. Here are some representative stories:

A woman active in Church for decades found the merger difficult. "What I spent my life building got torn apart." In the past she felt like she was a 4th class Catholic, now a 2nd class one. She hopes to feel equal before she dies. She, like many parishioners felt that women should play a greater role in leadership.

A man said that his children left the church because of abusive clergy. Disillusioned, they needed a church to help with their problems but felt that its silence & hypocrisy were a slap in the face.

A mother expressed overwhelming gratitude that whole parish prayed daily for her son to return safely from Iraq. She felt a deep hunger for spiritual nourishment from priests connecting people to God, even if pastoral work meant less time for administrative tasks.

A Black person, who grew up in a small Catholic Church where everyone knew one another, described her difficulty connecting after moving to Pittsburgh. Eventually a friend brought her to St. James where she was welcomed by people in pews with friendly questions and lots of smiles. Now she serves as an usher & volunteers regularly in the Ministry Center.

Another spoke of the power of hospitality. She was not raised Catholic, but phoned Fr. Metzler who invited her to come to RCIA that week. The RCIA leader was warm, gentle, accepting. Later she was asked to teach CCD and later become a Eucharistic Minister.

Another explained that her father, a WWII veteran, was not Catholic. Her parents moved to Homewood and built a large family of 9 children, all of whom attended Holy Rosary Catholic School. One day to their surprise her father came to Mass. Soon he converted to Catholicism. He eventually became involved in the church and even became a member of the Knights of Columbus. In the past year she lost several of her siblings. The parish supported her through these difficult times.

One volunteer described her work at the Ministry Center where she talked with guests about their health, medications and other struggles. She described a powerful interaction counseling a woman and empathizing with her. Appreciating being heard, the woman in tears gave her a big hug, saying, "You are special and I care about you." Covid has kept her from this work and she misses it. She wants to return to the Center she experienced such good being done and the friendly cooperative spirit among all the other generous volunteers.



Themes

JOYS AND HOPES Participants multiple sources of joy within the parish, many stemming from rich experiences in the past, as well as hopes for growth including:

- ◆ the desire for St. Mary Magdalene Parish to grow as a welcoming, inclusive, equitable community.
- ◆ the love of Mass, the Sacraments, and prayer, as well as the need for on-going opportunities for spiritual growth in light of real world concerns and pressures.
- ◆ the importance of lay involvement in all dimensions of the parish, flowing from our common baptismal vocation.
- ◆ the need for social gatherings to extend networks and build relationships across the parish.
- ◆ the hope that more parishioners will feel called and welcome to participate in various ministries of SMM.
- ◆ the goal of engaging young people actively in the parish, often participant's own children or grandchildren.

LEADERSHIP Participants expressed dismay and sometimes anger at clericalism and hierarchical, top-down bureaucracy. They shared frustration at decisions made without consultation, noting that this is inconsistent with Jesus' style of ministry and are driving people away. As one said, "the institutional Church makes it hard to sell the real Church.' At the same time, participants expressed deep admiration for clergy who relate pastorally and compassionately to people, and who support consultation and encourage lay leadership.

GRIEVING YET FAITHFUL Some participants voiced deep hurt from experiences of strict, judgmental, or marginalizing treatment. Yet they remained faithful members of the Church.

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, and OUTREACH Participants at all sessions valued finding ways to build community and celebrate our differences, while

building bridges to eliminate division or exclusivity among us – "journeying together".

Some participants praised as special gifts our rich diversity within the parish and our outreach to neighbors through social ministry. One shared how this cooperative spirit in turn benefits the parish as MOGC neighbors keep watch over Church property and Sunday cars in the lot.

MOGC participants valued the celebration of our diversity through liturgy, worship, traditions, and music.

WELCOMING COMMUNITY Some shared that earlier in life they had wandered from the Church but returned, largely because they were welcomed by pastor and included by parishioners. Feeling welcomed, respected, and included was mentioned by many as both an important experience they had, as well as something that needs to be prioritized among all in the St. Mary Magdalene Community.

A number of participants came to the Church through the RCIA Program past & present.

Prayer of Pope Francis *(at the Opening of the Synod)*

Come, Holy Spirit!

You inspire new tongues and place words of life on our lips: keep us from becoming a "museum Church," beautiful but mute, with much past and little future.

Come among us, so that in this synodal experience we will not lose our enthusiasm, dilute the power of prophecy, or descend into useless and unproductive discussions.

Come, Spirit of love! Open our hearts to hear your voice.

Come, Holy Spirit of holiness! Renew the holy and faithful People of God.

Come, Creator Spirit! Renew the face of the earth! Amen.

Plan on participating in the next round of sessions, probably in the Fall. Pastoral Council will use these results for the shaping of our Parish.