



Synod of Bishops Consultation

St. Mary's – Forman

Report to the Diocese of Fargo

Session Conducted on February 13, 2022

Background of the Synod of Bishops Consultation

Pope Francis wants to hear from the whole Church about what is happening in local parishes. Consultation sessions are being held worldwide to provide feedback for the Synod of Bishops, which is an organ of the Holy See tasked with providing consultation to the Holy Father. He has proposed doing this through a synodal process. Synod means “journeying together” and involves listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other in order to discern the path we are called to walk together. The synod “is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people’s hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.”

The consultation session for St. Mary’s was held on February 13, 2022. Mass was at 10:30 a.m. with a substitute pastor due to Fr. Tim having COVID. Immediately after Mass there was a potluck meal with the Synodal Consultation beginning at 12:15 p.m. It concluded by 1:30 p.m. In attendance were 23 parishioners, including 6 youth with the session facilitated by Cindy Klapperich.

Establishing the Content

This consultation session required time and effort to determine the content to be discussed and the format of how best to gather meaningful feedback. The questions for consultation were derived from the utilization of the “Facilitating Synodal Consultations” guidebook, Bishop Folda’s recommended questions, and referring to previous parish surveys. Each question utilized was scrutinized for the applicability to our parish and constructed in a manner that would best stimulate discussion, inspire thought, and create dialogue.

Methodology

The requirements of this Synodal Consultation were to address basic questions together, listen to the Holy Spirit, remain open to the perspectives of other people, and “progressively mature” the fruits of the Holy Spirit over time. To ensure a successful consultation session the facilitator encouraged dialogue and discussion among the parishioners present, and explained the purpose and process of the consultation session. Those in attendance were divided into four groups (Father-Son-Holy-Spirit) and were engaged in two rounds of the planned “carousel activity” which was set up with four different “stations.” One station for each focus topic:

- Purpose of our Parish
- Parish Liturgy and Worship
- Direction of our Parish
- Welcoming Culture of our Parish

During round one, each group had approximately 5-6 minutes to consider the question(s) posed to them at each of the four stations. In round two they were given 3-5 minutes to discern an additional question that concluded that particular focus area. The carousel activity inspired both group discussion as well as an opportunity for personal reflection. The final portion of the session provided an opportunity for parishioners to contemplate needs in our small community, list parish priorities, leave their name and contact information (if interested/willing in being involved in follow-up), and evaluate their Synodal Consultation experience.

Findings at the Station: “Purpose of Our Parish”

This group was provided with 6 “Purpose of our Parish” examples and in the first round were asked to provide additional objectives of what our Parish should function or do, this resulted in a total of 13 purposes listed. In the second-round parishioners were each given 3 stickers to place on the objectives they most desired.

Top 6 Purposes of our Parish

1. Help members deepen their relationship with God (11)
2. Reach out to those not coming to church. (8)
3. Encourage young families to come and ask to participate. (7)
4. Provide fun activities for the youth the keep them energized in the church (7)
5. Provide Christian education for all ages (6)
6. Offer meaningful worship experiences (6)

Other Priorities

- Engage in acts of charity and service to persons in need (4)
- Smile and say HI to people you know and people you meet (4)
- Aid in providing for the needy (4)
- Encourage members to share their talents with the church (3)
- Support the global mission of the church (3)
- We need to let people know we miss them in church, when not coming regularly (3)
- Spread the Gospel (2)

Findings at the Station: “Direction of Our Parish”

In this carousel group parishioners were asked four basic questions on the leadership and direction of the Parish. During their second visit, they were asked to provide feedback on one final leadership question.

Q. 1) Are opportunities available for parish members to provide input on decisions?

- Contact any council member
- Talk to Father
- Talk to Father and pray
- Annual meeting
- We would like to keep our parish in Forman!
- Yes, through our priest and church council
- I can't find any negative thing to say about our parish!

Q. 2) To what degree do those in leadership keep the best interests of the Parish in mind?

- I believe we welcome together as a parish!
- Do what you can to help people around you
- Take their role serious and keep financial and best interests on their minds

Q. 3) Parish council membership is representative of the diversity in our Parish?

- Parish direction – Absolutely. We are all pulling together!
- Yes. Have a good blend of all ages and backgrounds
- Find God in your own way
- We are welcoming to all

Q. 4) The parish has a spirit of trust, unity, and hopefulness?

- Unity in our parish is great. Everyone helps with the fall dinner.
- Yes. The unity of our parish is strong. We have a very close community.
- We have a great spirit of trust, unity and hopefulness to a great extent
- We are one in our faith
- Yes! Agree
- Within our parish, we feel there is a sense of trust and unity

For round 2, the parishioners were asked “How can/could leadership most effectively guide our Parish?”

- Keep all members interests as a focus
- Our leaders do a good job
- Listen to our parishioners
- Include everybody, not just a few
- Financial aid for all youth activities
- Golden Rule – do unto others as we would do unto ourselves
- Keep all members focused in Mass or try to

Findings at the Station: “Parish Liturgy and Worship”

At this carousel station, parishioners were asked a set of questions (three) about their personal belief of how the parish liturgy and worship connected them with their Catholic faith. On their second visit to this station, they were asked to list programs that could be added to grow their personal faith.

Q. 1) Do the worship services help you grow in your relationship with Christ?

- Yes. Good homilies. Through relationships in church
- Yes, Father Tim does a great job with the Mass
- Yes, I feel good when attending Mass on Sundays
- Yes. The gospel and homily are to keep us on track!

Q. 2) Is your Catholic faith being strengthened through the Church?

- Yes – through Mass, priest readings
- As weekly reminders
- Yes, the church provides a clear path to grow your faith
- Yes, because of Mass and prayers
- Kids, please come to Mass in addition to catechism
- Yes, my faith is being strengthened through participation at Mass and prayer

Q. 3) Through what experiences is the Holy Spirit speaking to you?

- Mass, Confession, Prayer, Teaching young people
- When you pray. Mass
- Mass, youth group
- When I help people in my community
- Quiet time, Communion, Mass
- Yes, in prayer

On their second visit to this station the parishioners were asked to list responses to the question “What ministries or programs would you suggest be offered to provide opportunities for parishioners to develop a deeper relationship with Christ and a stronger faith.

- Bible study
- Focus
- Rosary before Mass (2)
- Adoration times
- Search (Youth ages 16-21)
- Mission trips – Domestic or International
- Youth conventions
- As adults we should be standing behind our youths and their talents!

Findings at Station: “A Welcoming Culture”

This carousel station focused on the welcoming culture of our Parish. Parishioners were asked three questions that centered on fellowship and creating a sense of belonging.

Q. 1) Does our Parish provide enough time and opportunities for you to gather and enjoy fellowship with each other?

- Parish is quite warm and welcoming
- We spend plenty of time together
- We are friendly
- For the resources we have available, yes
- I think so, especially with fall dinners and potlucks
- Coffee and rolls, potluck dinners, good amount of time (not too much)
- Kind of, because fall dinner and potlucks don't happen too often

Q. 2) In your opinion, is our Parish warm, welcoming, and inviting?

- Yes, most people are nice
- Yes, adequate time but need firm schedule and timing adjustment
- Yes, the parish is welcoming. No matter if you've been here for years or for 5 minutes, people still welcome you every time we have Mass
- Welcoming culture – being included with a happy smile
- Yes, we are welcoming
- Yes – we are welcoming and hopefully inclusive
- Yes. We could always strive for more. Find ideas pertaining to moving forward which hopefully leads to welcoming culture
- Yes! Very welcoming

Q. 3 In your opinion, what creates (or would create) a sense of being wanted, welcome, and valued here at St. Mary's Parish?

- Conversation, group gathering
- I think our church is welcoming – I feel that way when I walk in the door!
- Positive attitudes, listening, consideration for others creates a welcome, valued environment!!
- Treat people like you want to be treated
- Kind, helpful members
- Everybody is very welcoming at our Parish! What more can I say?
- The nice people smiling at you and wanting to get to know you makes a person feel very welcomed here
- Food gatherings. Listening. Invite people to join. Asked to provide prayers at Mass

On their second visit to this station the parishioners were asked a very difficult question, “Who are we missing in our church, and why? Due to a very limited time to respond we asked for just a brief overview with a few simple solutions rather than a deep dive into the several, often complicated reasons for parish membership.

Who we are missing?

- People that are members but don't participate
- Young kids not coming to CCD classes
- Young families

Why are we missing them (why are they missing?)

- Maybe people have things going on, it is close to the middle of the day
- Not a priority maybe
- Our lives are too busy. Need to make a conscious choice to come to Mass

After the parishioners had concluded their group carousel activity we captured a group photo, asked that each complete an evaluation of the session, provide their name and contact information for any follow-up work, and most importantly as a facilitator I offered my sincere gratitude for their attendance.

There were two final questions on community needs and determining priorities for the Church but this feedback was not received as time did not allow. A parish council representative was tasked to obtain this feedback at a future meeting or gathering.

Session Evaluation Feedback – 4 surveys were returned with some representing couples completing 1 form

1. How well has this consultation allowed you the opportunity to listen and share your own experience of Church?

- Done very well.
- Well presented, open minds to discussions and thoughts
- Very well
- Very good presentation

2. What are your hopes for the Church as we “journey together” in terms of communion, participation, and mission?

- That we can keep St. Mary’s going
- Continue to grow the church with members
- Increase parish numbers through participation
- Bring back our missing parishioners

3. What practical suggestions do you have for your faith community to continue the synodal journey and be a more listening, discerning, and participatory Church?

- We just keep praying
- Listen during church
- Be open to everybody
- Promote the middle age group to partake

4. Are there other comments or feedback that you wish to provide?

- You covered lots of info.
- Stabilize Mass times. Not so late.

Consultation Summary Remarks

There was a number of great conversations and sharing among those present at this session. Those in attendance represented a very diverse population of the parish, with several youth, young adults, and long-time parishioners. The consensus from the feedback received is that the parishioners appreciated the opportunity to attend this Synodal session.

Even though time did not allow feedback on the two final questions, a considerable amount of responses were received with great story telling, dialogue, and discussion among those present. A few simple observations made during this session include; St. Mary’s is a very warm, welcoming, and unified Parish, additional faith-centered educational opportunities would be appreciated, and a rejuvenation among youth and young families will hopefully get those individuals participating in Parish activities.

The parishioners feel very strongly about their Parish and hope for continued success into the future!