

Pastor's Thoughts

The Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 04, 2022

The Synodal Process, Part II: Our Parish Family Report

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ & Friends of St. John Vianney:

With this week's *Pastor's Thoughts* I am delighted to share with you our parish family's Synodal Process Report that we shared with the Archdiocese. This is a summary of what we shared at our synodal listening sessions here at St. John Vianney some months back. Our parish Synodal Process was guided by the Parish Pastoral Council. The listening sessions were facilitated by Kathi Ferrari and Darlyn Sullivan, who recorded parishioners' responses. A great word of thanks to both Kathi and Darlyn for their work. A total of twenty-six parishioners participated, and there were three questions that were asked. Participants were asked to listen to one another's responses to the questions and not engage in discussion or conversation. For the most part, we were able to do that. These are the three questions that were asked:

What do you think is God's will for us as we journey together as a parish family and for the Church throughout the world? What concrete expressions of Christ are we called to embody in the Church today? How is the Holy Spirit calling us and where is the Holy Spirit leading us as a parish family?

Here is what the Holy Spirit revealed in our parish family in what was shared:

What do you think is God's will for us as we journey together as a parish family and for the church throughout the world?

- God wants us to be one cohesive unit beyond the identity of the Mass time/Mass community we attend and participate at. We are **one** community, **one** parish (**ONE** body of the church).
- We should draw closer to each other. People tend to stick to what they know, who they know (even before COVID). How do we create connection? When you are active in the parish, you create more connections.
- The Church, as a whole, needs to be more visible: in our faith community, in the local community, in the broader community and in the global community.
- We should focus on passing the church/the faith on to the next generation, in part by bringing the church together across generations and through outreach.
- The church is the largest charitable organization in the world but many people do not know all of what the church provides and does (local services like St. Vincent de Paul, the Firewood Crew Ministry, Backpack Pantry, as well as other Catholic service organizations such as CCS and CRS).
- We encounter God's love and mercy through our relationships, connections and service to each other. Learn to accept God's love and mercy for ourselves-and model it in our interactions with others.
- Reconcile. Pride can get in the way of reconciliation. Humble ourselves to reconcile things in our past.
- We are being called to know Jesus. Doing this can help us change the world (both environmentally and spiritually).
- The Holy Spirit is calling us to put our faith into action, ministering to/in the broader community.
- Look to Hebrews 12

What concrete expressions of Christ are we called to embody in the Church today?

- The Holy Spirit is calling us to love and accept each other (these do not necessarily reflect that we will agree with each other).
- Eliminate judgement.
- Find strength in common ground. We need to establish an outward connection with the broader Christian community.
- PRAY, PRAY, PRAY TOGETHER. PRAY with intention.
- We are called to stand for love. When we have this, we will have justice.
- The church is a mosaic and we are all a part of it. We can be dull and broken or we can be colorful and shining. We need to be the beacon of light to the world.
- We are called to represent the faith to our own community.
- We should strive to learn about the faith, and learn how to educate others about the faith in conversations and in a way that is not defensive. How do I represent the faith in the community/world?
- Beauty is an expression of God's mercy.
- Embrace small group evangelization

How is the Holy Spirit calling us and where is the Holy Spirit leading us as a parish family?

- The Holy Spirit is calling us to learn how to listen. Once we do that we will know more where He is calling us.
- The Holy Spirit is calling us to come together in fellowship, study and worship more frequently Bible Study, Apologetics Study, small faith sharing-groups/prayer groups, service efforts, etc. build friendships and grow relationships. They help us to step outside of ourselves, out of our comfort zone and what is familiar.
- Build a strong sense of belonging within the parish family. Kids thrive with that sense of belonging and community and it encourages them to grow in their faith.
- Find ways for every parishioner to contribute to the parish (e.g. sacristan, firewood crew, lector, Mass server, catechist, lawn mowing crew, etc.). We shine the brightest when we have everyone's light!
- Be closer to Christ (through prayer). Through this we can be stronger and bring others back to the church.
- Christ served in (mostly) ordinary ways that we can emulate in our lives.
- Learn how to evangelize. Pray that God will give us the gifts we desire (fortitude-the gifts of the Holy Spirit) to walk in His ways.

Other Feedback

The following comments were offered as suggestions for our parish family:

- Form a Hospitality Committee to welcome new parishioners
- Have a Ministry Fair – every parishioner should have a parish responsibility/ministry attached to their name... *“My name is and I ... at St. John Vianney.”*
- Provide fun activities for younger children so that they can socialize, feel connected and know they belong.
- Look for ways to involve/engage the Hispanic community more.
- Look for ways to reach out to parishioners who do not come to SJV anymore.
- Look for ways/times to come together with the Island's Christian community, and how as a parish and greater Christian community we can be more visible in our broader Island community.

My “take-aways” and thoughts:

There are some common themes that I saw emerge in our Synodal Listening Sessions:

- *Our responses reflect the Four Pillars of Stewardship, which are: Hospitality, Prayer, Formation and Service.*
- *Belonging leads to believing.*
- *Celebrating times and ways that we come together outside of Mass are desired, needed, crucial and essential for us to grow as disciples of Jesus. Let's celebrate times and ways we can come together as a family such as with parish potlucks, summer picnics and games like Bingo or Catholic Trivia, the Salmon Bake celebrating our Saint John Vianney Feast Day, “Mass on the Grass”, Pancake Breakfasts, Divine Mercy Sunday, and participating in ecumenical gatherings and community events like the Strawberry Festival.*
- *While we need to draw closer to each other, we also need to challenge and “check” ourselves to ensure we do not become too comfortable and only associate with our friends we know. We need to move beyond our comfort zone. We need to welcome visitors, strangers and newcomers, and listen to one another.*
- *We need to work at learning how to listen and practice listening at all age levels.*
- *We need to learn to forgive and reconcile.*
- *We want to learn more about our faith – Apologetics: What do we believe as Catholic people and why?*
- *We have a need to evangelize ourselves and each other through learning and faith-sharing together, and through our actions of service within the parish and in the broader community.*
- *We desire to continue to learn about developing and living a Stewardship lifestyle of discovering and sharing our God given gifts, talents, and strengths.*

I attended both listening sessions and did not share any thoughts of my own about the questions asked. I was awed and blessed by what people shared. The listening sessions gave me an opportunity to listen and discover with others who, what, and where the Holy Spirit is guiding and leading us as a family. Listening to parishioners' responses and reading the Archdiocese Report confirms to me that the Holy Spirit's presence is very much alive and at work in our hearts and in the heart of our parish family. We are listening and we are striving to do so. With listening to the Holy Spirit, demands the questions: how are we to respond? How will we continue and begin in new ways to respond and act on what the Holy Spirit is calling/demanding of us as Catholic disciples? The Pastoral Council and I will be taking up these questions in the coming months. In the meantime, over the next few weeks I will be writing and preaching about ways we can begin to respond to these two questions moving forward with initiatives we are already doing and initiatives we will begin soon.

May God be with you. His joy. His peace. His love,

Fr. David

Positivity, Relator, Futuristic, Developer, Empathy
Personal Religious Faith Demands Engagement!