

# FOR A *renewed* CHURCH

## MAY DIOCESAN SYNOD DAY

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This Synodal Process has offered us great opportunities for listening to all the voices within the parishes of our pastoral unit. We have had the chance to meet and discuss together the realities we face within the Catholic Church, our parishes, and complexities of providing spiritual services to Anglophones living on the South Shore. This listening process has allowed us to share both the best practices and challenges that our individual parishes face within the pastoral unit.

In March, we had the opportunity to come together not only with the representatives from the parishes who attended the October Diocesan Synod, but also additional members from each parish. Together we were able to share and deepen our discussions amongst the group. We were also able to bring to the forefront the need for action. As unique as all our parishes are, we share similar challenges, yet each parish is the support net for our communities. We realized that we need to create a strong synergy amongst our parishes, that our unique gifts benefit each other and need to be shared. Without creating this constructive collaboration within the pastoral unit, we risk operating our parishes as individual units with no possibility of growth or change.

The churches have become a place of resource for the communities which they service. A positive we have enjoyed throughout this process, was having the opportunity to exchange with the Priests in the unit to better understand their realities, hopes and vision for the future of the pastoral unit.

In our discussions, we recognized that there is a generational gap. Those in this generational gap do not feel that the church has ever been an open and welcoming place for them. They have not been able to see how the “church” fits and is relevant in their lives today. Many representatives reported that in their communities, places of work, social encounters that they have heard the church being characterized as, “an old institution, a place which is not welcoming, open or inclusive”. People within this group are forming their opinions without taking into consideration changes that have slowly appeared over the last 10 years. For many a church is “only a place to get sacraments.” They do not appear to remember that the Vatican has and continues to welcome divorcees and members of the LGBTQIA community to celebrate and share in the teachings of the church. The church still has a long way to go in Canada, especially with regards to Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

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This synodal process has allowed us to discuss, identify the changes that we need to make within our own parish communities. We recognize that now is the time to turn our exchanges into actions. In some parishes land acknowledgements are said at the start of meetings as this is an action we can undertake to support Truth and Reconciliation. Parishes have also organized activities for Indigenous Awareness days such as displaying children's shoes on the front steps, awareness about the Red Dress campaign as well as a Truth and Reconciliation project with activity sheets and feathers which were displayed in all parishes across the unit.

Communication is not limited to the challenges of inter-parish communications but also connecting to individuals in the broader community that are not aware of our English parishes and the services that we provide. We have discussed ways of sharing news amongst the parishes through "The Thread" but are also thinking of ways to increase our online presence through various social media platforms. We realized that parishes have many projects going on and that we do not "toot our own horns" often enough. We need to not only celebrate our accomplishments at the parish level but also at the unit and Diocesan levels.

Training of lay people and volunteers within the unit was another important topic to all parishes. We recognize that we need to find volunteers to help us fill roles within our parish communities. We need to stop giving our current volunteers "more hats to wear" and instead build capacity within our parishes and use the gifts and talents of more parishioners. We recognize that we need to welcome people into the parish first before asking them to volunteer within the community. When training new lay people, we want to ensure finding those who can continue training and become mentors to others.

A topic which was raised amongst many parishes within the unit is the need for building a greater awareness and understanding of other religions. We need to reach out to members of other religious organizations and communities and together create interfaith activities in our parishes. We need to promote participation in interfaith activities to highlight our similarities more than focusing on our differences. It is through building our understanding of each other that allows us to be more welcoming, more inclusive and live the teachings of the church in our everyday lives.

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