



DIOCESE OF  
LONDON

*Together on the Road*  
Conversations for a Listening Church  
in the Diocese of London



June 18, 2022

To: The people of God in the Diocese of London

After several months of listening sessions in the parishes and by non-parish groups serving the poor and the marginalized, in addition to input from a number of individuals, the diocesan synodal committee has drafted the first synthesis report summarizing the main themes and ideas offered in the sharings by participants. As promised, we are now making it available to you, the people of the diocese.

This report is required by the directives established for the synodal process by the Secretariat for the Synod in Rome. Limited to just ten pages, this synthesis will soon be considered along with those of the other eleven dioceses in Ontario in order to create a further ten-page synthesis. It, in turn, will be sent to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops as it prepares the Canadian submission to be forwarded to those in Rome preparing for the meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

As such this is a very high-level general report spotlighting only the main themes and areas put forward in the listening sessions. Necessarily, many of the particular concerns, ideas and suggestions could not be included. *However, these have not been discarded or lost. All that has been received has been saved in anticipation of creating a larger, more comprehensive report in the autumn, which will be given to Bishop Fabbro and the various diocesan advisory bodies for their information and consideration.* As well, the input received in the individual parishes listening sessions will be returned to the respective Family of Parishes for prayerful study and discernment by the pastoral team and others in parish leadership.

From all that was reported by the leaders of the listening sessions and by many of those who participated, the experience of listening and sharing in small groups was greatly appreciated. It is to be hoped that the listening sessions were not simply a “once-only” event, but, rather, the first step in building a culture of synodal engagement in our Families of Parishes and in our diocese.

Ms. Linda Staudt

Rev. Paul Baillargeon

Co-chairpersons  
Diocesan Synodal Committee



***Together on the Road***  
***Conversations in the Diocese of London for a***  
***Listening Church***  
**A Synthesis of the Synodal Listening Sessions:**  
**Observations, Reflections and Considerations**



**Prepared by Diocesan Synodal Committee**

**shared with**

**Bishop Ronald Fabbro, C.S.B.**

**Bishop Joseph Dabrowski, C.S.M.A.**

**and the**

**People of the Diocese of London**

## **TOGETHER ON THE ROAD**

### **CONVERSATIONS IN THE DIOCESE OF LONDON FOR A LISTENING CHURCH**

#### **A SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNODAL LISTENING SESSIONS: OBSERVATIONS, REFLECTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

##### **Introduction**

The invitation from Pope Francis to expand the consultation in preparation for the Synod on Synodality to be celebrated in October 2023 offered a unique and significant opportunity to engage the people of the diocese in “reading the signs of the times” and in seeking the movement of the Holy Spirit as this local Church emerges from the anxiety, restrictions and isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also an opportune moment to listen to the faithful after nearly a generation of upheaval and distress occasioned by the clergy sexual abuse scandals, an extensive round of parish and church closures and the introduction of the new model of Families of Parishes, wherein several parishes are grouped together under one pastor and pastoral team in order to pursue in common the goal of “being a mission-oriented Church that forms disciples of Jesus.”

Initially the call to engage in a synodal listening process in the midst of a pandemic seemed to be ill-timed given that the diocese along with the rest of the province of Ontario was constrained by a number of strict public health measures intended to contain the spread of the virus. Gatherings for the celebration of the Eucharist, the other sacraments and funerals were tightly regulated and it seemed to be the “worst of times” to plan, organize and conduct a broad consultation of the people of God. Yet as time would show and the feedback received would illustrate, it was the “best of times” as it provoked an outpouring of thoughts, feelings and ideas as to what the faithful believed the Church of London and the Church as a whole needed to recapture and become in a post-pandemic time. As we emerged from the darkness of the pandemic, it was more important than ever to encounter people where they found themselves in this moment. The synodal process offered an opportunity to listen and to hear from all sectors of the diocese: parishioners, pastoral leaders, parish staff, the women religious, the Catholic school boards, both educators and students, the Catholic colleges in London and Windsor and those groups in the wider community supporting people experiencing poverty and homelessness, all furnishing us the means to learn of their joys and sorrows, their hopes and dreams in reference to the Church.

While the instruction to the local Churches to enter into a synodal process was received in May 2021, no action to act on this mandate was taken until the autumn of that year when the Diocesan Bishop formed a Diocesan Synod Committee made up of a priest, a permanent deacon, a woman religious and seven lay persons from various backgrounds. Over the course of late 2021 and early 2022 they met virtually bi-weekly to devise plans for and to create tools to facilitate the listening sessions. The objective was to invite as many segments of the local Church and others not directly linked to the Catholic Church to participate in the synodal process, which was titled, “Together on the Road. Conversations in the Diocese of London for a Listening Church.”

As already noted, the challenges at the outset were several. In addition to the limitations on gatherings brought about by the pandemic, there were the further factors of the hesitancy and reluctance of people to congregate in fear of the virus, the general fatigue of ministerial personnel in the parishes as a result of having had to contend with the restrictions at the local level and, particularly, the vocal resistance to some of the measures, to say nothing of the heavy demands that the transition into a new diocesan model of parishes was generating and with which they were contending. As we began the synodal journey, those in ministry were generally exhausted with little enthusiasm for this undertaking. As a consequence, an early choice made by the diocesan synodal “team” was to recruit lay volunteers in the Families of Parishes and in other organizations to oversee, arrange and even conduct the listening sessions, removing this task from the pastors and parish personnel.

Early in the preparation period the diocesan synodal committee wrestled with the issue of what questions were to be asked in the listening sessions. The numerous questions proposed in the preparatory documents from the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, while addressing the three sub-themes of the synod, namely, communion, participation, mission, were seen as unmanageable and overwhelming to a spiritual conversation in a small group setting. Therefore two simpler questions were chosen. The first, in two parts, asked: What have been your experiences journeying together with the Church? What have been the joys and, correspondingly, the difficulties and obstacles? And the second question asked: As we journey forward, what are your hopes and dreams for the Church? While not precisely touching upon the three sub-themes of the synod, the diocesan team believed each of these ideas was addressed in the two questions.

A *critical element* of the planning for and creation of the listening sessions was to situate them in a framework of hearing the word of God in an environment of shared prayer, building on the Jesuit model of spiritual conversations. Following from the maxim of Sister Nathalie Becquart, the Undersecretary for the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, that “There is no synodality without spirituality”, it was the firm conviction of the members of the committee that if the listening sessions were to be a conduit for seeking the movement of the Holy Spirit, then the spiritual dimension of the gathering was *indispensable* lest they become nothing more than opinion polls or venues for offering disconnected suggestions or venting complaints. Even the committee meetings themselves, as well as the two-day session to synthesize the materials received from the various listening sessions were conducted in the same mode, leading to a spiritual richness and depth for those involved and a sure sense on the part of the diocesan committee that they had disposed themselves to discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit throughout this pivotal and vital endeavor.

### **Synthesis of Synodal Listening Session Responses**

As already mentioned, in undertaking to synthesize the input received at the various listening sessions, the diocesan synodal team deliberately chose to conduct the two-day session in an atmosphere of prayer and reflection following upon the format utilized in the individual listening sessions. The consideration of the responses received to each question was founded on a passage from Scripture and a prayerful reflection by a member of the team on that excerpt from the word of God. This approach gave a

shape and character to the synthesis of the materials being studied and to the discernment of what was revealed in them.

*Question 1: What have been your experiences journeying together with the Church? What have been the joys, and what have been the difficulties and obstacles?*

## **A. Joys**

The consideration and discernment of the responses on the joys participants experienced in journeying with the Church was built upon a reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) — “and who is my neighbour?” A contemporary response to this gospel question is to be found in a favourite phrase of the French theologian, Michel de Certeau, “Not without you”. Believing in the love God has for his people, how can one then not share that experience with others as the Good Samaritan did for his injured and abandoned brother laying at the side of the road. The experience of life in the community faith, the Church, generates relationships that makes believers affirm in the depth of themselves, “Not without you.”

The joys enumerated by listening session participants centred on the joy of connection; the joy in the encounter with God and others; the joy in serving God and others; and the joy in the celebrations of the faith.

Numerous responses spoke of the goodness of being with others in relationship and in community. Frequently respondents noted they had known compassion and a sense of being supported and strengthened by others in moments of struggle, difficulty and tragedy. As one respondent stated, speaking unknowingly for many others: “The Church was there at my lowest points.” There was frequent mention of appreciation for the bonds of friendship and connection afforded by being a member of the Church. In this regard, one participant vocalized a very personal sentiment: “I have no family, so the people who attend Mass at my church have become my extended surrogate family.” Notably a number of responses also referred to bonds and friendships with priests.

The greater majority of responses to this question highlighted the beauty, awe, peace and mystery to be found at the heart of the Church’s rituals. These were seen to provide a link to the rich tradition and universality to be found in the Catholic Church. Notably, numerous participants repeatedly accented the joy they experienced through the celebration of the sacraments both personally and in their families, particularly with their children.

Another source of joy for respondents was learning about the faith, particularly through small faith sharing groups. One participant, echoing what was said by many, stated: “I believe that small group/community activities help build the Church.” There was a repeated mention of a desire to learn more about the faith and to draw joy from it.

For some, one of the joys of Catholic life was to be found in and through the Catholic school, where educators and leaders particularly had the opportunity of building and strengthening catholicity in the students. One educator offered that, “sacramental celebrations are an example that allows the school to be

a part of the faith journey of our students.” The student reflections in connection to the school and the Church itself frequently mentioned community, sacramental milestones and a sense of belonging. One student observed: “Being in a Catholic school helped me form and grow faith.” Another sharing his understanding of “Church” stated: “Catholic churches are like a community. It provides a feeling of belonging and acceptance.” One student summarized his feeling for the Church as a place where joy was to be found, “in knowing that no matter what happens, [there is] always [is] a place to go that feels like home.

The service of God through the service of others was often stated; there was joy to be found in the active service of others. Conversely joy was also had in receiving assistance and services in an inclusive and respectful way. Joy was likewise experienced in volunteering in various ministries and in sharing one’s talents with the larger community.

Interestingly it was under the umbrella of this question that frequent and positive reference was made to the Family of Parishes model. One participant expressed this completely by stating: “The potential for inter-parish involvement and connectedness as a Family of Parishes excites me. Tapping into the talents and treasures of so many persons can bring us together as communities of faith.”

Finally, among the joys many respondents noted the goodness and value of the synodal process itself, especially the listening sessions. “Thank you for asking the common Catholic for thoughts. This is epic!” Throughout there was an explicit desire that the format of the listening sessions be continued and an ardent hope that they would bear fruit.

In various ways, respondents noted moments and events which made vivid the presence and love of God and allowed them to share that presence and love with others in their families, their parish and the community at large. The spirit of Jesus’ call to embrace others as neighbour in imitation of the Good Samaritan was evident in the hundreds of illustrations of the joys had in journeying with the Church and embodied Michel de Certeau’s profound assertion that “Church” necessarily entailed the conviction “Not without you”.

## **B. Obstacles and Difficulties**

The examination of the responses to the second part of the first question focusing on the difficulties and obstacles participants encountered in journeying together with the Church was preceded by a reflection on the gospel story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-24). It was this gospel passage that had framed the individual listening sessions, selected primarily for its depiction of being together on the road with the risen Jesus.

This initial reflection, concentrated on the first part of the story, fixed on the reality of how difficulties and disappointments can lead to disillusionment and blind believers to seeing the Lord in their midst. As with the disciples on the road, the eyes of the faith can sometimes be obscured by the more immediate problems and uncertainties that loom large in the moment and can easily preoccupy, often resulting in discouragement. What should be is not and more often than not impedes disciples from

seeing what, in fact, is. Nevertheless the difficulties and obstacles are real and need to be named and encountered if the way through them is to be discovered.

In many if not most listening sessions this category predominated in the sharings offered by participants. Overall, they centered on a repeated list of specific concerns. Among the areas named were: a grave concern for the lack of young people in faith communities and the imperative for a concerted effort by the Church toward youth; the exclusion of women from significant roles of leadership in the Catholic Church; the pain, shame and anger occasioned by the clergy sexual abuse scandals and the revelations of the Church's involvement in residential schools; the lack of welcome toward all members of the faithful and the frequency of parishioners feeling judged or dismissed, particularly by priests; the absence of faith formation for adults; the disconnect between the parish, the home and the Catholic school; and the perceived failure of the Catholic school to form its students to live a Catholic life. The words "exclusion", "inclusion", "judgement", "pain", "unforgiving" were pre-eminent in the responses to this question.

If one issue stood out above all others throughout the input received it was a pronounced concern for the lack of involvement and engagement of young people in parishes. The question was asked repeatedly: "How do we get our youth back?" "While there is great value in the Church, it seems to only be apparent to older adults." Many respondents expressed their personal pain at the fact that their children and grandchildren were no longer connected to the Church. While no clear solutions were proposed, the virtually universal sentiment was that this was the area where the Church needed to concentrate its efforts and resources or face the reality that many faith communities will simply disappear.

The question of the place of women in the Church was also conspicuous in the reflections offered on this question. The remarks by participants were frequently stark: "It is difficult to be a woman in the Church" and "At our session of fourteen, only one male was in attendance, yet the Church is ruled by males. Not having an equal role for women is degrading, disrespectful and frankly stupid!" Or as another participant put it: "Women have played a huge role in society, in education and health care over the past decades, so why is their role in the Church limited? They are needed to move the Church forward." As another participant put it: "We need a female voice." A few of the participants urged the ordination of women to the priesthood and some advocated for the ordination of women to the diaconate. "Can we at least have women deacons?" No specific suggestions to give women a more visible role in leadership beyond ordination were noted, but the consensus of the urgent need to address this issue was unambiguous.

The exclusion of certain categories of persons from full acceptance by the Church and even in parishes was highlighted in a number of responses. In particular, participants mentioned the exclusion of LGBTQ individuals and the marginalized. One respondent echoing the sentiments found in many responses stated that there was "a need to listen to those who are hurt or excluded, either subtly or overtly [and] to be more inclusive." Another individual was even more stark in their assessment: "Churches tend to form a comfortable community for members but exclude the poor and the marginalized. Members may donate money, food, clothing but not friendship. Marginalized individuals feel unwelcome." And the heartfelt statement of one parent in this regard was compelling: "That my son not be judged because of

who he loves. And one day he will feel welcome to celebrate Mass with me and his partner in a Catholic Church.”

In a similar vein a number of responses underscored the lack of welcome and a perceived attitude of judgement experienced in the parishes, oftentimes from priests. As one participant stated: “[I] always felt at home in [the] Catholic Church but at the same time [I] have been hurt by insensitivity of priests and [a] lack of wisdom when dealing with issues.” The sharings often mentioned that people were seeking compassion, tenderness, closeness and not finding it. Instead, individuals in their interactions with the Church often encountered rigidity, judgment, guilt and shame; they felt unheard and unloved. One participant noted: “The Church preaches don’t judge, yet they judge others.” Another stated: “The absolute rigidity of Church teaching has caused the loss of many; the feeling of exclusion for women, [the] divorced, LGBTQ; [there is] not a feeling of hospitality and love.” The responses in regard to such an environment were sometimes quite frank: the Church is “expecting people to come to us versus reaching out and inviting in” and “We have dropped the ball in bringing others to Christ.”

The reality of the clergy sex abuse scandals and the more recent outrage over unmarked graves on the sites of former Indigenous residential schools was front and centre in a large number of responses. These scandals and their coverup have not only been a source of pain and embarrassment, they have also contributed to a sense of stigma in being associated with the Catholic Church. “It is challenging to frequently have to defend my beloved Church against those who don’t share my faith because of many scandals [the] perceived second-class status of women and material wealth in the face of poverty.” The lack of transparency in these matters has led to a lack of trust in the Church and in its leadership.

The disconnect between the Catholic school and the parish was frequently mentioned as was the skepticism about not having the schools involved in sacramental preparation. Educators, in particular, underscored the “importance of having a Catholic home, school and church all working together.” And again, the need to “continue to focus on our students’ faith journey through the connection between home, school and church.”

In regard to the Catholic schools, the perception often stated was that these schools are not forming its students in an understanding of the faith and in how to live as regular, committed members of the faith-community. This was underscored by the opinion that Catholic schools offered little value in evangelizing. This was succinctly stated by one participant: “After twelve years of religious education and thirty-seven years of attending church, I do not feel prepared to be a missionary disciple.”

Among other obstacles and difficulties expressed were liturgies that were lifeless, with music that was not engaging; homilies that were not thought-provoking, challenging or relevant to contemporary life; and the inaccessibility of the sacrament of penance. In particular, the importance of good liturgical music was noted a number of times: “Music has a huge impact on the individuals who attend because it is chosen to suit the season and scripture of the day and helps set the tone for prayer, purpose and presence.” It was also noted that priests were overextended, not available and that it was difficult to establish relationships with them. As one participant expressed: “Priests are often forced to fill many roles but should be allowed to focus on being priests ahead of administrators.” Some participants even stated that some priests were not relatable and lacked credibility.



The litany of disappointments and sorrows was lengthy but underlying them was a yearning, a hunger for a better Church, a more loveable Church. Very much like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the participants “had hoped” for something different, something other, something more from the community of faith to which they had committed and for which they cared deeply.

*Question 2: As we journey forward, what are your hopes and dreams for the Church?*

This discernment of the hopes and dreams of the listening session participants was preceded by a prayerful reflection on the second part of the Gospel narrative of the encounter of the risen Jesus with his downcast followers on the road to Emmaus. Jesus, having eased their hearts with his assurance of God’s hand in all the events of his passion and death that had so disillusioned them, the two disciples begged that he stay with them. Having lifted them from the darkness of their fears and discouragement, they recognised in him the hope they needed to sustain them in their discipleship. The participants in the listening sessions, in expressing their hopes and dreams for their Church, likewise implicitly invited the Lord to remain with his communities of believers along the road ahead.

As might be expected, the hopes and dreams named by participants, in most instances, corresponded directly with the difficulties and obstacles that had been shared. As these had been recognized as hindrances and pitfalls for the life of their Church, conversely they were interpreted as opportunities and challenges to renew and reinvigorate the Catholic community and have it become all that it might be, that it needed to be.

Participants longed for a Church that was more authentic, more welcoming and more accountable. They hoped for a Christ-like Church as opposed to a Church of rules, a Church that genuinely practices what it preaches. One attendee offered that the theme of Education Week 2022 was apt for the Church at this moment in its history: “Rebuild, restore, renew together [is] a good theme for the whole Church right now.” Another participant stated: “My hopes are that as a group of faith-filled people is that we can break down the walls and stereotypes; my wish is that we can be more welcoming and less judgmental.”

A hope repeatedly expressed was for more faith formation opportunities in small groups, bible studies and for faith sharing as had been possible in the synodal listening sessions. Participants voiced a clear desire to be formed and engaged in their faith beyond the initial reception of the sacraments.

A greater and trusting collaboration between the clergy and the laity was named, and connected to this was the hope for the empowerment of the laity that promoted discipleship. One participant captured these aspirations well: “I was encouraged to learn how much people attending our session are keen to increase their faith, to re-engage in their spiritual formation. I was encouraged to hear people acknowledge it is not up to just the Church hierarchy to make necessary changes, but it is up to the laity as well.”

The need for greater outreach to the wider community was also noted. “We need others to see love, community, joy. Show and tell. Be an example of living faith in action. People need to feel and experience God’s love through us.”

There was within this category of responses the pronounced hope that the listening sessions would not be a one-time event but ongoing. “[I] hope that these synodal session [will] be offered again” and “That the disenfranchised contribute to this synod process.”

The strong focus on youth engagement and involvement, noted among the difficulties and obstacles, was re-iterated, with many participants stating that the barriers to youth participation needed to be removed, that the voices of youth needed to be heard, and that young people be given positions of responsibility and leadership in the Church. In connection to this idea, the perceived belief that the Catholic schools were not forming disciples committed to the faith provoked a corresponding hope that the Church, in partnership with the Catholic schools, would inculcate in students a sense of a lived communal faith that continued beyond graduation and into adulthood — a strategy not simply of programs and events but one of directly engaging students and young people in and through the life and work of the parish.

Reconciliation with the Indigenous people was seen to be a priority. One participant summarized this deep feeling sincerely, stating: “[I] dream of genuine healing for all forms of misunderstanding, hurt and damage and those who were left behind because of these events, sharing their story and seeking healing.”

Overall the attendees of the listening sessions hoped and dreamt of a Church that was more relevant to the contemporary world. They wanted “an inclusive Church that is forgiving, accepting, repentant, open to change, vibrant, moving forward, supportive of wellbeing, welcoming, understanding, transparent, responsive in times of crisis, a united versus a divisive Church, [one] that supports healing and reconciliation [...]. One response vocalized this fundamental yearning eloquently: “I dream of a Catholic Church that unabashedly lives with Christ as its centre, mentoring young and old, to develop a deeply authentic relationship with the Trinity and to embrace their rightful place as humble servants of God. I dream of a Catholic Church that lives the Gospel.”

“Stay with us.” The wish of two disciples expressed to the risen Lord, who had opened their minds and hearts on the road, was the hope and dream of many participants, begging the Church to accompany them along the road in the midst of their complex, imperfect lives.

## **Conclusion**

In the last part of the diocesan synodal committee’s discernment and synthesis of the wealth of responses from the people of God who participated in the many listening sessions across the diocese or who offered individual input is reflected in St. Paul’s declaration in his First Letter to the Corinthians (12:4-11) on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.”

The truth that the Holy Spirit has spoken to the Church of London through the literally thousands of responses offered in the listening sessions is manifestly plain. The spiritual gifts of the Spirit were had in the expressions of the faithful’s joys and difficulties in journeying with the Church and in their naming

of their hopes and dreams for the Church on the road ahead. Their different forms of service were manifest in the wide-range of ideas they proposed for addressing current issues in their Church. And the different workings were evident in their willingness to engage in the synodal process toward creating a life-giving communion within this local Church.

The joys participants enumerated centred largely on their joyful experiences of the Church and the faith in childhood and adolescence. Consequently, there is an explicit need for resources that help transition believers from cradle Catholics to a living dynamic faith.

The hunger for connection and encounter bespoke the desire for liturgical celebrations that are considered, attentive to the lived experiences of community members and that are uplifting in spirit. Participants longed for communities of faith where they were received as they are and not repeatedly admonished about what they should be or do; communities where they might engage with their fellow parishioners in real relationships of friendship and support.

The actualization of such a Church necessarily requires disciples who are formed in the faith. Hence the frequent call for adult faith formation, chiefly through small groups, and of instruction in Sacred Scripture.

Understandably the critical role of priests and pastoral team in the project of reinvigorating the Church was seen as indispensable. A joyful, welcoming, inclusive community of faith is not possible without the passionate engagement of its pastoral leaders. The need to accompany the faithful on the journey is elemental. Priests and pastoral leaders are vital witnesses to the compassion, mercy and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus and of the unconditional, all-encompassing love of God. They must walk in the midst of God's people, tending the needy, the lost and the wounded and without their tender and sacrificing leadership, the community is lost.

The hope for inclusion and acceptance dominated the vision of a renewed Church. The acceptance of diversity and the recognition that all believers are in some sense "on the way" and have not yet fully realized their call to live the Gospel in all its fullness will nullify a Church of judgement, a Church of reproach, and a Church that excludes.

Notably the synodal process is seen as crucial in order to identify and overcome the difficulties and obstacles the Church faces; indeed the engagement in the synodal process of listening and discernment was seen as a gift, providing an avenue for prayerfully addressing and responding to the uncertainties and challenges of the present time in the life of the Church. The synodal process was seen as offering disciples a conduit to a new faith and to have their hearts burn with hope for the future. The wish of a great many of the participants who engaged in this phase of the synod process was that the encounters in the listening sessions and in the exchange of deeply held convictions and longings be transformative for the Diocese of London and for the Church altogether; and that this mode of deliberate listening become the new and established way of being and working hereafter. The aspiration of participants in this unique moment in the journey of this local Church was that as a community of faith, we absorb the lesson, as Mark Nepo has stated: "To listen is to lean in softly, with a willingness to be changed by what we hear."

Ultimately the many responses and the myriad of ideas and suggestions for what might be done testified to the yearning for a Church of inclusion, compassion and mercy. Saint Pope Paul VI stated that the spirituality of the synod is that of the Good Samaritan. What is wanted is a Church that crosses the road to care for the everyday wounded, that concerns itself with the abandoned and forgotten, that dresses the wounds of those injured by the demands of life in the present day. Underlying the enumeration of joys, difficulties and obstacles, hopes and dreams was a heartfelt longing for a Church that reaches out beyond its structures to reclaim the forgotten and the broken, a Church that goes to the peripheries to meet and embrace the poor and marginalized, a Church that makes its own those abandoned, excluded and reviled, a Church of sinners that celebrates the redemption accomplished in the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

The participants in this diocesan synodal process expressed a desire of a deep *communion* with their sisters and brothers in living and celebrating the faith, an openness to an active *participation* in the work of carrying forward the Church's work of service, and a willingness to share in the *mission* of announcing the Gospel and of making Jesus known.

June 7, 2022

## **DIOCESAN SYNODAL COMMITTEE**

### **MEMBERSHIP**

Ms. Linda Staudt (Co-chairperson)  
*Past Director of Education, London District Catholic School Board*

Rev. Paul Baillargeon (Co-chairperson)  
*Chancellor and Judicial Vicar, Diocese of London*

Dr. Carolyn Chau  
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Deacon Len Hughes  
*Permanent Deacon, St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica*

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Diocesan Support Staff

Mrs. Chrisandra Skipper  
*Pastoral Services Coordinator, Diocese of London*

Mr. Matthew Clarke  
*Director of Communications, Diocese of London*

Facilitation

Mrs. Kathy Furlong

## Appendix

### A. Some statistics

- Number of Parish Listening Session Table Scribe Submissions: 256
- Number of Non-Parish Listening Session Table Scribe Submissions: 70
- Number of Submitted Responses by Individuals who Used the Self-Guided Synodal Participation Option: 191
- Number of Post-Listening Session “Exit Cards” to Capture Additional Thoughts and Ideas: 218

### B. Participant’s Guide (Parish Sessions)

#### **Repreparing our Hearts and Voices**

As we prepare to enter into this experience of Church,  
we invite you to prepare through reflection and prayer.

#### **For a Synodal Church**

Communion | Participation | Mission

#### **Prayer for the Synod**

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,  
make Yourself at home in our hearts;

Teach us the way we must go  
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;  
do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity

so that we may journey together to eternal life  
and not stray from the way of truth  
and what is right.  
All this we ask of You,  
who are at work in every place and time,  
in the communion of the Father and the Son,  
forever and ever. Amen.

Thank you for registering to participate in our Synod Listening Sessions. In this intentional process of mutual listening, Pope Francis wants us to rediscover the joy of being the People of God who journeys together, listening to everyone.

### **What is Synodality?**

It's the official process of the Church of listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit on a particular subject. We engage in open dialogue while listening to the Holy Spirit, open to the perspectives of others, with members of the Church, other Christians and the whole of society. Giving prayerful input on the needs of the Church today and the mission of Christ to all people in the world. We are called to Listen, to be Open, to Share and Discern the Vision

### **We are called to listen carefully**

We are called to listen humbly and to speak courageously; to listen in a manner that invites others to share authentically while we ourselves share our experiences and hopes with mercy and charity. We gather in prayer, listen to the Word of God, then reflect in silence, letting the Holy Spirit guide us. Setting aside our own expectations so that we can listen more clearly to what God desires of us. This is an opportunity to hear things from other points of view, a different perspective. Allowing the Spirit to direct us in ways which will vision the needs of the Church and the mission of Christ in the world.

### **Listening Session Group Etiquette**

The following ground rules will help ensure the listening session is a safe place to talk and everyone is treated with reverence and respect.

- One person speaks at a time
- We will all listen with an open mind
- We will be stopping the conversation at certain intervals to reflect and pray
- We limit how long we speak so that everyone has time to share
- We only speak once until everyone has had an opportunity to share
- We will be reporting the themes and experiences to the diocese as they emerge from the consultation discussions without indicating the names of individual participants.

- As participants, when we tell others of our experience of the consultation, we will not attribute anything we share to particular people or groups. After the session, if you have additional thoughts to add, a link to a web page will be provided where you will be able to submit additional thoughts, ideas and reflections.

## **Session Overview**

Each session will follow a similar format

- Welcome
- Gathering Prayer
- The Word of God - Gospel Reading
- Gospel Reflection
- Prayer
- First Round of Synodal Questions with Reflection Questions and Sharing at Tables or in Breakout Rooms
- Second Round of Synodal Questions with Reflection Questions and Sharing at Tables or in Breakout Rooms
- The Word of God - Gospel Reading
- Summary of Main Themes from each Table
- Closing Comments and Closing Prayer

During the listening session you will be given the opportunity to:

- Listen to the answers of other participants
- Share your responses to a couple of questions
- Respond to the messages you hear

We invite you to prepare some thoughts before you participate in the listening session using the questions below. The preparation documents from the Vatican for this synod remind us, "The mission of the Church requires the entire People of God to be on a journey together, with each member playing his or her crucial role, united with each other." (*Vademucum* 1.2).

### **We will consider these questions:**

For the First Round:

1. What have been your experiences of journeying together with the Catholic Church?
  - a. What joy did these experiences bring?
  - b. What difficulties and obstacles have you encountered?

For the Second Round

2. As we journey forward together, what are your hopes and dreams for the Church?



**The following themes have been identified by the Vatican as important to consider during this synodal process.** They can be prayerfully used as guide as you reflect on your answers to the questions.

- **Being Companions To Each Other On The Journey:** In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road.
- **Listening To the Spirit And Each Other:** Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudice.
- **Speaking Out:** All are invited to speak with courage, integrating freedom, truth and charity
- **Celebrating Together:** “Journeying together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.
- **Sharing Responsibility For Our Common Mission:** Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate.
- **Joining Dialogue In Church And In Wider Society:** Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silences and sufferings, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples.
- **Participating In Ecumenism:** The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.
- **Each Claiming Their Proper Authority And Participation:** A synodal Church is a participatory and co -responsible Church.
- **Being Part Of Discerning And Deciding:** In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit.
- **Forming Ourselves In Synodality:** The spirituality of journeying together is called to become an educational principle for the formation of the human person and of the Christian, of the families and of the communities.

While your preparation for the listening session is encouraged, do not be discouraged if you don't have time or if something is holding you back. We do not want, or expect you to, bring fully prepared written answers. There will be further instructions and a small amount of reflection time for you at the listening session. (You may bring notes from your reflections if you'd like.)

Wherever you are in your faith journey or season of life, we want to hear from you!

## C. Diocesan Synod Synthesis Agenda

### Days of Prayer, Reflection and Synthesis

Diocesan Synodal Committee

#### Day One

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>9:30 a.m.</b>               | <b>Welcome</b>  |
| <b>10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.</b> | <b>Session One: Joys</b><br><br>What joys did you experience ‘ <i>journeying together</i> ’ with the Catholic Church?   |
| <b>12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.</b>  | <b>Lunch and Personal Reflection Time</b>   |
| <b>1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.</b>   | <b>Session Two: Difficulties and Obstacles</b><br><br>What difficulties and obstacles did you experience ‘ <i>journeying together</i> ’ with the Catholic Church? |
| <b>4:00 p.m.</b>               | <b>Break</b>  |
| <b>4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.</b>   | <b>Mass and Personal Time</b>   |
| <b>6:00 p.m.</b>               | <b>Dinner</b>   |
| <b>7:00 p.m.</b>               | <b>Session Three: Hopes and Dreams</b><br><br>As we journey forward together, what are your hopes and dreams for the Church?                                      |
| <b>8:30 p.m.</b>               | <b>Social</b>   |

## Day Two

<b>8:00 a.m.</b>	<b>Breakfast</b>
<b>9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.</b>	<b>Session Four: Wouldn't be Good if . . .</b>  Wouldn't it be good if . . .
<b>11:30 a.m.</b>	<b>Checkout of room</b>
<b>12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Lunch and Personal Time</b>
<b>1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.</b>	<b>Session Five: Sharing our Experience</b>  Now what?
<b>2:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.</b>	<b>Personal Reflection</b>
<b>2:45 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.</b>	<b>Session Six: In Conclusion . . .</b>  What message will we leave?

*“To listen is to lean in, softly, with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.”* Mark Nepo

**Cover Artwork:** The Road to Emmaus by Daniel Bonnell ([www.fineartsamerica.com](http://www.fineartsamerica.com))

Taken from: *Renewing the Promise. A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, 2018