

Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario
Assemblée des Évêques Catholiques de L'Ontario



For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission
Regional Synodal Synthesis from the Ontario Dioceses

Church as Institution | Church as Community | Church as Formation

Joys | Difficulties and Obstacles | Hopes and Dreams

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Submitted by Bishop Gerrard Bergie, President of the ACBO, on July 8, 2022



Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario Assemblée des évêques catholiques de l'Ontario

Regional Synodal Synthesis Report

A. BACKGROUND

In October 2021 Pope Francis launched the path of synodality “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*”. From 2021 to 2023 the entire Church is embarking on a journey of sharing, reflecting and listening. As Pope Francis shared “*It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.*”

Through this synodal process the Church worldwide has been asked to reflect on and discern the following:

A synodal Church in announcing the Gospel, “*journeys together*”: How is the ‘*journeying together*’ happening today in the Church? What steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow in our “*journeying together*”?

B. SYNTHESIS OF DIOCESAN SYNODAL REPORTS

Dioceses across the province having completed the Diocesan phase of the synodal process (Appendix A) submitted their synod reports to the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO) in mid-June. A committee (see Appendix B) was assembled whose task was to synthesize and capture what was heard from each of the 12 dioceses and produce a provincial report that would then be passed on to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB).

The Committee’s work was grounded in the words of Sister Nathalie Becquart, the Undersecretary for the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, “*There is no synodality without spirituality*’. A three-day synodal process of prayer, listening, reflection and synthesis opened with the spiritual reflection, *A Step Along the Way* (Appendix C). Over the course of the three days, the committee identified the main themes that emerged from the diocesan reports. Specifically captured were respondents’ experience with the Catholic Church with respect to: joys, difficulties and obstacles, along with their hopes and dreams. **To the greatest degree possible, the Committee sought to retain the authentic voice of the participants and the dioceses by identifying key illustrative quotes from the reports submitted.**

C. MAJOR THEMES

Once the major themes were identified three main categories naturally emerged: Church as Institution; Church as Community and Church as Formation.

1. Church as Institution – structure, authority, hierarchy of the institutional Church
2. Church as Community – relationships within the Church, relationships with others and outreach
3. Church as Formation – experience of faith, faith formation and catechesis

The Committee noted that while these categories are not mutually exclusive and much intersectionality exists, they proved very helpful in providing an organizing framework for the report.

D. WHAT WE HEARD – THE JOYS EXPERIENCED ‘JOURNEYING TOGETHER’ WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. Church as Institution – Joys

Joy in being invited to and participating in the synodal process:

- *“. . . it was clear that everyone involved cared deeply about their faith, religious traditions, the Church, and each other. This daring sharing was a new process for lay people, staff and clergy. It was a consolation to see elevated levels of engagement, resulting in positive and self-reflective feedback. Even when comments veered into negativity, it was heartening that people cared enough about the Church to participate in the process.”*

2. Church as Community - Joys

Joy for the parish faith community of which they are part:

- *“While a significant majority expressed a profound desire for more community, it must be said that a considerable number of people conveyed a deep gratitude for their parish community. I feel such joy in being part of a sacramental church.”*
- *“If we learned anything from the pandemic, it is that the Church is a community, the Church is the Body of Christ, the Church is the Communion of Saints.”*

Joy in *belonging* to a faith community:

- *“I have no family, so the people who attend Mass at my Church have become my extended surrogate family.”*

Joy in being *supported* by the community during times of both joy and sorrow:

- *“As one respondent stated, speaking unknowingly for many others: ‘The church was there at my lowest points.’”*
- *“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 a place to go that feels like home.’”*

Joy in *serving* the needs of the community:

- *“This is a matter of giving people multiple small and meaningful experiences of commitment together, it forms them in action, it makes them discover the joys of giving.”*
- *“Our parishes do well in supporting their members who participate in the Church’s Mission by serving society in various and sometimes secular ways . . . We have contributions to the food bank, clothing drives, Christmas gifts for those in long term care and giving flowers to homebound seniors. We also wanted to mention that our Deacons do a great job by visiting the sick, Holy Communion to the homebound and encouraging parishioners to talk and support each other.”*

Joy experienced in and through the Catholic schools:

- *“Our schools act as Church for many of our students.”*
- *“Catholic schools are a blessing that deserve our utmost attention and care.”*

3. Church as Formation - Joys

Joy experienced through reception of the sacraments, in particular the Eucharist:

- *“Like the apostles on the Road to Emmaus it is in the breaking of the bread when we truly recognize Jesus.”*
- *“Respondents unanimously felt inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and honoured that He entrusts His mission to us. Many practicing Catholics say their experience of the faith provides them with traditions and a spirituality that supports them.”*

Joy in taking part in faith formation opportunities offered:

- *“According to most of the participants, the voice of God is heard through individual private prayer including adoration, rituals and devotional life.”*

Joy in the different ways in which the Catholic faith is celebrated:

- *“Some Catholics provided feedback about their desire for the Traditional Latin Mass which they find to be more reverent and therefore preferable.”*

E. WHAT WE HEARD – THE DIFFICULTIES AND OBSTACLES EXPERIENCED ‘JOURNEYING TOGETHER’ WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. Church as Institution – Difficulties and Obstacles

The hierarchical and authoritative nature of the Church:

- *“The administration of our Church looks less and less like the life of our Lord when He was on earth. The Church as an institution lacks humility. It is hierarchical, patriarchal, with a sense of being better than others.”*

The Church’s uncompromising doctrine along with an unwillingness to change:

- *“There are also the strict, unyielding, and uncompromising doctrine with the Catholic Church that limits our ability to actively listen when we have no ability or leeway whatsoever to deal with the concerns that are diametrically opposite to Church doctrine.”*
- *“The survey surfaced discontent with the Church’s current direction or teaching. Some, clearly frustrated with the Church’s lack of support for the use of the 1962 missal, the corresponding liturgies and what they see as a rejection of the Church’s orthodox teachings, believe the Church has rejected the truth as taught by Jesus Christ. Others, just as frustrated, that the Church is unwilling to change its teachings in areas such as its hierarchical structure, no women’s ordination and some moral teachings, particularly concerning same-sex relationships and living together without the Sacrament of marriage and believing the Church is more concerned about preserving its structure and privilege than spreading God’s call to charity. The deep divisions and polarization found in the faithful were painfully clear in the response we received.”*

Exclusion and limited roles available to women in Church leadership:

- *“Not having an equal role for women is degrading, disrespectful and frankly stupid.”*
- *“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?”*

The Indigenous, sex abuse and financial scandals of the Church:

- *“A common sentiment shared was that the Church was hiding from history and trying to protect its own self-interests rather than protecting those who could not protect themselves.”*
- *“Parishioners are searching for honesty, transparency regarding funds that go towards lawsuits, support for victims, and their families and help for abusers.”*
- *“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 Church must also take responsibility for its mistakes and repent for the wrongs committed. If the Church fails to make amends for past abuses, many people will not listen to our message or respect us. We should take part fully in the reconciliation process towards Aboriginal [Indigenous] communities.”*
- *“The strong feeling that not enough was done to provide restitution and express sorrow for Indian Residential schools was the top reason for feeling of embarrassment and shame.”*

Laity not encouraged nor have opportunities to share their gifts and talents:

- *“I feel I have an obligation to my parish, while I am poor, I do have talents I could offer, but I feel unwelcome, and unwanted.”*
- *“I have not really seen the Holy Spirit at work regarding decision making in my parish”*
- *“There appeared to be a belief that there is no evidence that the laity are listened to and there is nothing to show that opportunities are created to change this.”*

Priests required to take on too many roles:

- *“Reduce the workload of pastors – the pastors are too busy handling the administrative needs of the parishes.”*
- *“Many priests express the need to feel more supported in their work, as well as the need for companionship.”*
- *“Priests often forced to fill many roles but should be allowed to focus on being priests ahead of administrators.”*

A disconnect between the diocese and parishes:

- *“The inconsistency between parishes, as well as current diocesan procedures to review pastoral plans collaboratively and routinely need to be studied.”*

Fear of change and skepticism with respect to the synodal process:

- *“Some feared that inviting input might lead to the transformation of a church that they would prefer remain the way it is or the way it was.”*
- *“When invited to offer feedback, people said, ‘What for? Nobody is going to listen to me. It [response] will get changed.’”*
- *“Cynicism expressed regarding the synodal process specifically. A recurring pun used: Sin-Odd. Many respondents did not believe the Church would listen to their responses or that the Synod was rigged to bring about a certain result.”*

2. Church as Community – Difficulties and Obstacles

A lack of welcome to and connectedness with the community:

- *“The majority of participants in the synodal conversations desire or are searching for their place in the Church.”*
- *“For individuals who have felt condescended, intimidated, isolated, judged, marginalized, rejected or unwelcomed by the Church, it is clear they have experienced a Catholic community at odds with the welcoming, inclusive and redemptive message of the Gospel.”*
- *“We struggle to be a welcoming Church. There is a gap and bridging it will be difficult.”*
- *“Some grew up with the faith and slowly drifted away or no longer attend. They may still pray and believe in God, but they no longer feel connected to the Church community. Some feel they do not need the Catholic Church to explore their faith or relationship with God.”*
- *“There is a tension or perhaps a growing divide between Catholics over the Mass form itself – the Novus Ordo (Mass in English/Vernacular) and the Traditional Latin Mass. Some Catholics provided feedback about their desire for the Traditional Latin Mass which they find more reverent and therefore, preferable. They take exception to the restrictions placed on the Traditional Latin Mass and are pleased that it is celebrated within most regions of the Diocese.”*
- *“People have left the Church and left people questioning not their trust in God, but in the organized Church.”*
- *“The vast majority of respondents expressed that any moving forward of the Church’s mission needs to include a greater and further reaching out to those who feel abandoned by the Church.”*
- *“We must live lives of kindness to others. Unless we develop friendly relationships with those around us, they will never be interested in the Gospel.”*
- *“Changes in pastoral leadership styles when transferring pastors and associates can also damage a community, especially if done too often with a particular community.”*

The great absence of youth:

- *"The youth are the great absence; they have not abandoned the Church but feel abandoned."*
- *"If young people are not present in their local parishes, it is not so much that they don't feel the Church is relevant, as they don't know whether they can trust it."*
- *"One of the youth summarized what was felt within his youth group by stating, 'while certain non-controversial topics are "safe" to discuss within the Church, others seem to be completely taboo. Racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, colonialism, COVID-19, poverty and human rights are all issues that weigh heavily on our conscience as a Catholic, but we feel that we cannot discuss these topics with other members of the Church because they are too "political" or "controversial".'*

A belief by families that the Church is out of step with its understanding how the family of 2022 functions:

- *"Parishes need to be: delighted to see new families, children who cry, young people who worship God. The animosity towards young people and new families is tangible and drives people away. Parishes should accept people where they are at rather than point out what they should change."*

A lack of inclusion for newcomers, marginalized, divorced/remarried, LGBTQ2S+, seniors, youth, women:

- *"Churches tend to form a comfortable community for members but exclude the poor and marginalized. Members may donate money, food, clothing but not friendship."*
- *". . . this question (how are the concerns of the laity listened to) has shown light to a pattern of how many women don't feel like they are being listened to at all."*
- *"Whether perceived or real, 'the Church is considered misogynistic, homophobic, racist and colonial' or at least some of the above, by a great many. "*
- *"Many people indicated the need for a Church to be more intentional about inviting and engaging people in the Church's ministry, especially women and those living on the edge of the Church, for example, LGBTQIA+ community."*
- *"Our parishes must become more invitational."*

A fear of being judged or dismissed, in particular: newcomers, marginalized, divorced/remarried, LGBTQ2S+, seniors, youth, women:

- *"We acknowledge that sometimes those seeking companionship are often reluctant to do so because of fear of judgement or rejection, its our responsibility to have informal conversations to gain understanding of each other."*

The disconnect among parish, school and home:

- *"Priests are not visible in the RC schools so there isn't any connection between church and school."*
- *"Relationships between parishes and schools are uneven across the Archdiocese. Some schools have good and dynamic relationships with their local parishes. Other schools have zero connection or interaction with any parish. . . A few summaries suggested that sacramental preparation be placed back in the schools in order to strengthen church-school relationships and bring families back to the Church."*

Communication within the community and to the larger community:

- *"The Church continues to operate in traditional ways and misses opportunities to reach people in innovative and culturally responsive ways."*

4. Church as Formation – Difficulties and Obstacles

A lack of ongoing faith formation and resources:

- *“The world is evolving at a faster pace than ever and many have expressed concern that the church should be more connected to the reality of evolving contemporary matters.”*
- *“Some individuals showed a passionate commitment to Evangelization but requested better resources to equip themselves and their parish.”*

The laity’s lack of knowledge and understanding of Church teachings and doctrine:

- *“Catholics don’t know their faith, can’t explain it or teach it and parents can’t help their children. Most people know the rules but not the ‘why’s’ for the theology of the rules.”*
- *“In our local context, formal catechesis ends with confirmation for many parishioners. We can therefore assume that many of our Catholics have a 12 – 13-year old’s understanding of Church.”*

Inadequate formation of priests and deacons for contemporary parish ministry:

- *“Many of our respondents acknowledged the generous and self-giving service of our Priests and Deacons. Our people still love their clergy and are grateful for their life and ministry. Yet, some still expressed concern that the formation of Priests and Deacons does not adequately prepare them for contemporary parish ministry.”*

Homilies that are not relevant to everyday life and fail to inspire:

- *“If the homilies are of too high a spiritual or intellectual level, without people being able to make a connection with their everyday life, they gain nothing. They fall asleep physically and spiritually.”*
- *“Have scriptures explained in a way, that makes it relevant and useful in today’s world.”*

Schools and their role in faith formation:

- *“After 12 years of religious education and 37 years attending church, I do not feel prepared to be a missionary disciple.”*

F. WHAT WE HEARD – THE HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS WE ‘JOURNEY TOGETHER’.

1. Church as Institution – Hopes and Dreams

Leadership and organizational models rethought in ways to promote greater collaboration among clergy and laity:

- *“Another (response) insists let love be the guide, not just rules and regulations.”*
- *“Leadership and organizational models can be rethought in ways to promote greater collaboration.”*
- *“One attendee offered that the theme of Education Week 2022 was apt for the Church at this moment in its history: ‘Rebuild, restore, renew is a good theme for the whole church now.’”*
- *“Parish Finance Committee is a requirement in the Code of Canon Law but the Parish Pastoral Council is not.”*
- *“It was suggested many times that a shared model of ministry among priests and laity would be more engaging than the heavy load of ministerial tasks that the priest currently carries on his own.”*

The leadership and voice of women:

- *“There were repeated comments concerning the Church involving women in a more meaningful way, positioning women in leadership and recognizing the impact of language by updating and applying inclusive language.”*

Reconciliation for past mistakes:

- *“Indigenous peoples also need healing from the past harms done through the residential school system. An apology from the Holy Father that takes responsibility for the harm inflicted upon them will begin the process of healing for many.”*

- *“Promote new approaches to the pastoral care of indigenous peoples developed by the Episcopal Conference of Canada.”*
- *“One person suggests making an honest assessment of current Church policies and practices, as well as identifying past transgressions, ‘Think of it as an examination of conscience.’”*

A re-emphasized ‘Call to Holiness’:

- *“We are being called to re-emphasize the call to holiness, as we seek to respond to the challenges that we face today.”*
- *“How can our style of Church be relevant in the society in which we live? How was Jesus relevant in the society of his time? He was a shepherd, he prayed, instructed and loved. Our parish must model Jesus, we have to invite, welcome and involve others. The need for spiritual direction is natural but we need to make sure we are actively listening, communicating, leading by example, be visible, be respectful so that we can properly model the faith and speak the truth in love. We must be the ones to stand up for the word of God in total love for all the people.”*

An embracing and continuation of the synodal process:

- *“Passionate engagement of pastoral leaders is key”*
- *“The best way to make a change is to be part of the change. Priests need to ask for suggestions, feedback and encourage input regularly.”*
- *“A continuation of the synodal process may be a form of communal accompaniment in which parish communities are encouraged to listen to each member and grow in solidarity and compassion. “*
- *“One person writes that we need to ‘be open to a variety of methods to evangelize, dare to try new methods, don’t always put new wine in the old wineskins.’”*
- *“There is a need to develop stronger, deeper community in the parish, which will hopefully quench thirst of the lonely. In our local context, determining how we can best accompany people remains the central question for pastoral ministry.”*

2. Church as Community – Hopes and Dreams

A welcoming and accepting community:

- *“The majority of participants in the synodal conversation desire or are searching for their place in the Church.”*
- *“We must learn how to better welcome people whose lives are publicly at odds with the Church and her teachings. There should be no division of ‘us’ and ‘them’ because in community there is only ‘us’”.*
- *“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.”*
- *“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.”*
- *“May people find our churches a place of love and healing, a place where they feel PEACE. Everyone counts, everyone is loved, without conditions, without exceptions.”*

An inclusive, merciful, and compassionate community:

- *“More people might frequent the Church today if it was viewed as a sanctuary for searchers, the confused, the wounded, the broken and the non-religious.”*
- *“The vast majority of respondents expressed that any moving forward of the Church’s mission needs to include a greater and further reaching out to those who feel abandoned by the Church. Particularly those in irregular marriage situations, those holding uncommon or unpopular views, women, the elderly, the youth and the LGBTQIA+ community.”*
- *“We must strive to help them experience a welcome, a sense of being loved and valued, and know that this Church is their loving Mother who knows their needs and want to hear their voice.”*

- *“The wish expressed is for the parishes of the Diocese to be like families, in which the priest feels supported by parishioners and parishioners share deeply in faith and life. Children should be 100% safe and all minorities should be respected. Ideally, the parish should be a place of listening, dialogue and exchange ‘in which we can share our dreams and visions inspired by the Holy Spirit.’ We should also have dialogue with our Christian brothers and sisters.”*

A non-judgemental community of faith:

- *“The fear of judgement must be replaced by the unconditional love of Christ. The session notes regularly identified fear as one of the main factors that people do not speak up or become involved in the life of the parish: fear of being judged, fear of not knowing their faith or parish/diocesan procedures, fear of offending someone who thinks differently, and fear of confrontation was often identified. This fear must be replaced by the unconditional love of Christ.”*
- *“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 judgemental.”*
- *“The Church needs to first understand where people are at in their life and faith journey and walk with them with respect, compassion and gentleness.”*

A greater connection to families and youth:

- *“There must be a way to make the Church more comfortable for our young families and youth – one that reflects the ‘family structures’ of modern times” Another insists, “Let love be the guide, not just rules and regulations.”*
- *“The participants’ dream is first and foremost for churches to be filled with life and overflowing with families and young people.”*
- *“Youth want a greater sense of inclusion and belonging and they desire to hear their own voice in the process. The experience of synodality stands out to them positively because it has been a rare opportunity for them to be heard without judgement.”*
- *“Young people are the future, they must be given a place to speak or rather a place to better explain themselves. You have to listen to them and understand their needs. The more their questions will be listened to and the more answered, they will be able to take their place.”*

A greater and trusting collaboration between clergy and laity:

- *We must learn to better walk with all of God’s children, regardless of where they are in their journey, without compromising what we hold to be true as Christians. This is the narrow path of true synodality.”*
- *“A community that will ‘accompany people through difficult times.’”*
- *“Only in humility with open hearts and minds can listening and courageous conversations begin to build bridges between the different perspectives to bring a shared vision of the Church.”*

A Church that takes responsibility for its mistakes and takes action towards reconciliation:

- *“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 families of misunderstanding, hurt and damage and those who were left behind because of these events, sharing their story and seeking healing.”*
- *“Our faithful want the interpersonal relations between the bishop and the priests to be well cared for in order to avoid certain situations of the past to recur and to call into question the paternal relationship of the bishop with his priests, while also avoiding the climate of mistrust of priests towards their bishop.”*

A continued synodal process of listening and dialogue:

- *“Open the windows and let fresh air in’ as one participant shares. This synodal process is woven together with the journey of healing together as a church. The experience of sharing and listening without judgement feels new and unexpected to many, helping us to meet one another in our shared humanity as we relearn, or perhaps re-remember, our common wishes and fears, and perhaps most importantly, our common heritage as the People of God.”*

A deeper connection of church and school:

- *“Church must cultivate a firm and deep-rooted relationship with our source schools and parental community. Young people need a safe place to gather and dialogue about Church teaching in addition to having time to enjoy social gatherings such as weekly movie nights, dances, games night and take part in mentorship activities.”*

3. Church as Formation – Hopes and Dreams

Faith formation opportunities beyond the sacraments that places a renewed emphasis upon catechesis and formation:

- *“The desire for a deepened parish community through prayer, devotions and other community events.”*
- *“Ongoing faith formation is the key to one’s understanding of their own faith. Without that, they cannot go out and spread the Word of God and further evangelize within our greater society. Education for the laity on current moral issues, aspects of the faith and adult catechesis and on-going faith formation were requested.”*
- *“The promotion of Christian unity is intrinsically linked to evangelization. Renewal in the Church is assisted when Christians proclaim and witness together to the power of the Living Word of God at work in the Church and reaching out to the peripheries.”*
- *“If Catholics are not being formed by the Church, we can presume they will seek formation and guidance elsewhere including the media (especially social media) and government. This is especially true on complex societal questions, such as end of life issues, sexuality and gender, marriage and divorce . . . We require strong leaders, both lay and clergy to shepherd our people to a fully integrated view of the human person within our Catholic tradition and faith.”*
- *“We can’t love or communicate what we don’t understand.”*
- *“RCIA, Alpha re-imagined and reformatted for a synodal Church.”*

Liturgy that is reverent and enhances and promotes prayer life:

- *“Others wish for a more engaging Mass for their children, or even a children’s Mass, with children playing active roles in its different parts.”*
- *“Preach good sermons about living in our now and direct the people to read the part of the bible that strengthens us.”*
- *“Music was mentioned several times as a very important part of the experience of liturgy.”*

G. WHAT STEPS IS THE SPIRIT INVITING US TO TAKE IN ORDER TO GROW IN OUR 'JOURNEYING TOGETHER'?

"Obstacles become opportunities with God."

1. Church as Institution: 'Journeying together' to . . .

- . . . have a church hierarchy that is more inclusive and provides laity a greater voice.
- . . . have dioceses and parishes where more women are provided leadership roles.
- . . . have parishes where there is greater laity involvement.
- . . . embrace the synodal path, a path of healing.
- . . . ensure that synodality not be a one-time opportunity and that it becomes our way of operating.
- . . . adopt a process of synodality among the clergy – bishop to bishop, bishop to priest.
- . . . ensure that synodality is not dependent upon the present Pope, the present bishop or the present pastor.

2. Church as Community: 'Journeying together' to . . .

- . . . truly listen to each other.
- . . . enter into dialogue with openness and without judgement.
- . . . create a more loveable Church that welcomes and is more inclusive – to include everyone and exclude no one.
- . . . embrace Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous communities through concrete actions.
- . . . work towards a Church that is more transparent.
- . . . actively reach out and 'cross the road' attending to the marginalized.
- . . . engage youth and listen to their voice.

3. Church as Formation: 'Journeying together' to . . .

- . . . offer formation at every age and every stage of life so that clergy and laity are equipped for today's challenges.
- . . . provide formation that prepares and supports the laity to be missionary disciples.
- . . . engage in ongoing catechesis and education.
- . . . find new ways to engage families, parish and school in sacramental preparation.
- . . . inspire Catholics, both in the Church and those who have moved away from the Church, to develop a richer understanding of sacramental life.

H. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF NOTE

Common areas of note among the diocesan reports include:

- Whether the diocese was small or large, predominately urban/metropolitan or rural, there was much commonality among the joys, struggles and hopes and dreams expressed by the respondents.
- In reviewing the reports and identifying, joys, obstacles and struggles and hopes and dreams -- struggles and obstacles predominated.
- Some responses noted skepticism, that what they shared/submitted would indeed be listened to and acted upon at all levels of the Church's hierarchy.
- Responses demonstrated that people cared enough to contribute. The responses were perceived to emerge from places of deep-rooted care and concern for the Church. In some cases, the responses came from places of great joy and others from places of wounded love. As one committee member reflected, *'In reading through all the reports you were left humbled and moved by the fact that the respondents cared so deeply'*.

Appendix A – Synodal Synthesis Process

The Province of Ontario is comprised of nine dioceses, three archdioceses, and five eparchies and is home to approximately 4.5 million Catholics. Mass is celebrated regularly in approximately forty languages.

Dioceses and eparchies were asked to submit their own synodal synthesis reports to the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario by June 17th, 2022. The dioceses had several short months during which to gather as much information as possible from their parishioners, parishes, and many other individuals and groups who wished to contribute to this important undertaking. These diocesan reports were condensed into a ten-page report. The Regional Synod Synthesis Committee was likewise charged with the responsibility to condense all submissions into its own single ten-page report that would attempt to capture the voices and contributions heard across all of Ontario, and then submit that report to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops by July 8, 2022.

The dioceses and eparchies worked diligently to gather as much information as possible in very trying times, as waves of the pandemic continued, with ongoing restrictions on in-person gatherings, coupled with anxiety about gathering in any group settings.

Despite these restrictions, valuable information was gathered using a variety of means and formats. Parishes undertook unique approaches engaging communities in the synodal process including:

- Online surveys
- Paper questionnaires
- In-person small group discussions and meetings
- One-on-one conversations and meetings
- Virtual discussions and meetings
- Online forums
- Outreach to community groups, schools, school boards, etc. for written submissions
- Community groups and organizations made their own submissions
- Discussions with clergy, deacons, staff, parish volunteers

Dioceses engaged in regular and ongoing communication with parishes, parishioners, community groups and external partners and organizations, encouraging participation in this synodal process.

Dioceses expressed regret that they were not able to conduct more in-person meetings or to meet with groups multiple times during this synodal process. Nonetheless, dioceses felt confident that many people were able to participate and contribute their thoughts and ideas. Dioceses also expressed how powerful this experience has been for all involved, and there is a genuine desire to continue this conversation at the parish, diocesan, and provincial level. Many expressed a sense of urgency that these conversations must continue, and that there is no need to wait for the Synod in 2023 to continue the work locally.

Appendix B – ACBO Regional Synod Synthesis Committee

The Executive of the ACBO asked the Ontario Bishops to nominate individuals to serve on the Regional Synod Synthesis Committee. These names were submitted to the General Secretary prior to the 2022 Spring Plenary. At the Plenary, the Bishops considered the names that had been submitted, including others proposed during the plenary itself. The Bishops charged the Executive with confirming the members of the committee and with appointing a Committee Chairperson.

The following are the members of the ACBO Regional Synod Synthesis Committee:

Valeria Ayala, Spiritual Affairs Coordinator with the Archdiocese of Toronto, co-chair of Archdiocesan Synod Committee

Brian Beal, General Secretary of the ACBO

Hélène Boudreau, retired Catholic Francophone educator, member of Assomption de Notre-Dame, Oshawa, Facilitator of Regional Francophone Community Synodal process

Kristen Carey, Executive Assistant of the ACBO

David Dayler, retired Director of the Discipleship and Parish Life Office, Diocese of Hamilton, Co-Chair of Diocesan Synod Committee

Margaret Jong, Chancellor with the Diocese of St. Catharines, Member of Diocesan Synod Committee

Most Reverend Wayne Lobsinger, Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Hamilton, Member of Diocesan Synod Committee

Sébastien Lacroix, Assistant General Secretary (Francophone affairs) of the ACBO

Linda Staudt, retired Director of Education of the London District Catholic School Board, Co-Chair of the Diocesan Synod Committee.

The Executive also confirmed that Linda Staudt would serve as chair of this committee.

The committee was mandated with the responsibility of reviewing the submissions of all the dioceses and eparchies of Ontario, and creating a regional synthesis report that would be submitted to the CCCB by July 8, 2022.

Following three days of prayerful discernment at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre, Mississauga, Ontario, and following the process outlined in Appendix C, Committee Chair, Linda Staudt authored this report on behalf of the entire committee.

Appendix C – Synod Synthesis Committee – Agenda - Days of Prayer, Reflection and Synthesis

Days of Prayer, Reflection and Synthesis
ACBO Synod Synthesis Committee
Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre, Mississauga, Ontario
Day One

10:00 **Welcome**

10:00 – 12:00 **Session One: Welcome and Team Time**

Setting the Stage for Prayer, Reflection and Synthesis

12:00 – 1:00 **Lunch and Personal Reflection Time**

1:00 – 4:00 **Session Two: *Joys***

Prayer and Reflection – The Good Samaritan - Luke 10: 25-37

What we heard - The joys experienced '*journeying together*' with the Catholic Church

DAY TWO

8:00 – 9:00 **Breakfast**

9:00 – 12:00 **Session Three: *Difficulties and Obstacles***

Prayer and Reflection – The Road to Emmaus (Part 1) – Luke 24: 13-24

What we heard – The difficulties and obstacles experienced '*journeying together*' with the Catholic Church

12:00 – 1:00 **Lunch and Personal Reflection Time**

1:00 – 4:00 **Session Four: *Hopes and Dreams***

Prayer and Reflection - The Road to Emmaus (Part II) – Luke 24: 24-35

What we heard -- The hopes and dreams for the Catholic Church as we journey forward

4:00 **Break**

4:30 – 5:30 **Mass and Personal Time**

5:30 **Dinner**

DAY THREE

8:00 **Breakfast**

9:00 – 12:00 **Session Five: *The Path Forward***

Prayer and Reflection – Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Part 1) – 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11

- I wonder if? I wonder why?
- Couldn't we at least?
- How can we help?

10:30 **Checkout of Rooms**

12:00 – 1:00 **Lunch and Personal Time**

1:00 – 2:30 **Session Six: *From our Experience***

Prayer and Reflection – Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Part 2) – John 20: 19-23

What is the message we wish to leave to those in our parishes?

2:30 – 3:00 ***In Conclusion . . .***

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

A Step Along the Way

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything,
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders;
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future that is not our own.