



**SYNOD 2021-2023**

**Summary Report of the Diocese of Pembroke**



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

The Synod on Synodality in the Diocese of Pembroke was organized by a committee composed of the bishop, the vicar general, the chancellor, two episcopal vicars, and the director of diocesan pastoral work. The committee first appropriated the Vade Mecum, formulated the questions to be asked, determined the timeline, and designed a process to collect answers.

The purpose of the consultation was, according to the preparatory document, to find pastoral avenues that allow a deeper communion, a more complete participation, and a greater openness to the accomplishment of our mission in the world<sup>1</sup>. In the words of Pope Francis, it was also an opportunity to “to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to be nourished, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.”<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the announcement of this synod, the diocese had begun an evangelization project, which aims to direct all pastoral orientations towards evangelization. Thus, the committee designed questions to enable the faithful to share their feedback on synodal themes (synodality, mission, communion, participation) while at the same time providing valuable information for its missionary endeavor. The questions submitted to the reflection of the baptized of the diocese were the following:

*To become an evangelizing Church that reaches out to the disaffected Catholics, to the poor, and to those who do not know Christ...*

- 1. How can we, the faithful and our Christian communities, be more open to evangelization?*
- 2. How can we, the faithful and our Christian communities, better respond to the universal call to holiness through a greater love for God and for one another?*
- 3. How can the priests, deacons, religious and all the faithful be mobilized to evangelize?*
- 4. What are your dreams, hopes and vision for the future of the Diocese of Pembroke?*
- 5. How can we continue this consultation and dialogue after the synod?*

In reflecting on the questions, participants were encouraged to let the Holy Spirit guide them by praying and reflecting on the Word of God. Priests in the diocese were instructed on the synod and invited to decide how the synod should be carried out within their parishes. They were encouraged to hold a liturgy of the Word followed by discussions in small groups. Due to health regulations related to COVID 19, virtual gatherings were often more appropriate than in-person meetings and many parishioners simply answered the questions online.

The Diocese of Pembroke was also concerned with encouraging the participation of those baptized who do not attend celebrations very often or not at all. Thus, parishioners were challenged to think of at least one distant Catholic they could contact to answer the questions and provided with invitation cards to help them with this initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> Vade Mecum 3.1 et 1.2 and Preparatory document 1.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis' speech at the opening of the synod.

The lack of clarity in some of the synodal documents was one of the challenges we encountered, as was the limited time available for organizing the synod. Nevertheless, the synodal process was well established, and we received responses steadily: 160 responses were received, 150 in English and 10 in French. Using adapted questions, students in grades 7 to 12 from schools in the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board also responded as well as students from a French school.

It was directed by the Synod of Bishops that the synthesis be limited to ten pages. This allows the synthesis to present only the main themes emerging from the responses. To flesh out the text, we include in an appendix additional ideas and reflections coming from the responses. The synthesis and its appendices will become available on the diocesan website, and before the end of 2022, a ceremony will take place to celebrate the efforts made and the answers received.

## 1. Synodality

At the level of synodality, it first comes down to **leadership**, namely the willingness of the bishop and priests to continue this dialogue and consultation on the life and mission of the Church.

Another essential element is **prayer**. In one participant's words, "we need to be led by the Holy Spirit so that our minds, hearts, and souls are in conformity with Christ. Otherwise, we seek to create a Church in our own fallen image, and that is doomed to fail." To participate in the synod is in some way to enter into communion with God.

Additionally, **communications from the diocese and the parishes** are crucial. Communicating the results of the questionnaire will be the first step in inspiring further response. Letters, emails, parish bulletins, Facebook posts, the Ecclesia magazine, and the diocesan website are suggested as ways to convey the results of the consultation.

To continue on this synodal path, initiatives should be developed to talk about the work to be done at the diocesan and parish levels. The Bible or texts on spirituality could serve as a starting point for these discussions and turn around questions such as:

- What is the cause of the lack of participation in celebrations?
- What can we do to keep families in the Church?
- How can we address the problem of priest shortages and abuse?
- How can parishes better serve our spiritual needs?
- How can we make faith more relevant to people's lives?
- How can we bring back those who have left the Church?
- Why do parents of Catholic school children not attend Mass?
- Have we lost our ethics and morals?
- Why do people leave the Church and no longer attend Masses and other services?

Human relations and mental and physical health are other topics that could be discussed. Catholic personalities and experts would certainly help facilitating such discussions in the health field.

Overall, participants liked the online questionnaire. Some suggested that questions be returned regularly. But the preferred method proposed to keep listening, dialogue and find ways to implement future proposals is for parishes, individually or jointly, to organize **face-to-face or online meetings**.

These could be held after Mass or during the week over coffee. They would be intended to give any group the opportunity to express itself, whether it be children, teenagers, seniors, parents, Knights of Columbus, catechists, schools, etc. Someone suggested using existing meetings, such as parents' meetings for sacramental preparation, thus allowing us to reach out to Catholics who do not attend church very often.

Other ways proposed to continue the synodal journey would be a mini-retreat or an annual parish gathering. The bishop could also engage in conversations when he visits parishes, celebrates Mass, and meets with parishioners afterward.

If it was suggested that parish councils and priests initiate these initiatives, it is nonetheless still a matter of listening not of directing or teaching. A suggestion was made that we learn the "art of listening" with the aim of welcoming and respecting our differences. Pastors were also encouraged to call their parishioners to get to know them better: "This is how family spirit is built," writes one participant.

Parish discussions may be combined with inter-parish or regional structures of dialogue, similar to deaneries. Each parish would have a synodal representative who would connect via Zoom on a regular basis, whether monthly, quarterly or every six months, to convey what is happening in their parish, communicate progress and share good ideas. There could also be meetings in rural areas. A participant suggested that a diocesan committee or regional synodal committee composed of priests and laity gather ideas from parishes and regions and develop pastoral suggestions. Once some proposals are approved, they can be used as goals by parishes and other Christian communities in the diocese.

Parishes would then get together for discussions and prayer about how to implement these pastoral orientations. Pastors and Christian communities would benefit from support as they pursue the proposals. In this stage, it would be useful to have measures to assess progress.

Updates on progress made could be communicated using various means of communication already mentioned, such as letters from the bishop, electronic mailings, parish bulletins, the Ecclesia magazine, the Facebook page, and the diocesan website.

Last, a participant suggested that it should be clear what the faithful can expect in terms of response and whom they should contact if they have a problem (which person should they contact first? The pastor, a designated priest, or the bishop directly). According to him or her, it is more likely that parishioners will continue to participate if the process is clear.

## 2. Mission

Firstly, it is through **prayer and communion with God** that we will be more willing to evangelize. We must adore the Lord and be empowered by the Spirit, then we can tell others about Him and the love He has for us. The change of hearts and minds does not happen through our efforts alone; we must let God work through us when we evangelize.

The second and most important element that emerged from the responses regarding mission is **formation**. Evangelization and our faith must be better understood and appreciated if we want to evangelize. Having a deep faith and knowing that it is God's will that we proclaim the Gospel to those who do not know or follow Christ is essential. In one participant's words, we are "called and anointed by baptism - endowed with gifts and charisms by the Holy Spirit to build up the Church."

We need to **step outside of our churches** and homes and take the initiative to invite others to our activities. We need to be more visible in our communities. A participant suggests discussing the issue in home groups and developing an evangelism strategy.

It is clear from the answers the need to **know how to evangelize**: "We need to know that there are 'methods' to help us along in evangelizing ... If we could be made to feel that we are not "alone" - or 'doing it ourselves', then that would help. If we could be made to feel as 'facilitators' -- such as in an Alpha program -- or some-such -- that would help. Then it is a journey together." A participant writes: "Invite and share stories from Parishes on what God is doing there. Could include what's working, what's not and what's next."

Another element that undoubtedly emerges from the responses is that of **personal conversion**. Authentic evangelization must begin with a personal renewal in every Catholic, so that every member of the Mystical Body of Christ is convinced of the personal and unchanging love of Our Lord. Then we will be able to give more authentically to others this Love that we have received.

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 toward our Aboriginal communities.

To be missional, we must **be examples**. We will inspire others to consider our Church through what we do in the community, and how we do it, such as serving the elderly, the impoverished, and helping students (among others).

**Parish conversion** is also necessary, particularly to allow parishioners to better know one another. Dialogue opportunities will lead to reconciliation between parishioners and even clergy. One participant writes that there can be no spirit of evangelization without unity within the congregation.

The question of the **quality of the welcome and the Sunday experience** often comes up: "If the church becomes a welcoming place, if the experience is joyful and uplifting (short positive homilies, lively music, etc.), people will come because they want to be there."

A converted church is also a **listening church**: "The spiritual leader must listen to the concern of the parishioners and get to know them. You cannot open the door to evangelization, until people are comfortable knowing they have a voice". It is also important to listen to those who have been hurt by the Church, Catholics and non-Catholics.

Some would like a Church that moves forward to "reflect 21st century thinking." One person writes, "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! (...) Stop teaching clericalism in the seminaries and teach that 'the called' are equal to the laity and responsible to the community as well as to God. Others insist instead on maintaining a more traditional practice of the faith. Overall, we can see from the responses that people want to be proud of their churches and faith.

Finally, a Church that converts to better love and evangelize considers its priests. Many responses stress the need for priests to know how to communicate effectively, delegate and involve the faithful.

### 3. Communion

One response reads, "We cannot love God and others without His grace". Personal or communal **prayer** is essential for communion. It can be participation in Mass, reception of other sacraments, Eucharistic adoration, meditation on the Word of God, recitation of the Rosary and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, listening to Christian music, etc. Lived individually, in small groups, or during retreats and pilgrimages, these forms of prayer, accompanied by sacrifices, bring our minds and hearts closer to God

**Formation** is also viewed as a way to be in communion with God. It helps us understand Him, his Word, his love and his mercy: "When you know and love God more, you can only go towards others with love" writes a participant. Several formats are proposed for formation, including Life in the Spirit seminars, small groups to study the Bible, the Catechism and the lives of the saints.

For some, **traditional liturgy** is seen a fount from which Christian communities can draw inspiration, such as the Traditional Latin Mass.

A key element in fostering fraternal communion and holiness is **personal conversion**. We should have love for all, even if their actions contradict the Church. Love is the way the Church was built. We should accept our own limitations and not be a know-it-all: "The more we reflect on our own shortcomings, the better we can be attentive to others".

For communion to happen, we also need to live an **ecclesial conversion**. 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". Ecclesial conversion includes reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and victims of sexual abuse, and an assessment of women's role in the Church.

Experiencing more fellowship with one another means engaging in activities where it is possible to **gather, share and listen to one another**. This can take the form of groups where we reflect on the lives of the saints, the Bible, or another book.

Living in communion with others also requires **responding to one another's needs**. It's important to reach out to others to learn not only what their material needs are but also what their spiritual needs are: "Do what you can to serve: go visit old people's homes, babysit for groups of mothers, say hello and offer your help to a neighbor...".

The Church should be **more inclusive and welcoming**: "God said, 'Love one another as I have loved you'. (...) It's simple. We shouldn't exclude. We should be inclusive." One person suggested that at every Mass, someone identifies and welcome newcomers and strangers.

In addition, respondents believe that **bishops** play an important role in fostering communion, notably among priests: "bishops should personally devote whatever time they have to meet the priest and offer them support."

Furthermore, responses focus on **life witness**. 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. As Christians, we should refrain from deriding and fearing those whose beliefs do not match our own. It's about "seeing God in others" and "demonstrating the patience and unconditional love of Jesus in all circumstances, no matter how they treat us. This allows us to be a light of God's love in the world".

#### **4. Participation**

Responses suggest that participation in the mission of the Church can be increased if the **bishop and the priests lead by example** and encourage the faithful to witness to Christ: "Priests and deacons need to lead by example in reaching out to new people, welcoming them and introducing them to others". Increasing participation requires strong leadership from priests who need to understand how to motivate and communicate with volunteers about parish events and opportunities. Creating a task force for lay participation within each parish could be helpful.

To encourage the involvement of lay people, priests can use homilies, announcements and parish bulletins. Their role is to help the laity discern what their gifts are, so they can better use those gifts for evangelization. Evangelization must also be demystified: "It is not complicated; it begins with simple friendships".

Prayer again is seen essential so that the laity may "keep the flame in their hearts to spread the Gospel in the community". Priests should **foster spiritual renewal** by encouraging daily reading of Scripture, frequent participation in the sacraments, pilgrimages, consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, viewing of Formed videos, participation in retreats and seminars on the life of the Spirit. During these activities, lay people can "listen to the Holy Spirit and pray for priests,

deacons and religious. The responses also indicate that participants would like to see more perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the parishes and ministries such as "Unbound".

Participation in the mission of the Church is a matter of **growing in the conviction that we have something valuable to share**, that there is much spiritual poverty around us, and that it is our duty to share Christ with others. This can be done through a **formation on the mission** and the beauty of our faith. We could then be more passionate: "Before people can evangelize, they must be enthusiastic and love what they transmit (...) Let us, the Church, lay and religious, be mobilized only by the love of the Spouse. With gratitude and selfless service".

Someone writes: "Motivation and mobilization are the sinews of war. They depend on the Holy Spirit and dynamic teams. Paid employees are often less motivated than those who voluntarily give themselves to a task. It is better to have just one highly motivated employee, coaching a large number of Christians on fire, volunteers with little free time, but full of life, than to hire "pastoral ladies" who seek to protect their jobs."

The mobilization of the people of God also requires **formation**, especially for the laity. This will give them more confidence in their ability to evangelize. Such formation could include presenting the lives of the saints and the ways in which they evangelized. One synod participant suggests that "perhaps the first step is for everyone to reflect on their own lives and answer the question: What has God done for me in my life? Then we have a testimony to share when the opportunity arises. It is also for all to understand that evangelization is not reserved for priests but is in fact the duty of every baptized person. Jesus commanded us to "go and make disciples of all nations".

If parishes have **evangelization programs** in place and the necessary materials, the work of evangelization and participation will be facilitated. 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 the new wine in the old wineskins.

Church members should also "participate in community events and school activities. This way they will be **more present in the community** and will be able to create links with other people". 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 joy of giving".

Lastly, to encourage participation, sometimes **reconciliation** between Catholics is needed. It is so that we can truly show the love we have for one another and be happy. This is the only environment that will attract people.



## 5. Dreams and hopes for the Pembroke Diocese

The participants' dream is first and foremost for churches to be filled with life and overflowing with families and young people. People in the diocese would like to see more priests, deacons, and religious. Some simply want the Church to survive, regardless of its failings. Many people would like to see more convents, monasteries, hermitages, and Catholic hospitals in the diocese.

For this to happen, the Church must undergo a missionary transformation. We must realize that we can bring Christ to others and strive for those who have left the Church or remain on the sidelines due to COVID-19 to return.

This missionary transformation includes taking care of the newcomers' church experience. Evangelization is the process of building a community that crosses ecclesial and even political divisions (living unity in diversity), that does not judge, that does not polarize by its rules and where everyone feels welcomed. One person writes: "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. For the Sunday experience, many emphasize the importance of liturgies and sermons that are lively and relevant to our lives today; that are not moralistic and "that deal with the challenges and struggles that Christians are facing today".

The wish expressed is for the parishes of the Diocese of Pembroke to be like families, in which the priest feels supported by the parishioners and the parishioners share deeply in faith and life. Children should be 100% safe, and 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 as inspired by the Holy Spirit". We should also have dialogues with our Christian brothers and sisters.

Several other aspects of parish life were highlighted, including the desire to see an increased use of new technologies, to get a priest who is closer to the ethnic origins of the community, to have the same rules for all priests, and to have greater access to the sacraments.

In relation to the life and practices of the Church, two aspects stand out in particular:

- 1) For some people, there should be more openness to certain changes, such as women's ordination to the diaconate and priesthood, marriage of priests, same-sex marriage, and lay people giving homilies.
- 2) For others, it is the return to practices like the Traditional Latin Mass, Communion on the tongue, the use of the Communion rail at the front of the church, etc.

In many responses, formation is stressed as being important to the understanding of faith and its practice. It is critical to learn more about the Bible, the Catechism, and the lives of the saints. A number of responses also mention the importance of Catholic schools in faith education and greater collaboration between parishes and the diocese.

Among the pastoral activities listed as important are prayer and Eucharistic adoration, family summer camps, inviting witnesses of the faith, pilgrimages, processions, ecumenical activities, solidarity works, and music. Charity and reconciliation are integral parts of the dreams and hopes of the people who participated in this synod: reconciliation with Indigenous peoples as well as with those hurt by church members; charity towards the needy of the region and towards members of one's own community. "We need to address societal issues in our parish and diocese, such as the environment, racism, and poverty".

The responses to the questions of this synod also spoke about the administration and leadership of parishes and the diocese. Among them are preventing sexual abuse, enhancing the presence of the Church in communities, making decisions transparent, ensuring greater stability of priests in parishes, merging some Christian communities, and allowing lay people to manage parish administration to discharge the burden of priests.

We find in the responses that people want a bishop "that is not afraid to lead" and who visits parishes: That the evangelization fire of the bishop and his team be conveyed with vigour, perseverance, and anointing and that it be received and multiplied. Furthermore, priests should be accessible and passionate about the Gospel, visit the homes of parishioners, establish contact with them, participate in charitable works, and share the same theological views among themselves.

## Conclusion

One of the main goals of this synod was to find ways to listen continuously to God and to each other so that the Church can better accomplish its mission. It is not a synod like others with a beginning and an end, but a synod that began "in order to continue", in order to make pastoral decisions closer to God's will (Vade Mecum 1.3).

Many ideas were given to continue the listening process. Following are the major themes that emerged from the consultation and that can be used to continue discussing and listening, as Church leaders and laity "walk together" with the Holy Spirit to accomplish the mission of the Church: evangelization, prayer and spiritual renewal, formation, Church culture and the weekend experience, reconciliation and unity, personal conversion, works of charity, priests and church management.

The second phase of the synod will consist of discerning the Holy Spirit's calling from the responses. This discernment process will allow for pastoral priorities to be established, as well as the development and promulgation of synodal acts that will form the foundation of the Diocese of Pembroke's future vision and goals.

The dialogue will then continue with the faithful to discuss how the vision and goals can be realized. This synthesis will be published on the diocesan website, and a diocesan celebration will be held by the end of the year to celebrate the results.

## Appendix 1: Theme-based supplements to the main text

The Synod of Bishops asked that the synthesis not exceed ten pages. Such a short text inevitably runs the risk of losing some of the ideas expressed by the participants. For this reason, we have created an appendix to complement the main text. These ideas are taken from the responses and are organized according to major themes.

### 1. Prayer

**Evangelization should be done through prayer, fasting if possible and offering our sufferings.**

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Evangelization is done by listening to God and following the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Spending time in contemplative prayer strengthens our relationship with God, which makes us more open to spreading God's love.

As we become more in love with Christ and more open to receiving his love, we develop a greater love for others and realize that God is evangelizing through us.

### 2. Listening and dialogue (synodality)

**“I hope we can dialogue in a way that draws us together.”**

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To continue in the spirit of the synod, some people suggest organizing "coffee mornings" with priests, deacons, religious, and lay people for discussion. Family sessions may also be considered. Alternatively, priests may ask parishioners questions by sending out questionnaires like this one. Participation in "conversation circles" can also be an option (see Appendix 3).

### 3. Evangelization

**Evangelization is about getting to know others as well as sharing what gives us hope, no matter what their beliefs or lifestyles may be.**

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It is essential that we tell our own stories of how our faith has profoundly changed and sustained us. Additionally, we should avoid imposing our faith on others, and be able to explain any concerns or objections others may have about the Catholic Church in a positive and loving manner.

In the new evangelization, we proclaim the good news by living exemplary lives and establishing relationships without judgment. To do this, we can organize prayer groups, Masses, retreats, social events, and find out who needs help.

People turned to Jesus because he cared for both their physical and spiritual needs. Churches might consider offering healing regularly, such as once a month, with a healing Mass that includes the Sacrament of the Sick.

Let's move beyond old patterns and try new approaches to evangelization, such as inviting family and friends to parish events and using social media to inform people about parish events.

The key is to find ways to bring people together to learn, serve, and have fun. As Christians, we need to go into communities and let them know that we care about them. Only then can we share God's awesome truth with them.

### 4. Witnessing with our lives (service, charity and our visible presence in the world)

**Evangelization necessarily involves the witness of our life.**

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In response to the questions, respondents often mentioned the importance of setting an example for others and showing love. Here are some examples:

- Being kind to others - fostering an environment of joy when our company is with others and practicing patience - being more selfless - maintaining a sense of humor - forgiving others - having faith in others - respecting the opinions and beliefs of others - simply being Christ-like.
- Exemplifying love (inclusiveness, forgiveness, generosity, accountability);
- Engaging in interactions with all people with nothing but love and presence.
- Action speaks louder than words, so others will notice and be drawn in.
- Living according to the teachings of Christ in daily life, not afraid to admit our shortcomings in this regard and commit to doing better by God's grace.

- Providing clothing and food to the poor, homeless, and elderly. Be a role model. Show people what Jesus did. Jesus visited the sick and the poor.
- Helping those who need it.
- To address poverty, there must be a more equitable distribution of resources. Our eyes must be opened to this issue.
- Pray daily that God will allow us to see others as he sees them.
- Putting ourselves in others' shoes allows us to meet their needs.
- Bringing Communion to those who are isolated
- Bringing isolated people to Mass
- Providing refuge to refugees
- Be forgiving to others, especially those who hurt you. Ask for forgiveness from those we have hurt and accept that they may not forgive us.
- Helping singles or single parents
- Joining charitable organizations such as St. Vincent de Paul as a volunteer
- Visiting the ill and lonely
- Helping the homeless
- Participating in organizations that fight abortion or the opioid epidemic
- Feeding the poor in church basements
- Developing partnerships with Third World parishes
- Carrying groceries for elderly people
- Taking care of the housework
- Don't gossip or listen to gossip.
- Strengthening our families by cultivating family life
- Being kind to those who are suffering.
- Visiting nursing homes, babysit for moms' groups, say hello and offer help to your neighbor, whatever you can.
- Expressing our convictions with our hands, minds, and voices. We need to fight for social justice, provide for those in need, help the poor, and make resolutions for the protection of life, palliative care, hospice services, soup kitchens, clothing for the poor, etc.
- Being joyful in your life and in your church. Thank God for his blessings. Don't complain. Stay true to your faith. Reconcile with your neighbor and with God. Love without thinking of the cost. Pray and fast.

## 5. Formation

**The need for formation, especially in the area of evangelization and faith, is one of the elements that emerges most from the responses received.**

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Evangelization and faith formation are two of the elements that seem to be most prevalent in the responses. The faithful wish to be trained to know and share their faith. This can be done through small groups, Bible studies, conferences, or retreats.

Here are a few ideas from the responses:

- We can't love or communicate what we don't understand.
- As we become more convinced of God's love and the life-giving gift of truth, as we encounter it, it will resonate in our hearts. We will want others to experience this peace and joy.
- We cannot evangelize unless we know the Truth, the Word of God and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church and its Traditions taught in the fullness of faith.
- Start with YouTube and check out Bishop Robert Barron [Word on Fire Ministries], Fr. Mike Schmitz and several others [Ascension Presents], Matt Fradd [Pints With Aquinas], Augustine Institute [Dr. Tim Gray, Chris Stefanick, et al], Ken and Janelle Yasinski [Catholic Minute], and Matthew Kelly [Dynamic Catholic]. There are also good programs on Catholic television and good books to read.
- We need to go back to the basics in our parishes by working on catechesis so that we first know our faith, and by engaging in the Sacraments (i.e., encouraging people to receive Holy Communion and to confess).
- Have Scriptures explained in a way that makes them relevant and useful in today's world.
- The diocese could offer more learning experiences (Bible studies, etc.) through Zoom or other online methods, or help parishes do so.

Some believe that Catholic schools should step up their formation of students, especially concerning First Communion, Confirmation, and general catechesis. Teachers should know their faith and commit to teaching it. Formation could also be offered to parents because the family is the first place where evangelization takes place.

## 6. Welcoming

**If the parish community becomes a welcoming place for all, if the experience is joyful and uplifting, people will come because they want to be there.**

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The question of the quality of the welcome often came up in the responses:

- A warm welcome and introduction before Mass, as well as a 'conversation' after Mass, would help newcomers feel appreciated and loved by the Church.
- Encourage a welcoming presence within our parish so that we can be sure that newcomers will feel at home.
- If the parish community becomes a welcoming place for all, if the experience is joyful and uplifting (short, positive homily, upbeat music, etc.), people will come because they want to be there.
- Make Mass a welcoming and joyful encounter with the Lord and our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- It is a matter of our parishes allowing the evangelized people to find the face of Christ. This begins with parishioners "delighted to see new families, children who cry, young people who want to worship God. The animosity towards young people and new families is tangible and drives people away. Parishes should accept people where they are rather than just pointing out what they should change."
- Invite and welcome the marginalized into the church, don't judge the marginalized, treat everyone the same.

What is desired by some is a non-judgmental Church that shows unconditional love to all. Some people believe that the Church should be more welcoming to groups that have not felt welcome in the Church before and should also give Communion to those who want to take Communion.

## 7. The weekend experience

**There is hope that our churches will be more like family-friendly places where people can experience God's love.**

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The weekend experience is often mentioned. There is hope that our churches will be more like family-friendly places where people can experience God's love. According to the responses, what should be found in our weekend celebrations and assemblies?

- An environment where people smile at each other.
- A place of love and healing, a place of peace.
- Lively music and testimonies to make worship more appealing to newcomers.
- The melding of joyful, holy individuals.
- A respectful and humble environment where people feel safe to open up and share their vulnerabilities.
- Parishioners who are humble, faithful, reverent, and eager to work together.
- Support our priests no matter what (visit them often, let them know you still support them).
- Priests' kinship with priests, and priests' kinship with parishioners.
- Less focus on rules and dogmas. Gospel values are more prominent.
- Increased participation of the faithful in parish services.

## 8. About traditional practices (or not)

**Some respondents express a desire for a Church that retains its old practices, while other responses indicate that a return to the past is worrisome.**

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Some respondents express a desire for a Church that remembers and keep its traditional practices, rules, and teachings: "Keep the traditions and teachings handed down by the early fathers of the Church." Among these practices are kneeling, the Traditional Latin Mass, not speaking too loud in church, giving Communion only to those who are able to receive it, using altar rails, receiving Jesus on the tongue, wearing of cassock and habit, creating an atmosphere of reverence in the church, rejecting liberalism, and selecting only sacred music for celebrations.

On the other hand, some responses indicate that a return to the past is worrisome. One group of parishioners responded thus: "Some groups and communities in our diocese yearn for the pre-Vatican II traditions - our group is concerned about some of the directions these traditional priests are taking. Their pre-Vatican II ideologies can alienate some people, and our group feels it should be the



responsibility of our bishop to properly guide these priests. They cannot have "a la carte" rules for their own parishes, such as not allowing lectors or altar servers. We hope that all our priests adapt to the communities they serve, and that they don't move toward rigid pre-Vatican II practices of the past, such as the Latin Mass (where the congregation repeats words that make no sense to them), wearing old-fashioned black vestments, anti-woman and anti-gay stances, etc."

## 9. Reconciliation

**We must become more involved in reconciliation and dialogue with Indigenous peoples, people who have been sexually abused by members of the Church, and our brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations.**

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A desire is expressed to have "a space to hear from those who were abused by priests and nuns of this diocese. These are still open wounds for a lot of people, and they feel they were never heard or even actively ignored by previous Bishops and clergy." Another person writes, "My vision includes an honest reparation for past wrongs, a policy update that aligns with basic human rights for all members of society, and a system of accountability to prevent further abuses which have permitted the crisis the church is now engulfed in."

The Church should become more active in the truth and reconciliation project/process, and speak out on societal issues, the beginnings of colonization, and the results that are occurring now. "For example, the Church historically has much to regret in the stripping of culture and the abuse of our Indigenous people. We all have been guilty of colonialization, where we have not respected the dignity of Canada's first peoples. Yet, I have not heard a word from the pulpit about the historical past and today's continued reality on this matter, and what work we need to do to correct the error of our ways. Even the script of the Pope's apology to the First Peoples has not been mentioned in the church nor has it been made available to Catholics. Perhaps our priests need better training and more encouragement from the bishops. Society will never take our talk of love seriously if we can't confront our sin."

Reconciliation is also about dialogue with other churches: one person proposes "to organize at least one ecumenical service per year in each parish so that we can see how we relate to other Christians in our community and get to know each other. Another suggests "communication and cooperation between the parishes and local Christian denominations/fellowships re: days of prayer, meeting community needs, Christian outreach."

## 10. Small groups and social events

**Small groups are great places to pray together, continue in the spirit of synodality and invite people seeking God**

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In the responses, there is also a desire for open small groups that are opportunities for interaction with those who are not like us: "Small group activities can be a way to include one or two people outside the faith who are seeking God". Small groups are great places to pray together and continue in the spirit of synodality.

This desire for small groups and social events is expressed in different ways:

- Organize small groups in parish for Bible Study, and men's and women's small groups.
- Offer more opportunities for parishes to join together for fun social events- to build community- coffee times, church suppers, potlucks, etc., family events.
- We need time to "talk" through our thoughts and responses to Scripture.
- Focusing on "demonstrating innovative creative examples that we can invite others to join. It will begin with a small group and then spread."
- Dynamic Bible studies (lots of good video materials available) and breakfast or house groups to foster our growth and invite our neighbours: New Moms Groups, Retired Men's Breakfasts, Book Clubs, Parish Cycling Club, Walk and Coffee Group, 5K Run Learning Group open to the community, etc. "
- We "need the opportunity to share with other like-minded Christians, to encourage each other, trade experiences (failures and successes), learn together and proceed one step at a time, trusting in God to do the work". Prayer groups, small faith-Sharing groups etc.-"

## 11. Priests

**Priests should get out of their church more often and walk around the community to see what spiritual needs people have.**

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Priests need to set an example of modesty and simplicity and get out of the church more often and walk around the community to see what people's spiritual needs are. Additionally, they should be able to attend retreats and conferences that strengthen their relationship with Christ.

Several responses stress the importance of priests being able to delegate more and involve the faithful in parish activities. Priests and deacons can help by not taking over too much control and by letting the laity evangelize.

Seminarians should also have the opportunity to spend time in several parishes in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges families face today, and so we may better understand their concerns.

And hopes are that the bishop will continue to communicate beautiful messages to the faithful.

## 12. Management of the diocese and parishes

**Close some or many parishes so that priests aren't overwhelmed with the administration of dying parishes**

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Some of the responses focus on church management. One of the answers was, "I hope we can spend less of our time and \$ on maintaining real estate and more on evangelism. Maybe we need to learn to let go of what is holding us back including closing and amalgamating parishes." One participant's proposed initiative is to sell "expensive to maintain infrastructure to reduce the amount of clerical attention needed on temporal matters and so more attention can be given to spiritual matters."

It is also suggested to "close some or many parishes so that priests aren't overwhelmed with the administration of dying parishes and can actually start leading their parishes in a positive direction". (...) Reduce the workload of pastors – the pastors are too busy handling the administrative needs of the parishes. Amalgamate nearby parishes together to reduce the administrative burden". "That at every parish church that might be closed (out of necessity) a missionary centre be opened, and a missionary team be responsible for evangelization there."

One person proposed the idea that parish finance committees should be under the direction of a diocesan administrator: "That way they (the priests) could have more time to be involved in the pastoral care of the parish and work with the laity."

Among the responses we also find a desire for greater transparency regarding the finances of the diocese: "where does the money go and how is it used?"

Management is also related to how abuses are handled: "Put the Church in order," wrote someone: "A Priest who abuses a child must be disrobed. The Church must not allow forgiveness to include exposing any other children to this evil. Drastic action is needed. This blight on our Church requires drastic action to separate the Church of today from the Church that allowed this to go on. Besides being against everything Jesus stands for, such activity scars a child for life"

**Appendix 2: A table of the main themes that emerged from the consultation**

The following table could serve as a "synodal tool" to continue discussions based on the major themes that emerged during the consultations.

Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To know our faith</li> <li>• To know how to evangelize</li> <li>• More formation for students in schools</li> </ul>
Prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have the desire to evangelize</li> <li>• To be spiritually renewed</li> </ul>
Evangelization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing and using methods to evangelize</li> </ul>
Personal conversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving our life testimony</li> <li>• Doing works of charity, responding to people's needs around us, serving</li> <li>• Being present and visible in the world</li> </ul>
Listening, dialogue and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working together and listening to each other to make things better</li> <li>• Communicating progress</li> <li>• Improving communion among priests</li> <li>• Improving communion among the faithful</li> </ul>
Church culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being more of a family</li> <li>• Being more inclusive</li> <li>• Preserving our traditional liturgies</li> <li>• Being open to change</li> </ul>
Parish missionary conversion and the weekend experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being attractive for the unchurched peoples we invite (Creating or them a memorable experience)</li> <li>• Being more welcoming, less judgemental</li> <li>• Having more lively and upbeat songs</li> <li>• Giving homilies that relate to everyday life</li> <li>• Guaranteeing children's safety</li> </ul>
Reconciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With Indigenous peoples</li> <li>• With victims of abuse from members of the Church</li> <li>• Between priests</li> <li>• Between parishioners</li> </ul>

Small groups and social events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Places to socialize among Catholics</li> <li>• Place to invite nonchurchgoers (the unchurched)</li> </ul>
Priests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having competence in evangelization</li> <li>• Being good communicators</li> <li>• Knowing how to delegate</li> <li>• Involving the faithful</li> <li>• Being supported by the community</li> <li>• Not obsessed by rules</li> </ul>
Diocese and parish leadership and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead by example (evangelization, prayer, etc.)</li> <li>• Promote prayer and spiritual renewal</li> <li>• Encourage dialogue</li> <li>• Create a working group in each parish to encourage parishioner participation</li> </ul>

**Appendix 3: Conversation Circles (text submitted by the Madonna House Apostolate as a practical way to enter into synodality)**

There is an increasing interest and eagerness to participate in ‘conversation circles’ as a vehicle to share with and learn from each other personal, lived experiences of the Church. Two such groups will be starting here May 4th and will discuss a singular topic to start with: As members of Madonna House, how do we grow in listening, communion with each other, while deepening a sense of mission? There will be differing perspectives due to age, experience in Madonna House and in the Church, which would present a richer view of what has been, as well as hopes and possibilities for the future.

- 1) 10 people maximum per group
- 2) Group to come up with ground rules: no cross talk; give each person time; listen; remember time is limited – meeting is for 1 hour only. Receive people where they are at. Be open to other perspectives.
- 3) One or two of the committee members would join them.
- 4) No one leader per se, although several of them would be asked to ‘keep things moving.’
- 5) People could come and go without belonging to a fixed group. It would be quite OK to have someone start halfway through. Some may prefer to be part of a fixed group, if feasible, for sharing in more depth.
- 6) It is not a time for grievances but for listening for ‘what does the Lord want me to share’.
- 7) Each meeting would incorporate praying with the Word of God (selected in advance).
- 8) A passage from the synod documents (by the Holy Father or others) could be read.
- 9) During sharing, wounds may surface which must be dealt with prayerfully, delicately, and confidentially.
- 10) In advance of the next meeting, someone will select a Scripture quote & passage from synod documents as an entryway into the topic.

#### Appendix 4: RCCDSB Student Synodal Survey (Grades 7-12)

1) Do you feel that your opinions on faith and the Church are heard on a regular basis?

Yes: 25 responses

No: 25 responses

90 responses were received, but some answers did not directly answer the question which explains the limited number of answers.

2) How are you able to share them?

Students said they mostly express their opinions about faith and the Church through conversations with their friends, classmates and families, and sometimes in school with teachers or at church with a priest. Some students simply prefer to pray, knowing that God listens to them.

3) If not, what are some ways that would enable you to share them?

1. Go to church more often and pray.
2. Have certain times a day to discuss it, not just during religion class but as a real moment for discussion.
3. Create a place where we can write anonymously and talk about our opinions, without judgment.
4. In a little suggestion box, maybe in the back of the church.
5. If there were more young people to talk to, it might help us feel more comfortable talking about our opinions.
6. If there was a program at the school where people could anonymously share their opinions which were then discussed.
7. If there was some kind of question box for the priest or something like that, where the priest could read them and answer your questions if you have any and if not just read what you think or have to say.
8. I would be able to express them through prayer.
9. I think I could join some Bible groups in the area where I live.
10. If we could schedule a one-on-one meeting with the church priest to discuss your views and if the priest could mention some of the views at the next service.
11. Go to church more often and pray.
12. Talk to someone who works at the church, or share them online.
13. I would probably talk to a priest or someone who has a relationship with a priest.
14. Talk to members of the Church, like a local priest.
15. If questions about how we feel were asked more frequently, I would have more to share.



16. Start going to church more often.
17. Share them with God by praying in church.
18. I think we should go to church more often in person.
19. I could try to be more comfortable talking about it.

4) What would help you more actively participate in the life of the Church?

Students answer that they would be more likely to participate in the life of the Church...

1. If there were more activities and events offered for the youth.
2. If activities offered were more interesting and enjoyable for them.
3. If the community would encourage them to participate.
4. If there were more people their age, friends and family in the church.
5. If there was more tolerance and inclusivity in the church (for example less homophobia, judgments being more accepting and letting LGBTQ+ couples get married in a church).
6. If Mass was more engaging, fun and shorter (younger children hate going to church and just sitting there, benches are uncomfortable, and they “doze off” because they don’t have a very long attention span)
7. If the church was more connected to school and daily life.
8. If the priest at Mass would talk about more interesting topics that relate to younger kids (with relatable stories and speech that we understand, to make us more intrigued).
9. If the Mass was more interactive (have more discussion than just the priest talking) and had more songs.
10. If they had more of an understanding of the Bible and of the afterlife.
11. If they could actually go to church and not simply watch Mass on TV.
12. If they could be brought to church more often not just for holidays like Easter and Christmas.
13. If the school would bring them to church more rather than having only (religion) lessons in school.

## Appendix 5: An Overview of the Synthesis

In the Diocese of Pembroke, the synod on synodality was organized by a committee consisting of the bishop, the vicar general, the chancellor, two episcopal vicars, and the director of diocesan pastoral work. Its purpose was to find pastoral avenues for greater communion and participation in the mission of the Church. Participants were encouraged to let the Holy Spirit guide them in reflecting on the questions of the synod. Many parishioners answered the questions online, and students from schools responded as well. After the completion of the synthesis, the synod will continue by discerning the Holy Spirit's calling and establishing pastoral priorities and promulgating synodal acts that will form the foundation of the diocese's future vision and goals.

Letters, emails, parish bulletins, Facebook posts, the Ecclesia magazine, and the diocesan website are suggested as ways to communicate the results. Participants liked the online questionnaire but suggested that parishes organize face-to-face or online meetings to continue the dialogue. The bishop could also engage in conversations when he visits parishes, celebrates Mass, and meets with parishioners afterward. Parish discussions may be combined with inter-parish or regional structures of dialogue, similar to deaneries. A diocesan committee or regional synodal committees composed of priests and laity could develop pastoral suggestions and then parishes and other Christian communities could use these as goals. Participants suggested that the process should be clear to parishioners so they will continue to participate.

The responses regarding mission emphasized prayer and formation. We must have a deep faith and know that it is God's will that we proclaim the Gospel to those who do not know or follow Christ. Participants suggest that we step outside our churches and homes and invite others to our activities. We need to develop an evangelism strategy and know how to evangelize. Personal conversion and repentance are essential elements for authentic evangelization. The Church must also take responsibility for past mistakes and take part fully in the reconciliation process toward Indigenous communities. Parish conversion is also necessary for better knowing one another and for communion between parishioners and clergy. The Sunday experience must be joyful and uplifting, and the spiritual leader must listen to the concerns of the parishioners. Some people want the Church to move forward to reflect 21st century thinking, while others insist on maintaining traditional practices. Priests should know how to communicate effectively, delegate and involve the faithful.

Prayer and formation are also seen as essential for communion. This can be done, among other things, through participation in Mass, receiving other Sacraments, meditation of the Word of God, and listening to Christian music. Formation can help us understand God's Word, his love and mercy, and to love others. Several formats are proposed for formation, including Life in the Spirit Seminars, small groups to study the Bible, the Catechism and the lives of the saints. To experience more fellowship with one another, we also need to live an ecclesial conversion, which includes an assessment of current Church policies and practices, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and victims of sexual abuse, and an assessment of women's role in the Church. The Church should be more inclusive and welcoming. Bishops should personally devote time to meet priests and offer them support, and Christians should live lives of kindness to others.

In regard to mission, responses indicate that the bishop and the priests should lead by example and encourage the faithful to witness to Christ. Priests should also demystify evangelization and foster spiritual renewal. The mission of the Church is to share Christ with others. We can do this through formation to understand what our mission is, discover the beauty of our faith, and by being passionate about what we share. Parishes should also have evangelization programs in place and the necessary materials to facilitate the work of evangelization. Church members need to participate in community events and school activities to create links with other people and should reconcile with others to will truly show the love they have for one another.

Participants' dreams include churches filled with life and overflowing with families and young people, more priests, deacons, and religious, more convents, monasteries, hermitages, and Catholic hospitals in the diocese, and a missionary transformation of the Church. The parishes of the Diocese of Pembroke should be like families, where the priest feels supported by the parishioners and the parishioners share deeply in faith and life. Children should be 100% safe, and minorities should be respected. Many people stressed the importance of Catholic schools, collaboration between parishes and the diocese, prayer and Eucharistic adoration, family summer camps, inviting witnesses to the faith, pilgrimages, processions, ecumenical activities, and charitable works. Finally, the responses to the questions of this synod also spoke about the administration and leadership of parishes and the diocese.