

Diocese of Prince Albert Synod Synthesis

**Walking together as
Church with the Holy
Spirit**



2021-2023 Diocesan Synthesis Synod Report Roman Catholic Diocese of Prince Albert

Our Diocese entered the Synod 2021-2023 with hope and prayer; however, more time to prepare and launch the Synod process would have helped prepare and educate parishioners leading to greater participation. A good cross-section of our people (youth, young adults, adults & elders) and a small number from other faith traditions participated in the listening and sharing (See Appendix A for statistics of those who participated). We were grateful for those that responded, but the overall participation represented only about 10% of Catholics in the Diocese. Three of twelve Indigenous parishes took part in the diocesan synodal journey. There was particularly limited participation from immigrant Catholics, from those who are marginalized, and from those who have left the Catholic Church.

Parishes reached out to their people and those in their communities through in-person meetings, telephone conversations, e-mail, and other means. For some, the pandemic was a barrier to in-person encounters. For those uncomfortable with meeting in person or who had no access to a listening session locally, the Diocesan Synod Planning Committee offered six Zoom group sessions. The Planning Committee also created an online response for those who wished to provide their reflections but were unable or did not wish to participate in a listening session. This online tool began with an invitation to prayer and was available on the Diocesan website and through posters with QR codes. Many took advantage of both. Several people, especially those over fifty, participated in multiple online forums and in-person gatherings, which deepened the conversations as those gathered shared more personal stories of their common journey.

Many of our conversations were directed to the questions about belonging and being heard, which were the main Synodal questions and could also act as a lens for other topics suggested in the Preparatory Document:

1. Do I feel I belong in my faith community/parish/church and that I have a role in the Church's mission? Which situations have made me feel I belong? Which situations have made me feel unwelcome or unheard? Are there those that my faith community excludes, values less or values more? Share your stories.
2. Is my faith community/parish/diocese a safe place for me to speak courageously, candidly, and responsibly about the church and society? Do I feel heard? Share your stories.

The online forums offered three opportunities to engage these main questions and three to explore additional topics from the Preparatory Document: Ecumenism, Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission, and Celebration (Liturgy and Prayer). Some parishes also reflected on the question of Dialogue in Church and Society and Authority and Participation. In general, the overwhelming attitude of the participants was that they welcomed the opportunity to share their stories and felt that they had been heard.




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WHAT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT REVEAL?

We heard the call to be an authentic reflection of Jesus in our welcoming.

“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in Him.” Lamentations 3:20-21

Most of those who participated in our local Synod felt a strong sense of belonging and welcome within their parishes. At the same time, a few people have had and continue to experience feelings of not being seen or heard. In general, those from smaller parishes felt the strongest sense of belonging and value given to sharing their gifts. Those in larger parishes have more challenges around knowing fellow parishioners, being able to welcome them by name, and sharing a little in their deeper struggles. In all cases, those who participated in ministries at the Mass and other parish ministries were those who had the strongest sense of belonging. Many participants felt they were being called to be even more welcoming, greeting others with more than just a simple handshake at the door and a friendly wave at the sign of peace. Participants felt called to get back to social activities put aside during the pandemic. Participants felt called to discern how more room and invitations can be given for new people to enter different parish ministries and how we can share more deeply in the daily struggles of our neighbours.



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The more involved you are in ministry, Liturgy, and prayer, the more you feel part of the community – your stage of life and your capacity at that time affects how involved & welcome you feel within the community – God uses children to grow our faith. [Diocesan Zoom Session]

I feel that God’s plan involves me being active in my community parish. It is part of my family life. It is a way of leading by example. It is the way of my parents. [Indigenous Parish Synthesis Report]

Participants expressed dreams of building bridges, especially with folks in a neighbouring indigenous community. Desire to be more welcoming and hospitable to people who are distanced from the Church. [Parish Synthesis Report]

So many of the stories were of loneliness. I was shocked at how many felt they needed to carry their crosses alone and did not share with their Church family but really wanted someone to reach out. How often I have not seen their pain and suffering. [Parish Synthesis Report]

We heard the call to respond with mercy and compassion.

“Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!” James 5:9

We did hear through our synodal conversations that some people felt judged by others in the Church in various situations: for their noisy children, for the faith community they grew up in before joining the Catholic Church, for being a non-Catholic attending the parish with their Catholic spouse, for their lifestyles, their gender identity, their marital status, and so on. While Catholics have a duty to share the teaching of Christ and witness to it, this should always be done with charity and sensitivity to where people are at in their faith journey and what they are able to receive. Some significant divisions have arisen or were exacerbated during the global pandemic, and these issues divided families and parishes and continue to be a source of strife. Participants felt called to focus on building relationships and accompaniment instead of judgement: leading by example, living an upstanding Christian life, rather than simply lecturing.



**PARTICIPANTS FELT
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The youth and young adults really hunger for spirituality, although it may not yet be a hunger for the Mass. We need to accept where people are and teach and love them as Jesus does. [Diocesan Zoom Session]

We need to become more tolerant, accepting and welcoming towards ALL of our youth. While Pope Francis has helped the Church come a long way in this endeavour, the larger Church community as a whole still holds prejudice and subscribes to certain stigmas that keep our young people away from the Church. People from the LGBTQ+ community, people who are Allies, and people who have had or support the idea of abortions feel as though they are outcasts from the Church due to the stigma surrounding these topics. While we must always remain steadfast in our teachings, we need to create a community where these people feel they are welcome. The Church is for everyone. [Online Tool – Young Adult 18-35]

It is important to be aware of the sensitive moments and pray for our loved ones and ourselves trusting that the Holy Spirit will be with us to give us the words needed to communicate with love and understanding. [Diocesan Zoom Session]

I do feel like I belong. I feel like I have a mission in my parish to guide my family and community through an example of a grateful and humble life. I feel like our community is open and welcoming to all. [Parish Synthesis Report]

We heard the call to celebrate our faith with joy!

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Psalm 95:1

Liturgy and prayer in all its forms (the Sacraments, Eucharistic Adoration, devotions, retreats & pilgrimages) are the essential foundation for our Christian lives, both individually and collectively. Although the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of our Christian life, people also noted a desire for various forms of prayer in the parish that would help them to pray in different ways (e.g., traditional expressions of the Liturgy, charismatic prayer, and prayer geared more towards young people.) The question was raised whether Indigenous Peoples, different ethnic, and recent immigrant groups have opportunities to express themselves in worship according to their culture.

I think the church should do more fun events to make our church more interesting. [Online Tool – Youth 12-18]

I know several Catholics who ... love the charismatic way of praying, which I also love. If we did, I’m sure that some would come back. We are too starved in our praying. This would most likely help the different ethnic groups that form our church community. A lot of sharing and understanding could bring a beautiful enrichment to our assembly. [Diocesan Zoom Session]

We enjoy the prayer groups (adult and youth) ... My family likes to recite the Rosary. [Indigenous Parish Synthesis Report]



PRAYER AND WORSHIP
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CHRISTIAN LIVES, BOTH
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COLLECTIVELY.

We heard the call for better accompaniment, especially with our youth and young adults.

O You who dwell in the gardens, my companions are listening for your voice; let me hear it. Song of Solomon 8:13

Many of the older participants from Catholic and other Christian denominations voiced their concern and pain over their children and grandchildren not practicing their faith. They lamented the secularism of our culture and the influence of social media in the lives of all, especially the young. On the other hand, the message we heard from our youth and young adults was: Teach Us! Listen to Us! Accept Us! Include Us! The need and desire for accompaniment were apparent across all age groups.



TEACH US!
LISTEN TO US!
ACCEPT US!
INCLUDE US!

I’m very confused with my faith. I don’t know if I belong. I don’t feel like I do. However, on the other hand, I feel like I have to feel like I belong. [Online Tool – Youth 12-18]

Always make sure there is a priest in a high school. [Online Tool – Youth 12-18]

Have more opportunities for counselling. Places where Christians can get help with their journey and help each other. Sometimes our dark nights need help from others. Almost like an AA group where anyone can come and talk about their faith and receive support or help. [Online Tool – Adult 36-65]

I don't need another Catholic church 'program.' I need someone with which to dialogue, to hear me out, to break the spiritual disconnect. Not theology (more church teaching/beliefs etc.) but a more grassroots day-to-day journeying with each other. Perhaps I am describing small faith-sharing communities? [Online Tool – Senior 65+]

We heard the call for effective catechesis, including the 'what' and 'why' of our faith practices.

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Psalm 32:8

Throughout the Synodal conversations and responses, we heard the call for more efforts toward evangelization and catechesis. For many, catechesis ends when they finish school or sacramental preparation programs. Popular culture is no longer informed by the Catholic faith, and many things that used to be handed on more easily need to be communicated more intentionally. There is a need for creative, ongoing opportunities for faith formation as people journey through life in addition to the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. Opportunities need to be given to invite and accompany those who have questions and are searching or may not be regularly engaged in a parish. Faith is a life-long journey.



Open up opportunities for everyone to have an experience of God, really get to know Him first, and receive their identity from Him. Open up opportunities for Christians of all faiths to come together and offer guidance on how to live Christian community. Give us the direction and the tools. [Online Tool – Young Adult 18-36]

I am a convert. I did the RCIA program from 2012-2013. I feel like there hasn't been a lot of support after completing the program. Things I'm unsure of, I don't feel like there is someone I can go to and ask questions. [Online Tool – Adult 36-65]

One thing I would like to see is workshops where we discuss Catholic traditions, rules etc., where questions can be asked, and a Priest or qualified layperson could answer. [Online Tool – Adult 36-65]

We heard the call to be an example of Christian service in our community and world.

And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.
Mark 16:20

Our synodal conversations encourage us all to keep working on being missionary disciples, evangelizers, and witnesses. In our Diocese and parishes, we support social justice initiatives that serve the poor, those in prison, and those in particular need. People are mindful as well of global needs and find ways to help in emergencies. Participants observed that this sort of parish outreach is an essential consequence of our Baptism and is an expression of our spiritual life. In our communities, this shared service and witness is often carried out with Christians of other denominations. Our shared ministry is a practical and regular expression of Christian unity.

The Holy Spirit is asking us to look at how we can evangelize, especially through our example and also in coming to truly know and love God through prayer and becoming more knowledgeable about our beautiful Catholic Faith. [Diocesan Zoom Session]

We often make God so very small and exclusive. We could be doing so much more with people of other faiths and those with no faith/belief at all. We need to put ourselves out there and plug into the areas where our talents and gifts would be best put to use. [Diocesan Zoom Session]

We need more activities that fill the soul, that makes the community work together – projects to work on as a community team. [Online Tool - Young Adult 18-36]

First and foremost, we as finite creatures cannot solve our problems on our own, therefore, prayer is an essential part of the solution. The second part is to witness the Christian faith by the way we live. Actions speak louder than words. [Parish Synthesis Report]

We need to get involved in movements that are bigger than just our ‘home church’ like Development and Peace. [Online Forum – Responsibility for Our Common Mission]



**“WE NEED MORE
ACTIVITIES THAT
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We heard the call to pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit to speak with courage in our secular world.

When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:31

It can be difficult to be Catholic in today's world. Many of the Church's teachings are counter-cultural and are attacked, ridiculed, or misunderstood in the media. As Catholics, we believe that the Church's teaching is Christ's teaching. Even if the Church grows in her understanding of the 'deposit of faith' through time, matters of faith and morals that have been solemnly defined and taught cannot be reformed. However, from people's struggles, it is clear that we have not found ways to effectively communicate this teaching or help people understand it. Instead, many people's perception of Church teaching has been formed by media and not through faith sources.



“WE NEED COURAGE FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT TO MOVE OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE AND BE MORE EFFECTIVE EVANGELIZERS.”

Each baptized person has spiritual and natural gifts and talents, and we are to use these in bringing about the Kingdom of God in our midst. Things that hinder this are fear of speaking about God in the secular world and perhaps feeling like we do not know the answers if we are questioned or challenged. [Online Forum – Responsibility for Our Common Mission]

We need to radiate the joy of the gospel and the fire of the Holy Spirit so that we serve as a beacon for others who are seeking. We need courage from the Holy Spirit to move out of our comfort zone and be more effective evangelizers ... We need to understand more fully the power of prayer and building our personal and communal relationship with God. [Online Forum – Responsibility for Our Common Mission]

I speak openly to family whether they agree or not – *kiyam* (as it should be). [Indigenous Parish Synthesis Report]

We heard the call to continue to deepen our Synodal way of being Church, to facilitate listening and collaboration.

For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. 1 Corinthians 3:9

Participants appreciated the Synodal conversations, listening to each other, praying, and reflecting on their faith experience together. Although we try to work together collaboratively in the Diocese and parishes, the Synod experience is encouraging us to find ways to keep living this more deeply as we move into the future. There are human and spiritual obstacles sometimes to this living out of our communion, participation, and mission. People noted the importance for

both clergy and laity to be open to each other's gifts, participate together in parish and community events, and bridge language and cultural differences.

We were able to listen to each other as a community. We understand the good things we are doing and the need to do more and do better within our parish community. [Parish Synthesis Report]

When we leave the participation to the 'older folks', we don't benefit from the energy and vibrancy of the youth & young adults." [Diocesan Zoom Session]

The Holy Spirit has inspired us to be grateful for what we have, we have a strong community, and we listen to one another. [Parish Synthesis Report]

We need to have deeper conversations with each other. Like intentional conversations. [Parish Synthesis Report]

TENSIONS AND DISAGREEMENTS ABOUT DOCTRINE

All age groups raised questions and concerns about Church Doctrine. We should listen with respect to these questions, which are often the same questions posed by the larger secular culture. It is clear from the context that there is a need for better faith formation to help people understand the reason behind various teachings of Scripture and the Church. Topics of tension include the role of women in the church, the requirement for celibacy of priests, the possibility of married priests, the acceptance of divorced and remarried Catholics and those of the LGBTQ+ community, and views around abortion and euthanasia.



“RULES ARE SEEN AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PEOPLE THE RULES ARE PURPORTEDLY, IN PLACE TO SERVE.”

I struggle at times to be a part of a faith that will not honour and respect all kinds of love. I struggle at times with the treatment of First Nation people in the past. My faith has not struggled, but my pride in being Catholic has at times. [Online Tool – 18-35]

Throughout the Bible, Christ interacts with everybody with respect and love. He doesn't exclude anybody. Yet, we don't welcome the divorced, those who choose to live common law, LGBTQ+ etc., with open arms in our churches. They don't just want to be “present” in our churches but to participate fully. [Online Forum – Christian Unity]

In the area of marriage, our many rules have stopped couples from being married in the church – the church is perceived as being “rule orientated.” Rules are seen as more

important than the people the rules are purported, in place to serve. [Parish Synthesis Report]

Other comments were made imploring the Church to hold fast to her teachings.

The Catholic Church needs to hold strong in its teachings and promote truth above all. It needs to recognize that telling young people today that the church's way is the narrow path to salvation and the only religion with the fullness of truth. We cannot bow down to the world, and we have to love our sacred traditions and sacred scripture. [Online Tool – Young Adult – 18-35]

AREAS CALLING FOR HEALING AND CLARITY

Participants also shared situations where they experienced pain and by which they point us again to more intentional pastoral accompaniment and healing ministry.

Wounds Caused by Being Excluded from The Sacraments

Sometimes the Church is perceived as the institution that is making people suffer and not the one that is helping people with their suffering (ex: when we refuse Communion to someone who has been divorced [and remarried]). We need to be like Jesus and eat with the sinners (that's all of us, really!!), and not just sit in a temple and complain about how people from the outside are acting. [Online Tool – Adult 36-65]

Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandal

I appreciate the Catholic church for giving me a sense of belonging throughout my life. It disturbs me to hear about children who have been harmed by sexual abuse from priests. I would like an explanation about how this was allowed to happen. [Online Tool – Senior 65+]

Residential School Apology and Restitution – Relationship with Indigenous Peoples

We have people who were hurt by the residential school program, and they need concrete actions from the church to help them to heal. [Indigenous Parish Synthesis Report]

When the issue of residential school compensation arose, the Indigenous replied: most of us do not want more money – we want our families healed and real reconciliation. [Parish Synthesis Report]

CONCLUSIONS (AND NEXT STEPS)

We have practiced the process of synodality, sharing and listening throughout this first phase of our synodal journey. Now, we are called to continue to listen to the Holy Spirit in our next steps, both at our diocesan level and in our parishes. That process could begin with sharing our summaries both as a diocese and as a parish and then, together with our Bishop, discerning what steps we should take to continue our journey enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Let us continue to pray, listen to one another, and speak with courage as we move forward!

At the Diocesan level, there will be continued discernment with the Diocesan Pastoral Council regarding initiatives to be undertaken. Some of these may include, but are not limited to:

- Ongoing opportunities for listening to each other to continue healing and reconciliation in our parishes as we become more a Church that journeys together, particularly, with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. This will lead to a stronger sense of community for all, which has been devastated during the pandemic.
- Ongoing opportunities for learning how to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit as parishes and the diocese discern the path forward at this time. Continuation of the synodal journey that has begun.
- Initiatives that will teach us how – with trust in the Holy Spirit – to accompany others where they are at on their faith journey especially those who feel separated or marginalized in our communities and schools.
- Greater emphasis on outreach to those in our parishes who need support and those in need in our communities both local and global.
- Ongoing faith formation for all age groups focused on kerygmatic catechesis, which includes opportunities for encountering Christ. (*DC*, par. 2).
- Ongoing formation for clergy and parish leadership to aid in the implementation of these initiatives in areas such as liturgy, RCIA, the new *Directory for Catechesis*, accompaniment, evangelization, etc.



Appendix A: Demographic Information

Online Tools:

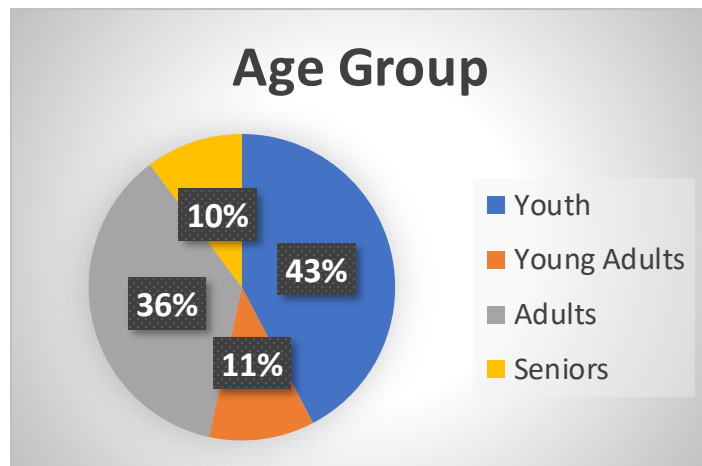
449 Total Participants

Youth (12-18) - 190

Young Adults (18-35) - 50

Adults (36-65) - 163

Seniors (65+) - 46



Diocesan Zoom Sessions (Including the Diocesan Pastoral Council):

198 Participants (many of whom participated in more than one forum)

Participants were almost exclusively in the 36-65 and 65+ age groups.

Parish Consultations:

Responses Were Received from 45 Parishes (60% of Diocesan Parishes)

687 Participants (all age groups were represented, but most participants were from the 36-65 and 65+ age groups).