

SYNTHESIS OF THE PARISH SYNOD CONSULTATION SESSION

Parish: Saint Henry

City: Charleston

Date of Session: March 6, 2022

Number of participants: 13

We publicized the session through the parish bulletin, by announcements at Mass, and through the parish Facebook page. Parishioners who are active and participating in the life of the parish were encouraged to personally invite others who have fallen away from the Church to attend and to share with them the purpose of this gathering.

The Church has offered support and encouragement to many people during the COVID crisis. While COVID definitely contributed to health and physical challenges, it also contributed to spiritual challenges as well. The Catholic Faith brings comfort, truth, and peace, especially in times of tragedy and chaos. Some recommendations which were given in order for the Church to help people grow in holiness were: (1) the greater need for parents to be formed in the Faith, (2) providing Children's Mass Missals for younger children to use during Mass, (3) more opportunities for parishioners to gather for faith formation, (4) providing resources in order that parishioners can learn about the Catholic Faith on their own time (apps, podcasts,...), (5) instilling a greater sense of respect and reverence in the church and at Mass, (6) providing a "question and answer" section about the Faith in the bulletin, (7) the use of "mentors" who have chosen to be "intentional disciples" and to connect them with those struggling with their faith and who would accompany them to a deeper faith. It was mentioned that people need to make a personal decision to take advantage of what is offered both in the parish as well as other resources that are available. There are so many ways to deepen one's Faith, but a person has to have the desire and make the effort for it to happen.

It was also expressed that we need to be “faithful” to who we are as Roman Catholics. We seem to have lost our “identity” and what it means to be Catholic. There is much confusion about Catholic identity, both in the Church and in the United States. The sex abuse scandals as well as weak leadership have caused much pain and confusion. For those who are taking their Faith seriously, they are looking for concrete answers and guidance. The bishops and priests need to speak more definitively, especially in regards to morality and the teaching of the Church. Christianity, in particular Catholicism, is being attacked in many ways and all too often we don’t stand up to defend ourselves.

Those who attended the session mostly agreed that our parish has a good “presence” within our community, especially because of our parish school. A large percentage of our student enrollment is non-Catholic, so this provides a great opportunity for evangelization to those not of the Catholic Faith. The parishioners who were present shared their deep love for the Catholic Church and what it preaches and stands for. They expressed the desire to learn and know more about the beauty and tradition of Catholicism. We are in the process of renovating/restoring our historic church. It was recommended to have a public “open house” and invite the wider community to visit and see the work we have done when it is completed. We also have a “shared prayer chain” with the other churches in Charleston. We also support and participate in a variety of other “outreach ministries” within our community. While Catholics are a “minority” in Charleston, we do feel we have come a long way in gaining the “respect” of other faith communities. We still have a lot of work to do! There are still many misunderstandings and confusion regarding the Catholic Faith. Several parishioners mentioned they enjoy the conversations they have with non-Catholics who ask about the Catholic Church.

Overall, the meeting was very positive and encouraging. No one really focused on the “negative”, recognizing that we are still a “work in progress” as God’s People. People have the desire to be “part of the solution and not part of the problem”. The greatest dream is to have everyone who professes to be “Catholic” attend Mass each week and

take an active role in the life of the parish - being God's People the way He intends and desires!