

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux Catholic Church

Synod Report

Introduction

On Thursday, January 27, 2022, Reverend Michael Straley, Reverend Simon Osuchukwu, Mr. Ryan Ayala, Mrs. Louise Larkin, Mr. Brian and Mrs. Marel Brady, and Mrs. Deb Bacon conducted the Synodal Process with over forty St. Bernard of Clairvaux parishioners. Mr. Ryan Ayala served as the Main Facilitator of the Synodal Process. In consultation with Father Simon, four actively involved parishioners were chosen to serve as Table Facilitators and advisors in the creation of a Content Outline which maintained the general flow of the *Sample Outline for a Synodal Consultation*. Additionally, this contextualized questions for greater understanding and readability by the parishioners of St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

While meeting to review the Roundtable Discussion, the *Practical Suggestions for Successful Facilitation* section in the Leadership Roundtable guidebook was analyzed in depth to ensure that Table Facilitators were equipped to lead a successful discussion. Table Scribes with excellent note-taking skills were recruited, representing a variety of ministries at the parish. Finally, parishioners who serve as Heads of Ministries were invited to attend, followed by a 4-week consecutive announcement in the parish bulletin, opening the call for anyone to participate, with Mr. Ryan Ayala as a contact.

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The Consultation was hosted on Thursday, January 27, 2022 from 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM at St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish Hall. Considering the time and willingness of our parishioners to participate, a warm meal and beverage was provided as a gesture of our appreciation. Upon entering the Parish Hall, participants were given a name tag with their table and group number already assigned. Father Mike

welcomed everyone as we opened the Consultation with the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* prayer. Mr. Ryan Ayala briefly introduced the team, the Synodal journey, explained the process of the night, and encouraged parishioners to take seriously the questions to follow, as our Holy Father strongly desires their feedback. To break the ice and to ensure that we modeled “dialogue,” and “constructive feedback,” Mr. Ryan Ayala proceeded to ask the large group: *How are we evangelizing our local church at St. Bernard of Clairvaux?* The overwhelming consensus of the parishioners was a strong feeling of welcome at St. Bernard of Clairvaux. They also appreciate being greeted when approaching and entering the church for Mass, a function attributed to the parish Hospitality Ministry. They also expressed appreciation for the ministries and groups available at St. Bernard.

Ministries specifically cited as being very supportive for personal spiritual growth and inclusion into the Body of Christ were the: Hospitality Ministry, Ministry of Care, Sanctity of Life, Women’s Spirituality, and Men’s and Women’s Renew Groups. Parishioners also appreciate the interior beauty of the church. The stained glass windows, the altar and sacred works of art contribute to providing an atmosphere of the spiritual. Finally, our parishioners expressed their love of our priests and their dynamic homilies. They also expressed an appreciation for the reverence of our Masses, the music and our choirs.

Roundtable Discussion

After the large group discussion, we separated into groups as Table Facilitators asked the *Focus the Recalling* and *Gather the Fruits to Share* questions. The joys that many of our parishioners shared at the roundtable echoed those shared during the large group discussion - the majority of parishioners at St. Bernard of Clairvaux feel welcome and love the reverence of its liturgies. Parishioners proceeded to share their concerns about not only the overall state of the Church, but also the church here at St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Strong concern for young children and teens at our parish led the discussion, including their need for support in the development of their Catholic faith. Issues and topics cited

include: loss of attendance of youth at Mass and continued use of sacraments to adult years (example: confession, communion); young children lacking education to prepare them for Mass; combination of the sacraments of communion and confirmation (grade 3), and the discontinuation of religious education/catechesis after the completion of confirmation. Many parishioners felt that extending the age for confirmation to grade 8 or at the high school level would provide time for more continued religious education, and potentially increase parental involvement with the faith journey of their children. Participants noted that many parents appear to stop attending Mass with their children after they receive confirmation.

Participants noted additional areas of concern and offered possible solutions, including: confusion regarding church function, social, moral and/or political issues which exist for Catholics due to inconsistency among bishops across dioceses. Participants observe a separation between what the church stands for as a whole, and a lack of demonstration of what it means to be Catholic by its members. This concern is rooted in the premise that there is a lack of focus on Jesus and on the Holy Spirit. Lack of a personal relationship with God may be the root of this concern. Comments such as “the identity of the church is watered down” and the “church lacks standing for something, while it appears to fall for anything “ are the perceived result of the church deviating from “the traditional church.”

Finally, parishioners expressed an overall desire for more catechesis to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. Moreover, they expressed a desire to better proclaim the Gospel in their local communities and to develop skills to be more effective evangelists to those without a faith community. Topics or issues that parishioners requested to learn more about included: The Mass, appropriate preparation for Mass, the Holy Eucharist, Bible Studies, Catechesis on the Holy Spirit, the Triune God, Evangelization 101, a catechesis on the difference between “institution” and “the church,” the death penalty, and how to best show God’s love for those in the LGBT community.

Large Group Feedback

After an hour and ten minutes of Roundtable Discussion, we redirected attention to the large group setting and asked Table Facilitators to share a brief summary of what was discussed in their groups. This was a great opportunity for parishioners to hear thoughts and concerns from other members of the parish.

Conclusion

We concluded by distributing the evaluation form and invited Father Simon to lead us in prayer.

Overall, the consensus was that the Consultation was fruitful and allowed the leadership of our church to recognize the desire and pulse of our community. Primary themes shared by parishioners can be narrowed to two overarching concerns: the future of our youth, and conflicting messages from Bishops in the United States. One of the fruits of the Synodal Consultation is our ability to obtain helpful feedback on how to continue to build the community of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. In a separate document, suggestions include on-going catechesis of the sacraments, reaching out to the youth of our parish, and participating in an on-going discussion about preserving the liturgical vision of the Second Vatican Council Fathers. We are grateful for the Synodal Consultation, as it gave our parish community an opportunity to have a voice and share their deep convictions with church leadership.