

Parish Synod Final Report, Church of the Redeemer

April, 2022

Executive Summary of the Parish Report

(The Executive Summary is identical to the Report sent to the Diocese of Richmond on March 28, 2022. The more complete and expanded Final Report begins on page 7).

Consultations: 18

Participants: 212

Demographics: In the 14 Listening Sessions there were 31 small groups of 3-5 parishioners each. 126 parishioners (mostly age 55 and over) participated in the 14 Listening Sessions. 51 youth (ages 12-18) plus seven adult youth leaders participated in the two youth gatherings. In reaching out to those no longer worshipping at Redeemer, eight interviews were recorded and 21 persons took the online survey (scattered ages). Participants were mostly European Americans, fitting the profile of the parish.

Section One: Communion. This is what we heard from Synod participants that expressed the experience of Journeying Together in Communion and unity with one another. Responses clustered around four main experiences: Community, Outreach, Sacramental and Prayer experiences, and a universal experience of being Catholic. (We will focus on Outreach in Section 3 of this Report and being Catholic in Section 4.)

Parishioners described their Redeemer community as warm and welcoming, having a true sense of fellowship. They sense a feeling of belonging to a family that cares and prays for each other. Parishioners feel they are blessed to have a good pastor and deacons whom they feel they can approach with any need or issue. Many parishioners expressed that the physical structure of a “church in the round” enhances a feeling of praying together rather than as individuals.

Almost every parishioner expressed a strong experience of being in Communion or union with each other, especially around their experience of

worship and prayer in the parish. All aspects of the celebration of mass and other prayer opportunities received praise from parishioners.

- The pastor, deacons, music minister, and many volunteers (choir, lectors, servers, ushers, decorators, etc.) work together to consistently provide worship opportunities that are uplifting and even inspiring.
- Parishioners said that clear proclamation of the scripture readings by well-trained lectors and homilies by the pastor and deacons that connect the scriptural message to current life situations help us to examine how we are living and inspire us to grow.
- The physical structure of the Worship space “in the round” is an advantage in that worshippers can see the faces of others in the celebration. It also enhances and encourages worshippers to sing, feeling unified by the music.
- Music flows from the liturgical seasons and from the particular scriptures of each mass. Cantors lead while they sing. A mix of traditional and contemporary music is utilized.
- Specific rituals during the liturgical seasons were noted: Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, foot washing, veneration of the cross, Easter Vigil light moving from outdoor lighting to lighting up the church, help people feel actively involved in the liturgy. There is active participation by the congregation, especially singing, but also responses during the mass, and people stay to the end of Mass.
- Prayer opportunities are offered beyond the regular worship, including Morning Prayer of the Hours (also live streamed), Evening Prayer on different occasions, and Taize style prayer during Advent and Lent.
- The parish began live-streaming mass and funerals during COVID and is considering continuing that policy for the benefit of the elderly, homebound, disabled, or ill.

Challenges were also noted by parishioners. There has been a sizable drop in mass participation after COVID. It would be good if children’s liturgy of the Word could be resumed, but finding volunteers is difficult. Parishioners asked for more prayer and spirituality opportunities. Because young adults are leaving the church there are fewer marriages

and baptisms. A few parishioners expressed a desire for more reverence in the Worship Space.

Section Two: Discussion and Dialogue. The questions on Discussion and Dialogue did not receive as much response as other questions in the Synod Listening Sessions. However, there were important issues raised.

In regard to speaking out, almost all expressed hope that both the universal Synod and our local Synod are evidence that people are willing to both speak out and listen if given a safe space and good process. Parishioners saw the universal Church in particular needing to listen more to people in the pews. People say they have to trust the Church and one another more before they will speak up. Hearing the Pope, our pastor, and our deacons speak out on current issues encourages the laity to speak out.

Obstacles to speaking out that were expressed in the Sessions included fear of being judged or even rejected or ridiculed, or being considered a trouble maker. Others said that speaking up raises the question “why bother, we haven’t been listened to in the past.” Parishioners expressed considerable cynicism and mistrust about the Church and being listened to. The biggest stumbling block is clericalism, priests and deacons who consider themselves better than us and do not listen to lay concerns. Some also noted bishops seem to fear taking a stand because many of those who support them are wealthy conservatives.

Regarding what issues in Church and Society need our attention, the dominant issue that needs to be addressed is the reality that youth, young adults, and even middle-age families are leaving the parish and the Church. This is happening for a variety of reasons, but many parishioners said that the Church’s stances toward the LGBTQ community (“our sons and daughters being labeled as ‘disordered’ in Church Teaching”), divorcees feeling unwelcomed and struggling with the annulment process, and women not allowed to be ordained and in positions of leadership, are some of the main reasons people are leaving.

Regarding dialogue with other Christian denominations, many parishioners expressed a need for the parish to work with other area churches, especially since our property is immediately adjacent to a Lutheran parish. Many ideas, such as occasional shared worship services

in the parking lot between us, then returning to our separate worship spaces for Eucharist were expressed. Co-sponsoring information events about what the differences and sameness in our beliefs are was another recommendation. The fact that the Diocese of Richmond ended the ecumenical work camp in the Tri-Cities for teens and adults of our parish several years ago gave the impression that the Diocese was against ecumenical activities. There is much interest in focusing on ecumenical sharing in outreach programs also.

Section Three: Participation and Mission. This is what we heard from Synod participants regarding the Synod themes Participation and Mission that encourage journeying together. The responses clustered around the parish experiences of Social Justice and Outreach, the functioning of the Pastoral Council, cooperation of the staff and committees, formation of adults, and building upon the Synod Listening process.

Responses of parishioners show that social justice is part of the DNA of Redeemer parish! There is both pride and a conscientiousness in the way the parish responds to the invitation to participate with their time, talent and treasure. Social Justice is seen as an intrinsic part of the mission of the parish and the universal Church which is based on the gospel of Jesus. The parish responds to specific, often ad-hoc needs (Ukraine, Kentucky tornadoes, individual's seeking a rent payment, etc.) and ongoing needs (Haiti, MCEF Food Bank, etc.) The parish's concern is also focused on the Catholic Church's universal call to address right-to-life issues (abortion, capital punishment, "option for the poor.")

Parishioners expressed thanks for having a Pastoral Council to advise the pastor, but also expressed some lack of clarity about how the Council actually works. Perhaps "under-utilized" would be a word to describe the Council's functioning. They would like to see more transparency surrounding the Council, clear articulation of its goals, regular publication of its minutes in a variety of accessible modes (website, kiosk, even hard copies made available).

Parishioners are thankful for the qualities of cooperation and approachability exhibited by the pastor, deacons, and staff. Religious Education resource people are very receptive to questions and

concerns. RE is going well, Vacation Bible School in particular. One parent noted “I loved watching my children go through the sacraments, First Communion and Confirmation.”

Committees are encouraged and thanked for the work that they do in all areas of parish life. They recognize the importance of homilies by the pastor and deacons that have implications for their personal lives, and for the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass that recognizes those who serve in a variety of roles in public life (first responders, nurses, doctors, political decision makers, teachers). Parishioners appreciate being “blessed” at masses for various personal occasions in their lives.

Parishioners noted the need for Adult Faith Formation and have participated in the AFF offerings by the pastor and the deacons. It was also expressed that in the big picture, seminarians could be trained with lay adults and that would help combat clericalism which is the result of seminarians being trained in isolation. Finally it was emphasized by parishioners that some sort of listening processes like the Synod should be designed to happen regularly.

In terms of challenges and obstacles in this area, it was noted that volunteers are getting burned out because there are fewer people to call forward as volunteers. Again communication was cited as needed to promote the various opportunities to get involved. Also noted was that AFF opportunities focus on presentations by ordained clergy. Parishioners would like more lay-led group studies.

Section Four. The Fundamental Question: “Journeying Together.” This is what we heard from Synod participants that expressed the experience of Journeying Together. Responses clustered around four main experiences: Community, Outreach (both internal and external), Sacramental and Prayer experiences, and a Universal Experience of being Catholic.

Parishioners, both youth and adults, describe the Redeemer community as warm and welcoming, having a true sense of fellowship. Parishioners sense a feeling of belonging to a family that cares and prays for each other. They feel they are blessed to have a good pastor and deacons whom they feel they can approach with any need or issue. Many parishioners expressed that the physical structure of a “church in the

round” enhances a feeling of praying together rather than as individuals and even helps the community sing better together.

But this feeling of being cared for is not only an inward focused caring; it enlivens the parish to reach out to others “beyond the doors of the church.” Redeemer staff and parishioners visit the sick in their homes and in the adjacent Regional Memorial Hospital. Food and Funds are given to MCEF (Mechanicsville Churches Emergency Functions) and volunteers from the K of C give their time there. Its Haiti ministry is a model for the diocese with frequent visits and projects. Its “No Room at the Inn” fundraiser raises \$30,000 each year for Haiti, and several local charitable agencies. The full-time Social Minister explains Catholic Social Teaching and the reasons for social involvement.

Parishioners look forward to and support parish gatherings, especially the weekly celebration of the Eucharist. Parishioners expressed a universal appreciation for the music, homilies, and ritual celebrations. One parishioner said “one thing that makes a liturgy successful is how well the homilist makes the connection between the readings and the celebration to take the message out into the community.”

Parishioners expressed a strong connection with simply “being Catholic”! They appreciate knowing that Catholics around the world are celebrating the same ritual of thanksgiving together each Sunday and even on Special Holy Days and liturgical feasts.

An obstacle to continuing this healthy “journeying together” is the fact that the numbers of worshippers and volunteers for the many ministries in the parish has been diminishing, even before COVID started. How to respond to the fact that the parish has become smaller in numbers and the population of the congregation is aging will be a major challenge. They want more listening opportunities, like the Synod process, to address these and other parish issues.

In addition, the stances of the universal Catholic Church toward women, the LGBTQ community, the divorced, the sex abuse crisis, and open communion were voiced as reasons many have left the parish and the Church. This was confirmed by those who have left the Church who took the online survey. COVID provided an opportunity not to come to

Church and many have drifted away in spite of efforts to use live-streaming for parish masses.

The Full Parish Synod Report

The Full Parish Synod Report includes:

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Introduction

What is a Synod? Pope Francis has called for a World Synod of Bishops to take place in October 2023. A Synod is a gathering of some 250 bishops from around the world who meet with the Pope to focus on specific issues within the life of the Church. Synods are meant to be consultative, for Pope Francis to be able to hear from those who are participating in the life of the Church.

Pope Francis has declared that the Synod of Bishops in 2023 will be about “synodality,” which means how we as disciples and parishioners are “journeying together,” listening to and responding to the Holy Spirit’s call to us to help bring about the Kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven.” This Synod’s themes are “communion, participation and mission” as lived out in parishes around the world.

Timeframe. Pope Francis announced Synod 2023 in July of 2021 when he published the foundational documents that gave the Church the type of topics he wanted to hear about from parishes around the world, and even from those “on the margins” who don’t regularly participate in the life of the

Church. These documents were sent to bishops in every diocese that summer. The Pope officially began the Synod process on Oct. 10, 2021. Bishop Knestout officially began the Synod in the Diocese of Richmond on Oct. 17, 2021.

On December 4, pastor Jim Cowles asked Dennis and Loretta Beeman to consider coordinating the Synod process for Redeemer parish. The Beemans agreed to coordinate the parish process and met with Fr. Jim on Dec. 20 to brainstorm how a process based on Synod documents from Rome might work at Redeemer. Fr. Jim invited them to meet with the parish staff on Jan 12, 2022 to present such a plan. The staff enthusiastically endorsed the plan presented by the Beemans.

The Redeemer Synod Plan. The plan for the Synod process at Redeemer included the following steps:

- A timeline was established that included publicity, training of facilitators and note takers, development of Listening Sessions, a registration process, sessions for Youth, and efforts to reach those no longer worshipping at Redeemer, and the formation of a Leadership Team to write a report on the results of the Synod process.
- Publicity utilized parish bulletin announcements and flyers, announcements by the pastor and liturgy coordinator at weekend masses, prayers of the faithful, Synod Coordinators speaking at masses, the kiosk in the Commons, and the parish website and Facebook pages.
- Twenty-seven Facilitators and Note Takers were trained to lead twelve two-hour Listening Sessions, seven in person and five via zoom, beginning Feb. 15 and concluding on March 16.
- A Listening Session model was designed so that small groups of 3-5 parishioners would respond to synod questions for three minutes each, without being interrupted while others listened. Three rounds of questions were presented in each Listening Session. A Reflection Guide was provided ahead of time to enable participants to reflect on Synod themes. Parishioners also spoke about what they heard from each other and what they hoped the parish and the universal Church would do in the future.

- Two special youth sessions, one for middle school and one for high school, were presented by the parish Youth Minister. Their responses are incorporated into the Report.
- Special attention was paid to Pope Francis' interest in "those on the margins" or those no longer participating in the life of the Church. Discussion cards which contained two discussion starter questions were prepared and distributed. A QR code linking to an online survey was provided for anonymous input. That data is also included in this Report.
- The notes taken in all the various Listening Sessions became the basis of the Report.

Who Participated? In the 14 Listening Sessions there were 31 small groups of 3-5 parishioners each. 126 parishioners (mostly age 55 and over) participated in the 12 Listening Sessions. 51 youth (ages 12-18) and seven adult leaders participated in two youth gatherings. Eight interviews were recorded and 21 persons took the online survey (mostly young adults) for those no longer worshipping at Redeemer. Total individual participants: 212.

Processing the Results. More than 150 pages of notes from the various groups were analyzed to find dominant themes. A Google Forms instrument helped group the thousands of statements responding to the questions in the Reflection Guide into dominant themes. The resulting Final Report was sent to the Diocese of Richmond and presented to the Parish Staff and Pastoral Council on March 27, 2022.

Each section of the Final Report includes strengths or positives and also obstacles or negatives that were recorded. At the end of each section are "Suggestions Made."

Section One

The Fundamental Question:

Are We “Journeying Together?”

The official Preparatory Document from Rome for Synod 2023 states “A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together’: How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?” (PD, 26). Pope Francis wants to know if and how we are journeying together!

Section One presents what participants that commented on the experience of “Journeying Together” as a parish said at the Redeemer Parish Synod Listening Sessions. Responses clustered around four dominant themes: Community, Sacramental and Prayer experiences (see page 13), Outreach (both internal and external, see page 17), and the universal experience of being Catholic.

Parishioners, both youth and adults, describe the Redeemer community as warm and welcoming, and it has a true sense of fellowship. Parishioners sense a feeling of belonging to a family that cares and prays for each other. They feel they are blessed to have a good pastor and deacons whom they feel they can approach with any need or issue. Many parishioners expressed that the physical structure of a “church in the round” enhances a feeling of community and praying together rather than as individuals. It even helps the community sing in unity together.

One parishioner said that a friend told her that “if my parish had been like Redeemer, I would probably still be a Catholic.”

Parishioners look forward to and support parish gatherings, especially the weekly celebration of the Eucharist. Parishioners expressed a universal appreciation for the music, homilies, and ritual celebrations. One parishioner said “one thing that makes a liturgy successful is how well the homilist makes the connection between the readings and the celebration to our calling to take the message out into the community.” (More on sacramental celebrations in Section Two, page 12.)

Parishioners expressed a strong connection with simply “being Catholic!” They appreciate knowing that Catholics around the world are celebrating the same Eucharistic ritual of thanksgiving together each Sunday and even on Special Holy Days and liturgical feasts. At the same time, parishioners remain very upset about the sex abuse scandal and its cover-up by the bishops of the Catholic Church.

An obstacle to continuing this healthy “journeying together” is the fact that the numbers of worshippers and volunteers needed for the many ministries in the parish has been diminishing, even before COVID started. How to respond to the fact that the parish has become smaller in numbers and that the population of the congregation is aging is a major challenge to the parish. Parishioners want more listening opportunities, like the Synod process, to address these and other parish issues.

In addition, the stances of the universal Catholic Church toward women in leadership roles such as becoming priests and deacons, the LGBTQ community, the divorced and the annulment process, the sex abuse crisis and its cover-up by the bishops, and lack of open communion were voiced as stumbling blocks by many in the pews, as well as reasons why many have left the parish and the Church. These concerns were confirmed in the online survey by those who have left the Church. COVID provided an opportunity not to come to Church and many have drifted away in spite of efforts to use live-streaming for parish masses.

Suggestions Made.

- A picnic-type celebration this Summer/Fall to welcome parishioners back in person, presuming COVID calms down.
- A directory containing parishioners’ occupations and areas of expertise to help the needs of parishioners (example: parish nurse, maintenance).
- Listening Sessions or a Town/Parish Hall on various topics several times a year. (Will combat cynicism of “they will never listen.” People are less cynical and trust more when they are listened to.)
- Improve communication about the many opportunities at Redeemer (use the yellow sheets more, invitations to volunteer via social media, phone tree for those without email).

- Make Redeemer more visible within local community. Example: a new, bigger sign at the Meadowbridge Rd. entrance; promote Redeemer's many ministries to those in the Mechanicsville area.
- Support and fellowship for those seeking annulments and for those divorced.
- Family night (movie?) to keep parents and youth involved in parish.

Section Two:

Source and Summit, Celebration!

Almost every parishioner at the Listening Sessions expressed a strong experience of being in Communion or union with each other, especially around their experience of worship and prayer in the parish. All aspects of the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the Church's Source and Summit of life, and other prayer opportunities received praise from parishioners.

- The pastor, deacons, music minister, and many volunteers (choir, lectors, servers, ushers, environment, etc.) work together to consistently provide worship opportunities that are uplifting and even inspiring.
- Parishioners said that clear proclamation of the scripture readings by lectors and homilies by the pastor and deacons that connect the scriptural message to current life situations help us to examine how we are living and inspire us to grow.
- The physical structure of the Worship space "in the round" is an advantage in that worshippers can see the faces of others in the celebration and helps to promote community. It also enhances and encourages worshippers to sing, feeling unified by the music.
- Music flows from the liturgical seasons and from the particular scriptures of each mass. Lectors are well trained and cantors lead while they sing. A mix of traditional and contemporary music is utilized. The congregation's singing and participation make liturgies

Spirit-filled celebrations, as one parishioner noted, “they fill us with enough Spirit to spill out for days!”

- Specific rituals during the liturgical seasons were noted: Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, foot washing, veneration of the cross, the Easter Vigil light moving from outdoor lighting to lighting up the Worship Space, help people feel actively involved in the liturgy. There is active participation by the congregation, especially singing, but also responses during the mass, and most people stay to the end of Mass.
- Parishioners appreciate being “blessed” by the whole congregation for their service as teachers and catechetical leaders, and Council members. Blessings of life events such as anniversaries and students going off to college are also appreciated.
- The Prayer of the Faithful (Universal Prayers) are connected to the Sunday Scriptures, contemporary needs and concerns for both the world and our local parish.
- Prayer opportunities are offered beyond the regular worship, including a weekly Morning Prayer (daily during Lent and Advent, also live streamed), Evening Prayer on different occasions, and Taize style prayer during Advent and Lent.
- The parish began live-streaming mass and funerals during COVID and is considering continuing that policy for the benefit of the elderly, homebound, disabled, or ill.

Challenges were also noted by parishioners.

- There has been a sizable drop in mass participation after COVID.
- Parishioners asked for more prayer and spirituality opportunities.
- Because young adults are leaving the church there are fewer marriages and baptisms.
- A few parishioners expressed a desire for more reverence in the Worship Space and do not like the “worship in the round” design of the Worship Space, wishing there were statues and stained-glass windows.

- One woman expressed a desire to “hear women preach from their female perspective on life.” Another said “I would like to be a deacon but I am a woman.”

Suggestions Made:

- Youth (or even Young Adult) Mass
- Resume Children’s Liturgy of the Word
- Resume Nursery Service

Section Three:

How the Parish Functions

This is what we heard from Synod participants regarding the Synod theme of Participation which is evidence that they are “journeying together” as a parish. The responses clustered around the parish experiences of the functioning of the Pastoral Council, cooperation of the staff and committees, formation of adults, and building upon the Synod Listening process.

Parishioners expressed thanks for having a Pastoral Council to advise the pastor, recognizing that in the past the pastor would often make every decision with no consultation whatsoever. But they also expressed some lack of clarity about how the Council actually works. Perhaps “under-utilized” would be a word to describe the Council’s functioning. They would like to see more transparency surrounding the Council, clear articulation of its goals, regular publication of its minutes in a variety of accessible modes (website, kiosk, even hard copies made available).

Parishioners are thankful for the qualities of cooperation and approachability exhibited by the pastor, deacons, and staff. Religious Education staff, in particular, are very receptive to questions and concerns. Religious Education is going well, Vacation Bible School in particular. One parent noted “I loved watching my children go through the sacraments, First Communion and Confirmation.”

Committees are encouraged and thanked for the work that they do in all areas of parish life. Committee chairs work hard but “need new blood” to support them. The congregation is growing old.

Parishioners recognize the importance of homilies by the pastor and deacons that have implications for their personal lives, and for the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass that recognizes those who serve in a variety of roles in public life (first responders, nurses, doctors, political decision makers, teachers). Parishioners appreciate being “blessed” at masses for various personal occasions in their lives.

Parishioners noted the need for Adult Faith Formation and have participated in the AFF offerings by the pastor and the deacons. It was also expressed that in the big picture, seminarians could be trained with lay adults and that would help combat clericalism which is the result of seminarians being trained in isolation. Finally it was emphasized by parishioners that some sort of listening processes like the Synod should be designed to happen regularly.

In terms of challenges and obstacles in this area, it was noted that volunteers are getting burned out because there are fewer people to call forward as volunteers. Again communication was cited as needed to promote the various opportunities to get involved and issues which are confronting the parish. Also noted was that AFF opportunities focus on presentations by ordained clergy. Parishioners would like more lay-led group studies.

Suggestions Made:

- Increase awareness of Pastoral Council activities, publish minutes in a variety of ways, pictures of Council members in Commons.
- Synod type Listening Sessions several times a year.

Section Four:

Our Mission in the World

Responses of parishioners show that social justice is part of the DNA of Redeemer parish! There is both pride and a conscientiousness in the way the parish responds to the invitation to participate with their time, talent and treasure in the Church's social mission in the world. Social Justice is seen as an intrinsic part of the mission of the parish and the universal Church which is based on the gospel of Jesus. Parishioners indicated that they are truly participating in the life of the parish when they respond to the needs of others, both within the parish and "outside the parish doors."

The parish responds to specific, often ad-hoc needs (Ukraine, Kentucky tornadoes, individuals seeking a rent payment, etc.) and ongoing needs (Haiti, MCEF Food Bank, etc.)

Redeemer staff and parishioners visit the sick in their homes and in the adjacent Regional Memorial Hospital. Food and funds are given to MCEF (Mechanicsville Churches Emergency Functions) and volunteers from the K of C give their time there. Its Haiti ministry is a model for the diocese with frequent visits and projects. Its annual "No Room at the Inn" fundraiser raises \$30,000 each year for Haiti and two local charities that help prevent homelessness. The full-time Social Minister explains Catholic Social Teaching and the reasons for social involvement. The parish's concern is also focused on the Catholic Church's universal call to address right-to-life issues (abortion, capital punishment, "preferential option for the poor.")

Parishioners also expressed a need to emphasize dialogue with other Christian denominations. Many expressed a need for the parish to work with other area churches, especially since our property is immediately adjacent to a Lutheran parish. Many ideas, such as occasional shared worship services in the parking lot between us, then returning to our separate worship spaces for Eucharist were expressed.

Co-sponsoring information events about the difference and the sameness of our beliefs was another recommendation. The fact that the Diocese of Richmond ended the ecumenical work camp in the Tri-Cities for teens and adults of our parish several years ago gave the impression that

the Diocese was against ecumenical activities. There is much interest in focusing on ecumenical sharing in outreach programs also.

Suggestions Made:

- Invite youth to participate in social ministry activities.
- Invite Boy Scouts and American Heritage Girls from other churches to have interdenominational activities and services.
- Invite neighboring Lutheran Church to have supper with food trucks, choirs sing, etc.
- Let ordained focus on spiritual needs, have lay “Chief-of-Staff” manage the parish.

Section Five:

The Youth of the Parish

The parish Youth Minister conducted two Synod Listening Sessions for youth, one for middle school students (grades 6-8) and one for high school students (grades 9-12), totaling 51 youth responses. Six other adults assisted in the process. The youth process paralleled the synod questions that adults responded to. The responses from both groups were very similar and are combined in this report.

When asked what they feel joyful about belonging to the parish, most of the youth expressed that Redeemer is a very kind and friendly parish. They find it a welcoming parish that is open to all people and not exclusive, and they, themselves, feel accepted.

Most agreed that being a Catholic is important to them and that they have a strong connection with God and the Church. Most agreed that no matter what we do, God always loves and forgives them. They feel that Redeemer provides a strong youth group which has lots of activities and volunteer opportunities for charitable works.

They value the Parish’s Vacation Bible School and the FIRE Groups, but would like to have more Youth trips. The youth find value in the design of the church in the round, the baptismal font, the Eucharist itself, the

Blessed Sacrament chapel, the use of Holy Oils in the Sacraments, the Music and the Scriptures. They also expressed that they like the pastor.

However, there were a few who expressed that they are forced to attend Mass and don't feel being a Catholic is important; and that they don't need to love God. Some are disheartened that the Catholic Church does not accept same gender couples. They find it hard to connect with kids of other faiths, and that the Catholic faith is misunderstood. They would like to see more diversity in the parish.

Some are discouraged by the length of the mass and long homilies, and some find mass boring. They are also disheartened by little kids making too much noise and other interruptions, such as cell phones and people leaving mass early. A few indicated that faith requires concentration, but that is difficult to do at Mass.

They also indicated that there were more old people and not enough youth in attendance. A few don't like confession in the open and would prefer a confessional box. It was also voiced that baptism should be later in life so they can make the choice. They feel that the church needs to modernize. A few expressed they would like more artwork like stained glass windows in the Worship Space. A few would like a gym in the Parish.

Section Six:

Those who No Longer Worship with Us

In calling for Synod 2023, Pope Francis expressed a desire to reach "those on the margins" and those who no longer participate in the life of the Church. The Parish Synod Leadership Team tried to reach those no longer worshipping at Redeemer with two approaches.

First, parishioners were encouraged to contact friends and even their young adult children who no longer worship at Redeemer. "Yellow Cards" were designed and distributed with two conversation starter questions on them which asked "what were your primary reasons for deciding to no longer worship at Redeemer" and "what changes to the parish or the Catholic Church would you like to recommend?"

Second, the card also had a QR code which linked to a survey asking similar questions about leaving the parish and their thoughts on the Catholic Church. Eight “interviews” were collected while 21 persons took the survey.

Comments collected via the cards and personal conversations were similar to the responses via the survey. They both focused more on teachings of the Catholic Church rather than on their experience at Redeemer. Comments included:

- The Church’s teaching on contraception.
- Lack of women in leadership roles in the Church, including ordination of women
- Priests not allowed to be married
- Church needs to be more modern, flexible and contemporary
- Church should recognize gay marriages
- “Not enough room on this card to express my concerns”

One parishioner took the time to type up a summary of a conversation with their two young adult daughters.

“I spoke with my daughters who have stopped going to church on any kind of a regular basis. Just wanted to share some of their thoughts with you. Reasons for not feeling connected are lack of women in leadership positions, not allowing priests to marry, and not recognizing gay marriages. One shared that she thought her generation (50 yr olds) aren't who we should be speaking with; but, the high school and college age children. She shared that our granddaughter can't wait to be 18 and be able to make the decision to not attend any more. Breaks my heart. I guess time will tell.”

The online survey was completed by 21 people, with a little more than half of those being between the ages of 30-49 years of age and the others were above 50. Although the numbers are small, it is important to listen to those who took the time to complete the survey.

In the survey more than half agreed that the leadership of Redeemer listened well to its parishioners, while only one-third felt that the Universal

Catholic Church does listen well. Another one-third took a neutral stand on the issue of listening.

Most of those surveyed who were former members of Redeemer or the Catholic Church felt that attending church gave them joy. When attending Redeemer they loved the feeling of community, along with the worship and music. One person stated, "I love the spirit of Redeemer. The generosity and friendliness of the people at this parish are amazing."

However, they are dismayed by the policies of the Catholic Church so they stay away. Strong emotions were expressed over the heartbreak they feel about the church in general. Here are some of the comments:

"I don't think the policies of the Catholic Church (covering up wrongdoings in response to the sex abuse scandal, condemning those who choose not to be married within the walls of a church,)... It breaks my heart daily seeing the stances the Catholic Church takes on such divisive issues."

"Pastors, Bishops, Cardinals and most likely the Pope gravely sinned by keeping quiet on matters of priests hurting their flocks. Moving priests from parish to parish allowed this grave sin to continue and put others in harm's way. I feel uncertain about priests who are on the altar. Loss of trust."

"Hierarchy and money seem to overrule the gospel. God gave us gifts to be stewarded wisely. The gift of women to the church is sinfully wasted by rules created by man -- not God."

"I have a child who is gay. She feels judged and hated at the church."

Some of those surveyed feel that the church should reach out and connect with people who have become disconnected; they also saw a need to increase diversity within the church. Several also said "We need to do more for the young children as well as the youth."

When asked what advice they would like to give the church, they stated the Church needs to be more accepting of those whom they have made outcasts, come to a more modern understanding of sexuality, and include women in higher leadership within the church as deacons and priests. The Church needs to "Stop doing annulments and that whole

process. It's unfair to have a church court that doesn't even know you make decisions on your future."

As said above, the Church's sex abuse scandal is a stumbling block for many who have left. One person stated that the church should stop "demonizing people outside of the organization while not condemning those within the church who are committing crimes against humanity and the community and the church in general."

Those taking the survey expressed many reasons why they no longer worship in the catholic faith.

"I really feel that the Catholic Church does not listen to nor pivot and change with the times. I believe the priests can get married and still lead the church positively! I believe that women can be deacons. I feel like the Catholic Church has alienated a lot of people with the red tape and getting caught up in these man-made laws of the church. A lot of these ideas are outdated and not healthy."

"I am a 70 year old married white male, who was raised Catholic and attended 12 years of Catholic school. But as I majored in science, I could not rationalize a scientific understanding of the universe and human evolution with the medieval concepts of angels, devils, exorcisms, etc. That was a first step in my walking away from the church. Then, I met my future wife. We have been together for nearly 50 years, married for 46 years and raised two daughters. We used birth control to avoid having children before we were financially prepared to raise them, and again after we decided not to have more children. Both of our daughters were raised well, and have advanced college degrees. In the eyes of the church, we are sinners for using effective family planning, which is an absurd position on the part of the church. That is the second step in my walk away from the church. I believe that many of the problems the church has are related to a poor understanding of human sexuality, not only failure to recognize the need for family planning. The church's rejection of LGBTQ members is a failure on the part of the hierarchy to minister to the needs of all the people. I have gay and lesbian family members, and I know that they are being failed by a hidebound church. The church needs to move into the 21st century and deal with the realities that people are dealing with in their lives. Right now I see the church as a relic of centuries long past."

Appendices

Other Comments from Listening Sessions

The Final Report has attempted to include as many comments from parishioners as possible. Themes that were expressed most often were considered dominant and given more emphasis. Statements that were expressed by some or a few participants were also mentioned but given less emphasis.

It is important to mention comments that were made by one or two participants because sometimes there can be important insights that only one or two people mentioned. Some of those comments are listed here in no particular order.

- Training for seminarians that includes administrative, business and organizational skills. Let lay persons do administration
- Old model of parish won't work with aging parishioners and thus fewer volunteers and less money.
- Have fewer ministries, but do them really well!
- Overcome cynicism of "they won't listen" by listening to ourselves and making a difference locally.
- Put the tabernacle on the altar in the Worship Space.
- I love Pope Francis; he is a holy man.
- Pope Francis has hurt those who love the Latin Mass.
- I love Bishop Knestout
- We are not living up to the Spirit of Vatican II.
- Vatican II has made the Church too loose with its rules.
- I long for more unity in the Church, no bishops arguing with each other.
- Change in pastors can make a big difference and lead to confusion and frustration.
- "I'm part of a multi-generational Redeemer family; I started as a youth at Redeemer, now my children are in Youth Group."
- Stay focused on Pope Benedict's tenets of "Sanctity of Life, Sanctity of Marriage, Freedom of Religion."

- More emphasis on Stations of the Cross and Rosary.
- Redeemer is a secret in Hanover; let people know we are here!
- Redeemer not Catholic enough, lacks stained glass windows, needs more statues.
- Mary garden is in back, not visible.
- Religion and God is diminishing in society.
- Deacons are getting older; are we grooming replacements?
- Closed communion: would Christ turn anyone away from the table?
- Recent national situation of “invalid Baptisms” because of misuse of a pronoun shows how the Church is out of touch with people.
- Church defines homosexual acts as “disordered.”
- Have never heard a homily on taking care of the environment.
- Have never heard a homily on racism.
- I miss not being able to take the Cup at Mass because of COVID.
- I miss Latin Rite mass.
- We are “white” in our approach to everything.
- Parents need to participate in the Religious Ed of their children.
- My children don’t participate but still consider themselves Catholic.
- I am participating in this Listening Session but don’t believe anything will change.
- Need to find a way to communicate with those who don’t come to mass.
- I was struggling and feeling disconnected from the Church. A parishioner gave me the listening card from the church. It was nice to have someone reach out to me.
- Need to understand other’s perspective when listening
- I feel like I’m coming out of my shell since listening.
- Resume position of full-time Adult Faith Coordinator

Conclusion

This Synod Report is a summation of what parishioners said in the Synod Listening Sessions, plus the “Yellow Cards” and online survey to reach those who no longer worship at Redeemer. It does not include any analysis or interpretation of what was said by parishioners. It is being given to the Parish Staff and Pastoral Council as an aid to help parish planning.

Many thanks to the Parish Staff for their support and to all those who volunteered as facilitators and note takers for the Listening Sessions. May the Church of the Redeemer continue to “Journey Together” on its spiritual path by speaking out and listening!

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