

1. Ministry Name: St. Cecilia Parish
Ministry location: Bainbridge Island, WA
Ministry Type: Parish
Ministry ID# (if known)
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2. What were common or important themes that emerged from the listening sessions?

As a demographic sample, St. Cecilia respondents were primarily white and born just before or after 1960. The listening sessions revealed a diversity (in opinion) of the faithful in their journey to and with the Church. Common themes expressed during the listening follow in no particular order:

1. Comfortable with the teaching authority of the Church; gratitude for the sacraments (notably the Eucharist), tradition and devotions; encouraged more thorough catechesis of the faithful focused on instruction of Church doctrine and teaching, as a means to increase understanding about why the Church stands “outside” of the culture.
2. Concern about viability of the Church’s doctrines especially related to leadership of women and the priesthood (married priests, women’s ordination); welcoming of LGBTQ catholics (gay marriage) in an effort to be more inclusive and address dwindling numbers of clergy. The listening sessions highlighted an increased desire by these faithful for the Church to become more inclusive to marginalized communities. In more than one listening session, the faithful identified the LGBTQ community existing outside the life of the Church and expressed sincere desire for union with this community and recognition of their “humanity”.
3. Need for openness and humility in sex abuse scandal and other “bad” actions of the church. Shame felt among the faithful, desire for healing, reconciliation of the whole church.
4. Better formation of priests and adult laity, beyond initial sacraments and confirmation. Teaching catechism, doctrine about rules, discernment, scripture and bible study.
5. Youth leaving church because of its position on sexuality. Seen as hypocritical with the gospel of love and acceptance.
6. More participation of Laity; have laity lead in parish business and ministries which allows priests to focus on sacraments. Requires laity taking initiative too.
7. Eucharist is central to our catholic faith, Mass is the same all over the world.
8. Keeping tradition and allowing things new. The Church needs to adjust, evolve and grow in core truth honoring wisdom that has accrued and finding balance with evolving needs of the world. “Ancient constancy, but being every new.”
9. Maintaining traditions, (Rosary, adoration, Stations of the Cross) teaching about them to increase understanding and history, and making them more accessible.

3. What particular stories or real-life experiences were shared related to the way the church currently journeys together? (Give examples with identifying information, but without names – e.g. a young Hispanic woman shared a story of her faith in God increasing as a result of her First Communion or a middle-aged African American man saw his faith grow through participation in a faith sharing group.)

Respondents to this question viewed this experience on very personal terms and the responses could be summarized as follows:

1. Instances of personal encounters with Christ;
2. How the individual sees his/her role in the local parish community and;
3. How the Church truly represents a “universal” Church and;
4. Very conflicted feelings about the Church’s role in and response to the sexual abuse crisis

Respondents in the first group shared extremely moving experiences of Christ’s presence in their lives. Sample responses include:

- Older white male shared his story of estrangement from the Church as a youth. Witnessing a priest killed in action while administering the last rites to a soldier confirmed his commitment to the faith.
- Older white male shared his personal encounter with the vision of Christ at the foot of his bed as he recovered from a serious illness which provided him great peace.

Respondents in the second group offered personal anecdotes relating to either joy or sadness (also frustration) at trying to “belong” to their local parish. Some perceived the local parish community as very positive due the pastor’s emphasis on “welcoming” our brothers and sisters as well as numerous parish community events such as parish sponsored dinners. Others noted less feeling of “welcoming” due to personal circumstances such as divorce or feelings of being “judged” for reasons undisclosed.

Sample responses include:

- 30-40 y.o. married white male, father of two young children left previous parish and started attending St. Cecilia because of our very positive, respectful and tolerant relationship with kids especially during celebration of the Mass.
- A young white woman with young children and convert to the church doesn’t feel welcome at the parish. Says her ideas/gifts are not wanted here.
- Older female parishioner brother & sister-in-law got married after having a child and received positive encouragement from the pastor. He welcomed them to the parish and this made all the difference in how they feel toward the church.

Respondents in the third group expressed a deep appreciation of the “universality” of the Church. An older white retired couple spoke of their appreciation of being able to practice their faith during travel across the globe (Abu Dhabi, Mexico, Morocco). The theme of “universality” was also expressed by those who had converted to the Catholic faith in adulthood. A majority of converts cited the Eucharist as the reason they were drawn to the faith and that it truly provides the sustenance needed as member of the body of Christ. Responses by converts throughout the listening sessions highlighted a strong appreciation of the sacraments. Sample responses include:

- An older white gentleman who converted decades ago called the Eucharist “central” to his faith and is grateful for it.
- An older white retired male who converted after he was married said he appreciated the ability to attend Mass anywhere in the world and makes a point to engage with parishioners in those situations and learn about their community.
- A woman who converted to Catholicism from Protestantism after meeting her husband described joy of deepening her faith and credits the Catechism. She wishes there was more and deeper devotion to bible study within the Church.

Many respondents expressed strong feelings (anger, resentment, shame, hurt) about the Church’s role in and response to the sexual abuse crisis. This has been a heavy burden on many families and in some instances has led to fractures within family. Respondents also lamented the loss of parishioners due to lack of transparency by the Church to address the sexual abuse crisis and their own shame at the Church’s response. Sample responses include:

- Older white male expressed embarrassment and shame about being Catholic following the sexual abuse crisis.
- One member of the parish Youth group stated they want a more welcoming Church and don’t like that people assume they are anti LGBTQQ because they are Catholic.

4. What dreams, desires, and aspirations for our Church were expressed by participants?

Responses to this question were consistent with the diversity of participants and are grouped by recurring themes from each session.

Tradition and Teaching - Participants who reflected a deep appreciation of the tradition and teachings of the Church expressed a longing for more “traditional” expressions of faith; renewed emphasis on education on the teachings of the Church, particularly to our young; increased participation in the sacraments and; more frequent opportunities for devotional practices such as Adoration.

Inclusivity - Respondents expressed conflicted feelings belonging to a Church that seems at odds with the times and shared a desire to bridge this “divide” by becoming more inclusive. Some advocated for gay marriage, thus including LGBTQ Catholics; and for married priests and women’s ordination to address the priest shortage and recognize women leadership.

Community - Most respondents conveyed a deep desire for community within the parish, appreciation of fellowship events and activities. Many expressed gratitude for pastors that emphasized “welcoming” others to the faith and the parish community, and preached on the gospels and Jesus’ teaching of love and acceptance.

5. What challenges or opportunities do these reflections pose as we journey together?

The faithful are significantly divided about the role of the Church in the modern era. The challenge for the Church is how to “evolve” to serve and be relevant to people in the modern culture, while

remaining faithful to the beliefs, teaching and sacred traditions of our rich history in the Catholic Church, which can be seen as a balm for the modern world.

Respondents also expressed a concern about our children both raising them in the faith in a very secular society and keeping them engaged in adulthood. Many respondents shared personal stories of adult children no longer practicing the faith and this caused them great sorrow.

6. What did participants share related to the question of “what steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?”

Participants shared many ideas to enrich our parish community as we journey together:

- Provide more opportunities for “multigenerational” involvement in their parish community, integrating school and church community,
- Focus on ways to encourage young people to participate and remain in the church,
- Protect and welcome families with young children in church.
- Show gratitude for those who participate in various ministries.
- Reach out to “those who had fallen away” and offer encouragement to return.
- Become a more welcoming to community to all who come, including LGBTQ people.
- Continued emphasis on catechetical education and study of Scripture
- Continued emphasis on traditions and provide opportunities to “make them more accessible and welcoming to people of different backgrounds, ages and lifestyles.”
- Offer more opportunities to connect in small groups and synodal listening.

7. How many listening sessions did you have?

St. Cecilia parish facilitated 19 listening sessions. Three sessions were held virtually (Zoom) and the remaining in-person at St. Cecilia.

8. Did you have different listening sessions for different groups?

One listening session was held with members of the parish Youthies ministry.

9. Did you seek to invite unrecognized voices? If so, how?

A few participants reached out to former parishioners to attend. Some of those parishioners left the Church (some cited the sex abuse scandal as the reason). One session included a former parishioner who was very active in the parish and she gave a very powerful recitation of the hurt she felt the Church has caused particularly as it relates to the sex scandal and the Church’s beliefs regarding homosexuality.

10. What other methods, structures, or approaches did you use in your plan?

St. Cecilia Synod on Synodality listening sessions primarily used the materials provided by the archdiocese and supplemented these with “Guided Meditation”, a “three rounds of sharing format” used by the Diocese of Trenton, NJ.

11. How many total people participated in all of your sessions?

116

12. How many session participants were from each of the following age groups?

- a. 0-13: 0
- b. 14-17: 6
- c. 18-23: 2
- d. 24-30s: 5
- e. 40s-60s: 35
- f. 65 and up: 68

13. How many participants were from each of the following ethnic, race or culture groups?

- a. African American/Black/American
- b. Caucasian/White: 112
- c. Chinese
- d. Filipino
- e. Hispanic/Latino: 1
- f. Japanese
- g. Korean
- h. Native American/American Indian/First Nations/Alaskan Native
- i. Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian
- j. Vietnamese
- k. Multi-Racial: 2
- l. Other/Unknown: 1

14. How many participants were from each of the following gender groups?

- a. Female: 73
- b. Male: 43

15. What other groups were unique or notable in their participation? (describe and list the number of participants.)

The participants in the listening sessions provided a representative sample of active parishioners at St. Cecilia. The synod coordinators at St. Cecilia are extremely grateful for the participation of the Youthies ministry as they provided sincere reflection on their role in the Church today the issues that concern them as they enter young adulthood.