

Catechesis Summary: Forward Together In Christ Consultations

Of the participating members in the discussion groups around the Diocese both a good news story and a challenge was presented in the findings. Of good news – parishioners are looking to their home parishes as places of catechesis. People genuinely desire the opportunity to engage more meaningfully with personal and enriching catechesis offered through their parishes to grow in their relationship with Jesus and their understanding of the Catholic faith. The challenge, however, is that our parishes are in desperate need of resource and effective tools to help meet the catechetical needs of the persons in the pews. A few categories of consistent commentary arose quickly out of my reading. I have, to the best of my ability, worked to summarize them briefly below.

Catechetical Formation for Children and Families:

The need to support families was of number one priority in the conversation regarding catechesis. Families as the domestic Church and parents as primary catechists was of greatest concern for those consulted. The parishes' role in making space for family-led catechesis and supports for parents in their role as educators in faith was very evident. Creative strategies such as babysitting, Vacation Bible Schools programs, parish outreach for parents and children, a wider breadth of options for times/styles/modes of engagement were all suggested as options for practical supports. Particularly, it was made clear that families and parents need to *see themselves* in the life of the parish to feel seen and supported. Families need to be prayed for, resourced to, and given pathways for engagement that *meets them where they are at*.

Sacramental Catechesis:

There is a consistent desire for a more “hands on” approach from the parish in the formation, particularly of children, for Sacraments of Initiation. Participants do not feel that schools nor parishes are doing a sufficient job of preparing children to be welcomed to the Sacraments, leading to inconsistency of practice of the faith. Lots of suggestions were made for particular programs of catechetical study in preparation of the Sacraments, but more importantly, there is recommendation of a regular, welcoming and pastoral presence of parish leadership in the life and regularity of family life to ensure a wholesome relationship of accompaniment in Sacramental years. It was very clear from the responses that there are a great number of places in the Diocese where preparation for Initiatory Sacraments is taking place primarily in the Schools. At least half of all response sheets indicated the need for Sacramental Preparation to “be removed from the school setting, and placed back in the hands of the parish.” This indicates a great need for the Sacramental Guidelines to be reviewed in the Diocese with all pastoral leaders and Catholic Education Partners for clarity of roles and responsibilities. Once again, the role of parents in this time of formation was emphasized as being of utmost importance, and particular tools for parent-supported catechesis were greatly requested.

Catechetical Formation for Adults:

From the notes, it is very clear that adults are thirsty for more when it comes to ongoing faith formation and religious education. Adults are looking to their parishes for enrichment, and need help. Suggested pathways for this catechesis include the following:

- a need for more effective, conscience and relevant homilies
- teaching Masses and engaging catechesis about the liturgy/liturgical seasons
- a “head-on approach” to tackling tough questions, particularly about moral issues
- regular Scripture study
- faith in action – an outward facing catechesis rooted in practice of Catholic Social Teaching

The Cooperation of Catechesis and Evangelization:

Those consulted see the natural relationship between evangelization and catechesis. The participants have spoken of catechesis as being an opportunity to share the *joy of the faith*, but must be done with great enthusiasm and creativity. Evangelization was spoken of as a necessity in our parishes, most especially for the lukewarm, the despondent Catholics. Many spoke of these as the millennial generation, who, although fully initiated, and formed, no longer regularly practice their faith nor engage with parish life. Many suggested that the reason for the crisis is a lack of infrastructure in the Church to support this particular demographic. Parishes are failing to meet the catechetical needs of these young adults who continue to seek meaning and value in life for themselves and their families. Someone stated, “The Church seems inflexible,” and often, although not explicitly stated, others echoed the same sentiment. Many believed with greater creative energy and enthusiasm in catechetical initiative, there is great potential to “welcome home” those who are on the peripheries, those who do not regularly gather around the table.

Intersection with Schools:

It is noted that much of the reporting done on families and catechesis for children made note of discouragement with Catholic Schools. Many wished for a greater pastoral presence from parishes in the schools on a more regular basis. Many also made it clear that they did not feel that Catholic Schools are effectively catechizing children on Catholic beliefs and morals. It is believed, however, that the Schools are a place of great safety and value in the life of the family, and therefore, it is necessary that the parishes and schools work together to create pathways for effective evangelization of families and integration of parish life into the culture of the school community.

Forward Together in Christ
COMMUNICATIONS – RELATIONSHIPS SUMMARY

PARISH/DIOCESE

Too often parishioners are not aware of events and opportunities provided by the diocese. Using both print and social media, there needs to be regular and current communication from the diocese to parishes regarding events taking place in the diocese. Similarly, regular communication from pastors, in person and using print and social media, needs to take place. Diocesan and parish communication needs to include the good news stories as well as information about upcoming events and policy or educational information.

It was acknowledged that, to the extent possible, additional staffing will be required to improve communication both at the diocesan level and the parish level. It was also suggested that a common template for parish websites would be helpful in this regard.

Regular “diocesan” meetings/workshops with pastors, as well as with others engaged in ministry in the Diocese such as parish secretaries, pastoral ministers, deacons, youth minister, liturgical ministers are needed to foster good communication between the diocese and parishes.

Several respondents called for more visible presence of bishop(s) at parishes, in addition to Confirmation, and anniversaries or special occasions.

PASTORS AND PARISHIONERS

Pastoral Councils and parish listening sessions or annual town hall meetings were recommended as means for dialogue between pastors and parishioners. Pastors need to be present, as much as possible, at meetings of parish groups. Priests need to be present and available to speak to parishioners before and after Sunday Masses when the majority of parishioners are present. Above all, pastors must be available to listen to parishioners.

The parishioners need to be aware of the means to contact their pastor or the diocese when problems arise; concerns need to be expressed and subsequently addressed in a timely, honest and respectful manner.

Up-to-date databases in each parish will be necessary moving forward if good and effective communication is to take place.

TRANSPARENCY AND CLARITY

Several respondents called for greater transparency and clarity when messages come from the Diocese or from the Pastor. When decisions or policies are communicated, it is important that the reasons behind them is clearly and honestly communicated.

IN PARISHES

Opportunities for parishioners to get to know one another and to speak freely about their concerns are required to foster good relationships and communication.

INTER-PAROCHIAL COMMUNICATION

The sharing of information between parishes – e.g., social and formational events, and parishes working together and learning of one another’s successes and challenges would strengthen and encourage better relationships within the diocese. The notion of parishes acting independently (in silos) needs to be eliminated.

PARISH-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

Many respondents called for better relationships between parishes and schools. The mutual exchange of information regarding activities, invitations to participate in each other’s activities, building relationships between school staff(s) and clergy and parishioners through face-to-face encounters and the use of print and social media were recommended.

Forward Together in Christ: Summary of Responses for Clergy Care

On the topic of Clergy Care, the responses clearly showed how much that people care for and love their priests. There was much encouraging feedback to show the support that people have for the clergy, and their willingness to assist.

In collating the responses, I have used the 5 categories below ranked in order of most frequently mentioned points:

1) Pastoral Ministry VS Administration

- There was a strong sense in most of the responses that priests get bogged down in the administration of parishes to the detriment of their pastoral ministry. As one response stated, “CEOs of companies aren’t involved in every aspect of their organizations, but delegate much of their responsibilities to those that they trust.” Many priests it seems are not only preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments but are also doing secretarial work and maintaining their buildings. Many of those tasks probably should be delegated to others, either staff or volunteers, so that Father can focus on what he was ordained for - pastoral ministry.
- There was a sense that priests don’t always know how to ask for help, and some priests feel that the responsibility is on them to do everything.
- It was indicated that a priest should not have to micromanage every aspect of a parish’s operations. The suggestion of being more intentional about recruiting volunteers and instituting Pastoral Councils could go a long way in this respect of supporting our clergy and reducing their workload.
- There were multiple suggestions for more ‘professional development’ for priests, especially leadership training which would give them more confidence in leading and building up other leaders in the parish rather than micromanaging everything themselves.
- It was also suggested that if a parishioner has an idea for the parish they should also come with a plan on how to help make it happen. We can’t just dump more stuff on a priest’s shoulders and walk away.
- The role of Deacons was also mentioned several times. Perhaps it is time to give them more responsibility in the parishes. Also repeatedly mentioned was that the Church should seriously explore the possibility of ordaining women as deacons (or priests) in order to lighten the load.

2) Respect for Clergy as ‘Human Beings’

- Many of the responses recognized that perhaps many place their clergy on a pedestal, and we forget they are just regular people.

- We expect a lot of our clergy - and of their time - but sometimes forget their need for rest, downtime, and days off.
- We also overlook a priest's need for normal human interaction to live a balanced life. Priests need healthy relationships in the parish where he can build friendships as 'just a normal guy' and not necessarily as a 'special' person that is always placed on that pedestal.
- Many suggested that the laity should take more initiative in inviting Father over for family dinners, outings, and to just give their priests an outlet to 'be themselves'.
- There were also a lot of suggestions to 'bring food to Father' so he doesn't have to worry about cooking.
- Priests live alone, and often feel isolated. Perhaps there should be an option for priests to live together in one rectory in each region of the Diocese to develop needed fraternity.
- On a parish level, there was also a lot of responses pointing to the importance of planning 'Clergy Appreciation' initiatives and events.
- When it comes to being critical of priests, such criticism should always be done in respect and charity, first taking concerns directly to the priest without speaking behind his back or immediately complaining to the bishop (which should always be a last resort).

3) **Structural Supports**

- A number of responses included calling for more support from the Diocesan level (acknowledging they were not aware of what is currently in place).
- Every priest should be 'checked in on' regularly.
- Vacation time should be mandatory and kept track of. For those that don't take enough vacation, make sure that they do. For those that take too much vacation, they should be reigned in as well.
- Diocese should offer many opportunities for retreats and clergy gatherings.
- Attention should be given to priest support groups.
- There should be a mentorship program for young/international priests.
- There should be a formal 'welcome wagon' committee to assist international priests to help them plug-in to the local community, introducing them to services they will need like doctors, vehicles, government services, etc.
- More care should be offered to retired priests.
- The Diocese should have available a list of 'substitute' priests who are not in parish ministry or retired and are willing to fill in, especially for priests new to the Diocese who don't necessarily know who to ask to help with coverage.

- Priest moves were also brought up many times. It was suggested that priests not be moved so often, and that more consideration should be placed on discerning good fits for priests and parishes.
- Further to this note, many suggested a serious look at closing/consolidating small parishes.

4) Encourage Vocations

- As many of the stresses on our clergy result from a lack of priests available, laity and clergy alike should do whatever we can to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life.
- Our young people need to know that a religious vocation is an option for them, and that it is a beautiful calling.
- We need more ways to help our young people discern God's voice in their lives.

5) Intentional Prayer for our Clergy

- Many responses mentioned the need to pray for our clergy in an intentional way. Priests are our spiritual Fathers, they need our prayers!

HOSPITALITY AND OUTREACH SUMMARY

FORWARD TOGETHER IN CHRIST

The responses are categorized under nine headings: Welcoming; Mission; Events; Programs; Outreach; Clergy; Communication; Issues and finally, Structural concerns.

Items are mentioned, more or less, in order of greatest frequency to least in terms of how often the suggestion came up.

Welcoming – Intentional greeting

At the top of the list was the desire for clergy to greet parishioners before and after mass. Investing in the training of hospitality ministers and having deliberate greeting practises was an important recommendation. The emphasis in training was to have well formed greeters who function as a team with a positive attitude that upholds the dignity of the parishioners especially to those who have been away, disconnected or disenfranchised. The team should also involve the youth. Some valuable practises are: Formally instituting greeters; knowing people's names; thanking people for coming and letting them introduce themselves to each other at the beginning of mass. Acknowledging visitors and new comers; having welcome signs; have a parish survey to get people's feedback. The following was only mentioned once which is good – Secretaries should be welcoming and not gatekeepers. Finally you will like this – allowing children to run in the basement!! 😊

Mission – How hospitality and outreach are defined

Mission was mentioned with the need that hospitality and outreach should be fundamental, named facets of the mission statement. The parish should be well informed of the unique needs of the local community in order to better address them. Awareness that the parish is a place of connection, and it should have an integral approach of hospitality in all of its facets – we are to be welcoming as Christ, in all endeavours. A sense that a Catholic view towards the greater community needs to be ecumenical and sensitive to diversity.

Events – Activities that may be one off or recurring

Food as an instrument of hospitality reigned supreme! By far (mentioned nine times) was coffee and donuts (St. Tim Horton, pray for us!) In general, having food events like potluck, which can especially honour ethnic diversity. The importance of having a social committee for events and an awareness of having a breadth of events that will attract a greater spectrum of the parish – bazaars, movie nights, parish social outings like hockey games and ice skating. Blessings were fairly common – cars, animals, backpacks etc. Keeping churches open; ministry fares to facilitate volunteering; getting to know the priest evening; events that fundraise; vocation talks at the parish and schools. Deliberately appreciating volunteers as an act of hospitality. Of interesting mention was the need to focus on hospitality at special sacramental

and liturgical events – baptisms, weddings and funerals. With that, is the awareness that those events can be opportunities of outreach to visitors and disconnected Catholics.

Programs – ongoing seminar series etc.

Having parish life programs like Renew, Rebuilt etc. Faith development programs like Alpha. Forums for discussion like Theology on Tap. Talks on current themes like Indigenous reconciliation, MAID etc. Of interest was the regard for ‘front line workers’ and having catechesis for catholic nurses, PSW, doctors, prison guards etc.

Outreach – Focus on local outreach with an emphasis on elderly and sacramental follow up

Outreach suggestions were geared mostly towards ministering to the local community. Awareness of having an effective presence in schools, nursing homes, hospitals, prisons etc. Bolstering parish outreach through continued recruitment of volunteers with a dedication to training them with the knowledge of the particular needs of the local community. An awareness of disconnected Catholics and how to engage them i.e. – shut-ins, fallen away, marginalized, disenfranchised. Mention of the fundamental option for the poor – caring for the poor via food pantries etc. Of interest was a theme of seeing the celebration of the sacraments as moments of outreach as the majority of those attending are not regular church goers. Recognizing that follow up after the celebration of sacraments is an important opportunity to develop community. Calling families after baptisms; mailing out birthday cards for the babies’ first year; visiting families at their homes; inviting them to coffee Sundays; giving gifts like Rosaries; possibly offering babysitting. Having a bereavement group that connects with families who are mourning after a funeral. An emphasis was also placed on caring for the elderly. Catering to them with phone calls, mailing the bulletin to them, visits - Communion etc, especially visits by the clergy. Special events for the elderly – dinners, card parties. ‘coffee Wednesdays’ etc. Finally, it was mentioned that parish outreach has to be visible to the local community it serves. Advertising parish outreach lets the locals know what is available from the parish and can foster volunteerism. The publicity and the outreach ministry itself can develop and re-establish trust through service and inclusion. A positive spin on outreach can renew the narrative of Catholic service and inclusion.

Clergy – Clergy being present to the community and cooperation between priests and deacons

A big consensus exists in comments about the need for priests and deacons to be present to parishioners 15 minutes before and after mass. The other theme is ongoing cooperation between priests and deacons. Recommendations for priests and deacons to meet once a month, and making parishioners aware of the roles and responsibilities of priests and deacons. Promoting diaconal ministry. Of mention was greater availability of priests to their parishioners.

Communication – Vehicles of communication

The bishop's Heart to Heart is appreciated and it is recommended that it be made more available to the general public (I guess the diocesan website is not enough?) – i.e. get people on a distribution list where it is sent directly to them weekly. The need for good PR – maintaining a good face to the public by manifesting the good actions of the parish. The 'Coming Home for Christmas' campaign is appreciated.

Issues - Sensitivities

There needs to be sensitivities towards mixed marriage couples (I suspect they mean irregular marriages) and towards people who don't feel welcome at church. Awareness of economic realities and differences – some people may be ashamed to join with the community. A general consensus that more volunteers are needed and that acknowledging and appreciating them is necessary. It was mentioned (once each) that the chancery office is not accessible enough and that the Christ the King Cathedral needs to be more open with longer visiting hours.

Structural Concerns – Stuff to help with hospitality and outreach

Places for people in wheel chairs in the general seating plan of the church. Crying rooms for young families with toddlers. Children's liturgy is helpful for both children and their parents. Live streaming of liturgies. Having welcome areas in the church where people can gather and having access to shelving and tables for brochures and information. Books and items for children – laminated books and colouring books etc. Investing both resources and time in maintaining modern technology – i.e. social media etc. Finally, mention was made that the chancery could have a dedicated office or more resources specifically for hospitality and outreach.

Forward Together in Christ Summary Report

How do we Engage Laity in the Ministry, Mission and Maintenance of the Parish?

It was evident while reading the responses that those who engaged in the process were very much interested in creating parishes that were active, dynamic and connected. The responses were amazingly similar in their perspective and content and in what the respondents felt needed to be done to engage laity in a more profound way in parishes. They were passionate about the need for this to occur.

The dominant message by most groups was that people wanted to be known and acknowledged as part of the parish community. The feeling that more people would engage in the parish if they felt they belonged was quite strong and a variety of ways to make that happen were recommended.

The responses have been broken down into a few major categories with an overview of the ideas expressed in the consultation listed under each category.

1. Parishioners

This topic was an important area covered in the responses.

Participants seemed passionate that laity needed to feel as though they belonged and needed to be invited to engage. The major highlights were as follows:

- Get to know people as individuals (especially pastors).
- Take the time to learn something about the individual person's story (often mentioned pastors should do this, but also laity).
- Find ways to make people feel they belong –have blessings for birthdays, anniversaries; anything to help make connections.
- Engage in a variety of social events on a regular basis in the parish; the type of event is not as important as ensuring something happens often to help people feel a sense of belonging. Coffee Sundays were mentioned numerous time as needed.
- Help people feel like they are part of a parish family and that they belong as member.
- Find ways to reach out to parish members who cannot come to Mass due to age, illness, or other problem.
- Produce bulletins in hard copy as well as on line and some suggested have one designed for children as well.
- The role of the laity should be defined and then have the cooperation of the priest to implement.
- Purposefully welcome new families by having someone sit and meet with them, write down their gifts and talents and how they might help the parish; provide a welcome package to new parishioners with parish information.

2. Parishioner Engagement

This topic was consistently the dominant area within the responses. People felt very strongly that we do not engage people well and because of this many are prevented from being connected to the parish community and thus to their faith. There were many overlaps from the groups on suggestions on how to do this:

- Find out, by survey or some other method, what the “gifts and talents” of each parishioner actually are and then ask them to use those in the parish for specific tasks.
- Ensure that it is not always the same people asked to offer support/volunteer at the parish.
- Personal asks work best for bringing people onside to volunteer, take on a task, or engage in some manner within the parish. The majority felt the priest should ask directly, but should know that the ask fits the qualities the person is capable of fulfilling. (Many also suggested laypersons could do some of the personal asks.)
- Introduce ministry leaders at Masses so people know who they are.
- Have a yearly or bi-annual ministry Sunday and display all ministries of the parish; invite people to find out more and consider joining.

3. Parish Councils

While there was some feedback on parish councils, it did not appear to be as pressing a problem for the respondents. Here are some of their thoughts:

- Parish Councils should consist of a variety of committees to engage more parishioners.
- The Council should regularly report to the parish on their activities.
- Ensure that the Council does not become a closed group who stays in their roles forever and does not seek to engage others.
- Do not let Councils be the exclusive voice about what goes on in the parish; other input should be sought.

4. Parish Ministries

Providing a wide variety of ministries was an important aspect of the feedback. For the most part, it would be safe to say that people would like parishes that offer “everything” as they feel it would make the parish more vibrant. Many ministries were mentioned, these most often:

- Youth ministry – which included engaging youth at every level of ministry, especially liturgical ministries, and on parish council and other groups within the parish.
- Family ministry, where families were welcomed, supported with specific events, especially assisting and educating parents is necessary, which will help to keep them engaged. Ask families to take on specific tasks as a family. Without the faith being passed on, generations within a family will be impacted.
- Small faith groups, or study groups to engage more people and have them really connect with each other.

- Children’s Liturgy to help engage children, but also to allow parents to feel more relaxed during Mass and to focus on the Gospel and homily. Expand to have ways to invite children to participate at other times and in ways that include them in the life of the parish.
- Several mentioned a ministry whose purpose would be to connect the parish and school in a variety of ways, so the school and parish support each other.
- Maintain records of maintenance so new priests to parish know what has been done.

5. Priests

There were high expectations about what the priests could do to make the parish more vibrant and to draw people into the parish community. Some highlights are:

- Be visible before and after Mass so people get to know them and they get to know their people.
- Move from a corporate mentality of running parishes to a more familiar one.
- Invite people to engage repeatedly from the pulpit and let them know there is support for them from the pastor.
- Engage laity in the Mass as much as possible.
- Teach about the Mass so people understand its importance throughout.
- Engage different cultures within the parish to be more inclusive.
- Do not become exclusive with those you ask for support within the parish, or those with whom you engage with at the parish.

6. Evangelization

There were several suggestions as to ways we can reach out and evangelize beyond the ministries listed above:

- Make the sacraments more engaging and include families.
- Consider public evangelization using billboards, social media and other sources of media to invite all, including those who are not parish members.
- Clarify what mission means and how to fulfill that role.
- Teach what should differentiate us as Catholics from the others in the community/world.
- Engage with events at the Deanery level to allow connections between other parishes and their members.
- Consider a conference within each deanery on a regular basis to allow input from parishioners and to help evangelize.

For the most part the responses were mostly about forming relationships within the parish. The respondents felt, as one group put it, that we need to become “fishers of people” once again. Central to success is the pastor, who they admit cannot do it all, but is the catalyst for implementation of all the ideas. Overall, they felt we could build the Church by building community - priests need to know their sheep and let their sheep know them.

Forward Together in Christ

LITURGY

LITURGICAL CATECHESIS

The primary underlying theme from submissions highlighted liturgical catechesis as the most prominent recurring point. Many other topics seem to emanate from it that lead to a desire for a more reverent celebration of the Mass. There is an overwhelming need for extensive liturgical catechesis that includes explaining the Mass (such as teaching Masses) and the meaning of its parts, as well as many other areas of liturgy. People want to know "what" is happening and "why" in the liturgy. Children's liturgies should help children understand the Mass and ensure that the liturgy is Christ-centred.

HOMILIES

Many respondents addressed the topic of homilies. Parishioners want well-prepared, concise (less than 10 minutes) homilies that are clear, simple, intentional, engaging, and relevant to their daily lives. There was a hope that homilists would just not read a homily. Homilies should not be a lecture but aim to help parishioners understand the context of the readings and their practical application in today's world. Some homilies should be targeted towards the youth, and homilies don't need to be theology lessons.

MUSIC

Parishioners want good music ministry. Most respondents prefer familiar hymns with variety and without distractions during the Mass. There were many requests for common hymn books that the assembly knows. While some people have shown interest in Latin hymns, Mass Parts, and Gregorian chant, it was found that most people are not familiar with Latin and do not participate in Latin Mass parts and hymns. The respondents want to learn new hymns and practice before Mass. Announcing hymns before singing them and encouraging singing in different ways will also make the liturgy more participatory. Good cantors enhance the liturgy. Music should be congregational and not performative.

WORSHIP AIDS/SCREENS

There is a need for resources (worship aids such as missal, cards, and screens) to help guide parishioners to actively participate during the liturgy. Many people are unfamiliar with the prayers, may not know where they are in the liturgy, or may struggle to hear or understand the Presider. Screens are helpful to some but distracting to others; however, they offer an alternative way to assist people in better participating in the liturgy. Live streaming is also essential for parishioners who cannot attend Sunday Mass in person. Live streaming should not replace the experience of participating in Mass with the community in person.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE LITURGY

Teach parishioners to participate and make them part of the liturgy. Ministers require formation. Increase the number of ministers, including young, people. Increase access to the sacraments, presumably referring to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Involve children in the liturgy as much as possible.

ARS CELEBRANDI

Respondents regularly spoke about wanting well-celebrated liturgies. Parishioners expect well-prepared and celebrated liturgies, including Priests and ministers, to worship reverently. The worship space should be uncluttered and focused on the priest and altar. There were several requests to increase the use of sacramentals (e.g. incense) in Mass. Use Children's Liturgies of the Word to help children celebrate the liturgy. Encourage reverence within the church as opposed to providing entertainment.

MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT

Develop the skills of ministers and use mentors to help ministers develop confidence and address opportunities for improvement. Increase the number of ministers and focus on ministerial development. Use scheduling tools and provide resources to ministers who need them (e.g. Lector workbooks.) Some responses suggested intentionally improving the hospitality ministry/welcoming to build community.

MASS TIMES/DEVOTIONS

The tone of this theme is that minimizing worship decreases participation, and there were many requests to increase the opportunity for churches to be available for prayer and liturgies—staggered mass times in communities with multiple parishes (neighbouring parishes to work together). Encourage and make more frequent Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and other liturgies available.

PRIEST'S PIETY/PASTORAL CARE

Parishioners recognize the difference between priests who take an active interest in the parish (externally focused) and those who do not (internally focused). Priests should not change the Mass and want consistency in celebration. Find positive approaches as opposed to criticism when difficult subjects arise. Avoid clericalism—open communication between the pastor and the laity. Solicit input from the parish.

Forward Together in Christ

Summary of Responses: Schools

Clergy & Parish Relationship with Schools:

- Consistent comments from almost every group that the priests need to be more present and active in schools, both elementary and secondary streams.
- Relationships between priests and principals is important and too often there is a poor relationship. Priests are sometimes not welcomed in schools and/or priests are not willing to be involved and do not establish or nourish the relationship.
- School masses are important and too often they are held in gyms with little exposure to the parish.
- School masses: not enough of them, they lack reverence, students do not how to respond. Masses in gyms lack reverence and students are “herded in”.
- Frequent suggestion that priests should conduct teaching masses annually to educate students and staff on the Mass.
- Common request for Youth Ministers to be in schools as a liaison and to bring a faith presence to schools. Youth Ministers could assist with religion education and play a bigger role in liturgies and celebrations. Not enough Youth Ministers in the diocese actively working in this role. This position is regarded as one that could bridge some of the gaps between the parish and the schools in a variety of ways.
- The Bishops, diocese and priests need to have presence at school board meetings to defend the faith with regard to policies and should influence boards to hold true to the teachings of the faith in their decision making.
- Parishes and priests to play a greater role in sacramental preparation; too much is left to teachers who are often not qualified (see below).
- Parishes need to get creative to attract and bring students to the church: more altar servers, school choirs sing at masses/funerals, hold more events that appeal to young families. Many comments that mass needs to be more “fun” and “engaging” to draw children and families in.

Teachers: Qualifications and Accountability:

- Consistent comments that teachers are not living the faith. Pastoral references are given out too easily and Catholic teachers are not vetted properly. Catholic teachers no longer reflect or role model the faith to the students. Teachers, board staff and trustees are not held accountable to fulfill the obligations of the faith.

- Many teachers are incapable of teaching the religion curriculum because they do not practice the faith and are not held accountable to be a practicing Catholic to work within a Catholic board. Many of them have limited knowledge of the faith.
- Frequent suggestions that religion should be taught by qualified staff with theology degrees, rather than the subject be part of the overall curriculum (elementary level). For example, schools have French teachers and teachers of the Arts who specialize, know the subject matter and are capable of teaching it well. This approach should be applied to religion. Catholic schools put too little emphasis on teaching religion effectively and consistently.
- At the secondary level, religion classes are too often taught by whoever can fill in, i.e. gym teachers or math teachers. Minimal emphasis is put on religion as a teachable subject therefore it is taught poorly. Seems like an afterthought. Some comments that religion teachers should have theology degrees or clergy be brought in to teach that subject.
- In addition, many comments that the religion curriculum is too broad and watered down and does not focus enough on the history of the faith, the saints, the teachings, the obligations of the baptized.

Privatization of Catholic Schools & Home Schooling:

- Some references to Catholic schools (both elementary and secondary) to be parochial with more influence and control coming from the diocese and local parishes.
- Government funding is leading Catholic schools to be too secular, and they are losing their Catholic identity.
- Non-Catholic parents seeking Catholic education and participate in RCIA yet make little commitment to the faith.
- Greater support for home schooling from the diocese and parish is needed.

Hot Topic Issues:

- Some references to the pride flag to be removed from schools; some comments that it has no place in Catholic schools and questions were raised about the Bishop's role in it being approved and supported at the board level.

Note:

There were minimal references made to parents and their role in faith education. Only a few comments were made regarding the importance of the parish/home/school triad.

The bulk of the responses highlighted the needs for priests to do more for schools and for teachers to be better qualified and practicing the faith.