

# “The Church is Convoked in Synod.” (2021-2023)

## **HOLY CANADIAN MARTYRS PARISH OTTAWA, ONTARIO CANADA**

### Summary Report to the Parish “Synod on Synodality”

#### *Introduction*

From the beginning of his service as the Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis has repeatedly mentioned “synodality.” It continues to be one of his favorite themes. “Synod” (σύννοδος), the root of “synodality,” comes from two Greek words: σύν (with) and ὁδός (path, road, way). The term recalls that persons are journeying together, accompanying each other as they travel. For Christians, this accompanying journey is through this world to the eternal Kingdom of God (that is already realized, however imperfectly, during the earthly journey itself).

Pope Francis has engaged the entire Catholic Church in a synod (2021-2023) which involves many levels of discernment, discussion, and dialogue. The synodal process started in late 2021 within each parish community when parishioners were asked to share their experiences of our Church and their hopes for its future. Now, other levels in the synodal process are underway within nations and continents. All this synodal process will culminate in October 2023 with a gathering of Pope Francis with the “Synod of Bishops” in Rome.

Holy Canadian Martyrs Parish has taken part fully and enthusiastically in the synodal process at the “grass roots” level of our parish. This summary reports our activities in the synodal process from January-April 2022. But, more importantly, it conveys the reflections of parishioners shared openly and respectfully within the “sharing circles.”

The reflections contained herein are not intended to present a consensus of thought or a majority opinion, as may be seen in various democratic or governmental structures. Rather, every attempt has been made to convey what has been shared by individuals – their thoughts, opinions, sentiments, dreams, angers, ambitions, hopes – for the Church. As a rule, every comment in this summary report was repeated by more than one participant in this synodal process.

At a weekday Mass during the Easter Season, our pastor, Tim Coonen, omi, reflected on the movement of the Holy Spirit in the early Church, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, the first reading at Mass that day. He noted that no one, no group, can “control” the movement of the Holy Spirit. He explained that, oftentimes, the will of God is conveyed by the inspiration of a frightened individual or a timid group that is impelled to share a vision for the Church. We trust that the same Spirit remains active in our Church, our parish, our homes, our hearts.

As our parish continues to discern the guidance of the Spirit in our midst here and now, may the conversations and sharing of the parish synodal process inspire us and prompt us to listen attentively to the God who daily gives us new life and new enthusiasm. Amen.

Holy Canadian Martyrs Parish  
Synodality Committee

### *The Synodality Process in the Parish*

- In January 2022, Holy Canadian Martyrs Parish formed a Synodality Committee with 7 members; 2 members attended diocesan training.
- The Synodality Committee arranged 4 Zoom lectures on synodality presented by Professor Cathy Clifford and Professor John Renken, both from Saint Paul University. Each lecture was followed by an active Q&A period. All presentations were well attended and recorded for distribution.
- Frequent explanations of the Synod process were provided in parish homilies and bulletin inserts.
- The Synodality Committee trained 18 facilitators/note takers who then conducted 26 sharing circles in the months of February-March 2022. Sessions were held in person at Canadian Martyrs Church and on Zoom.
- Total number of participants was 104, including:
  - 12 from our youth group
  - 4 from an ecumenical group
  - 12 from St. Rene Goupil Deaf Community.
- The majority of participants were adult parishioners active in our parish as well as their inactive families and friends: single people, parents, and seniors. A few other persons presented their comments in writing but were unable to attend a sharing circle.
- Participants in each sharing circle were invited to offer personal reflections on the following 3 questions:
  - 1. How is our journey as Church going?
  - 2. How can we “do Church” better?
  - 3. What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church?
- The following compilation represents a “summary” of the responses of the participants in the 26 sharing circles and a few others who presented written reflections to the Synodality Committee. Every attempt is made to be objective and accurate in conveying the responses in this compilation.

### *Question 1: How is our journey as Church going?*

- Common themes about the journey of the universal Church
  - Members of the laity have been afraid of speaking up; some fear that speaking even in this synodal process is a futile exercise because voices will be ignored, reports will be “watered down.”
  - There are concerns about: clericalism; patriarchy; *Humanae vitae*; inclusiveness; lack of a welcoming spirit; judgmental attitudes; discrimination, etc.

- We note discontent and disagreement with the Church's judgements of 2SLGBTQQA+ individuals;<sup>1</sup> limitations placed upon women; upon divorced or separated Catholics; judgements of other religions or spiritualities (i.e., Indigenous)
  - We sense shame over clerical abuse, residential schools, misogyny.
  - There is a desire for married priests and ordained women.
  - Ecumenical relationships need to be promoted and expanded into practical services.
  - The Church needs to revamp the marriage nullity process.
  - We continue to embrace Vatican II
  - We must work toward truth, justice, and reconciliation with Indigenous people.
  - We are to embrace LGBTQ+ individuals.
  - We should welcome and respect non-Catholics, other spiritualities, other cultures.
- Common themes about the journey in our parish
    - We are a welcoming parish.
    - We are inclusive.
    - We are prayerful.
    - We celebrate Vatican II.
    - We are connected to the Spirit.
    - We are a life-giving community.
    - We warmly welcome the presence of the St. Rene Goupil Deaf Community.
    - We have good liturgies: preaching, music, greeters, involvement in ministries.

### ***Question 2: How can we “do Church” better?***

- We must give women a greater and real role in leadership. They must be recognized for their contributions and gifts.
- We must address patriarchy and “top-down” structures.
- We must eliminate any prejudice against LGBTQ+ community.
- We must embrace Indigenous persons in the community; make amends for the past; offer reparations for residential schools.
- We must change the role of priest. Priests must reflect a more pastoral style and less clericalism. Authority needs to be exercised in a synodal fashion, shared broadly with others. We should give performance evaluations to church leaders. We would welcome married priests and women priests.
- We must address accountability within the sexual abuse crisis.
- We must be aware that many persons feel “unwelcome” in the Church. We must be more humble, open and welcoming to all: the marginalized, mentally ill, LGBTQ+, other churches, Indigenous community, spouses of Catholics, youth, non-Catholics.
- We must maintain our identity and traditions while adapting to our society's needs.
- We must place more time, talent, and treasure on proclaiming/living the Gospel in new cultures and societies, and place less emphasis on maintaining structures (including

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<sup>1</sup> 2-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, + (= hereafter LGBTQ+).

physical and social structures) which are no longer effective to preach the Gospel today in community. Our Gospel-witness must be “practical” – outreach to the lonely, the marginal, the needy, the immigrants, etc.

- We must focus less on the Church as a “religious institution,” and more on it as a spiritual communion of disciples.
- We must make available various devotions to enhance spiritual growth: e.g., the rosary, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, study of the Bible and a return to its radical challenges, lives of the Saints, other kinds of prayer.
- We must adapt to technological changes and weave into our religious practice new insights from science.
- We must broaden our faith formation to adapt to the times in practical ways, including modern life and worship.
- We must be aware that many persons feel “unwelcome” in the Church.
- We must focus on care for our world, our environment and its sustainability.
- We must learn from the wisdom of the Indigenous.
- We must re-evaluate the role of the Church in politics.
- We must enhance the Church with a passion for justice that leads to concrete action, near and far.
- We must broaden our commitment to effective and practical ministry to the Deaf community:
  - to provide ministers to/in the Deaf Community (knowledge of American Sign Language and Deaf culture)
  - to ensure a liturgical environment and adaptations (seating, lighting, etc.)
  - to increase awareness within the parish of the presence of the St. Rene Goupil Community.

### ***Question 3: What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church?***

- We are called to be a synodal Church. This is essential.
- We are inspired with high expectations.
- We should encourage young people and leaders (clergy) who need to listen without prejudice and judgment:
  - to listen to the Spirit
  - to listen to one another, our feelings and our needs: women, laity, youth, the Deaf community, immigrants, homeless, addicted, marginalized, Indigenous, LGBTQ+.
- It is most important that we love each other in obvious and tangible ways.
- We are anointed to emphasize our dignity and our destiny as “new creations in Christ,” and to focus less on our sinfulness and brokenness.
- We are moved to “practical” ecumenism/inter-faith adventures in the community and beyond – not to the exclusion of ongoing discernment on theological issues and past factors which have caused division
- We are to heed the call to be an inclusive and non-judgmental community of missionary disciples. This is as important as any knowledge of theology.
- We are invited to build community:

- to connect with other denominations
  - to support projects to meet local community needs
- We are prompted to welcome all people without judgment. This includes embracing those returning to the faith.
- We are to understand in concrete ways the fundamental dignity and equality of women. They are to be respected. They should be welcomed into leadership roles with full participation.
- We are challenged to be accountable by acknowledging past wrongs, to be open and not secret:
  - to take responsibility for sexual and other residential school abuses
  - to hear from those hurt.
- We are impelled to heal the hurt caused by clericalism in all its manifestations of patriarchal entitlement.
  - Clericalism is the enemy of synodality.
  - In the Church, no one is “set above” others with entitlements that drive others away by silencing them, diminishing them, discouraging them, “cancelling” them.
- We are moved to revisit qualifications for ordination: married, LGBTQ+, women.
  - We are called to offer formation for the complexities of today’s world to seminarians and other church leaders.
  - We are also called to offer ongoing formation to the ordained and to current church leaders.
  - All formation must include formation in the “art” of synodality, Vatican II challenges and vision, the evil of clericalism, the understanding of the Church as a community of missionary disciples who are welcome all persons without judgment and discrimination.
- We trust that the Holy Spirit guides us. The Spirit is our hope and our help. The Spirit brings joy and togetherness to a community. The Spirit urges us to help our community. The Spirit is in all of us – uniting us to hear what the Spirit speaks to all the Church. Without the Spirit, we wither and die.

### **Conclusion**

The response to the synodal process of Pope Francis by our parishioners has been enthusiastic and exemplary. It reveals an eagerness to enhance the mission of the Church that we love. While we continue the world-wide synodal process 2021-2023, our parish is invited to discern the findings of this summary report as we endeavor to weave its goodness into practical aspects of our parish life as a community of missionary disciples.

**“Whoever has ears ought to hear  
what the Spirit says to the Churches.”**

Revelation 3:22 *NAB*