

Parish Summary Report



St. John Vianney

Saginaw

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Executive Summary

Parish Process

We began by sending materials to each home to educate and encourage members to pray for the Synod. We made announcements at the end of Mass and had a bulletin board with information and a place to sign up to participate. Our listening sessions were held immediately after Mass one weekend, and others a blend of evening and daytime. Special sessions were held for leaders and staff, as well as one for Faith Formation families and youth.

Positive insights

Overall, participants found St. John Vianney a very welcoming parish. This parish feels like family to most. Members enjoy the educational offerings such as The Chosen and Alpha. Bible studies are enjoyed as well, and participants would like to see more bible studies as well as events outside of Advent and Lenten seasons.

Participants were pleased with our sacramental ministers' homilies and their friendliness. Another positive brought up frequently is the music ministry. In addition to wonderful music at Mass (with a talented choir and musicians), they enjoy the Taizé prayer, JAM concerts, and concerts with guest musicians (like Sarah Hart).

The parish is active in outreach, with a different outreach every 1-2 months. Participants also enjoy the Thanksgiving baskets, Mitten Tree and Christmas giving to needy families.

Main challenges

We used to be a vibrant young parish with many children and youth. Where did they go, and how can we bring them back? This concern was echoed by many at the listening sessions. In addition, we seem to have many members that have left – either to other parishes or because of COVID-19. The participants would like to bring people back.

Changes that could be made

There are many items listed as potential changes. We will need to take baby steps at first. We held a call campaign to all parishioners at the start of COVID-19 that was greatly appreciated. It is suggested that we do that again to invite people back or find out how we can meet their needs.

People miss seeing the youth involved at church. We could have them bring up their offertory gift and take part in bringing up the gifts prior to communion. To draw the youth back, we may need to start with social activities that welcomes those families and helps them build a tie to the church.

The key is to make changes so that our parishioners see that their voice was heard, and their suggestions were implemented.

Parish Process Overview

St. John Vianney began the promotion and explanation of the Synod process with a parish mailing approximately 1 ½ months prior to the listening sessions. The mailing included the Thematic and Fundamental questions with an explanation and request to prayerfully pray for the Synod.

Announcements after mass, and brief introductions by the parish coordinator were also used to educate the parishioners on the process. The Synod prayer was prayed together at Mass times.

We held a total of six listening sessions. All were planned to be in person, with one held using Zoom due to inclement weather. They were a mixture of daytime and evening. We held sessions after our Saturday, 5 pm Mass and our Sunday, 10:00 am Mass. Pizza and refreshments were provided. The participants in the sessions were divided into small groups of 5-7 people.

The parish leader sessions (Parish council, finance, other committee leaders, staff, and priests) were held twice to accommodate all leaders. Leaders also participated in other sessions as facilitators. Additional facilitator volunteers were also included in the sessions.

One session was held during the children's faith formation classes to accommodate parents/grandparents. Two of the families were ill, and those families included minority families and youth that were going to participate in the session.

A total of 144 parishioners participated in the sessions. They were typically active parishioners. There was representation of minorities including LGBTQ parish members.

The standard questions for the sessions were used without modification. Each participant received a participant book with space for notetaking and an evaluation.

Challenges were encountered as we urged people to participate. The Thematic and Fundamental question sheets were not understood by many, and they found it confusing. Those who attended felt the initial questions sent really seemed to be unrelated to the questions reviewed in the listening sessions. We noted that having food and refreshments was an enticement.

One comment we heard often is that there was not enough time in each round. We could have planned a little more time and would if we held this type of session again.

We would not have overloaded the parishioners with so many Thematic questions, which served to both confuse them and, in some cases, made them feel they could not participate because they had no idea what was truly needed.

The most significant discernment findings of our listening sessions include:

- Bring back the parishioners that have left, particularly those who are not attending church at all. Reaching out to those who left due to the priest scandal and cover-up and healing those wounds is crucial
- Focus on young people – they are the future of the Church
- The priests and leaders make a big difference in the parish. Must have enthusiasm and engaged leaders to keep the parishioners engaged
- Must be accepting of all people: single, married, divorced, minority race, LGBTQ. Understand we are all different, but all are children of God and thus deserve our respect and acceptance.

Discussion on what we need to continue to do produced many things that were overwhelmingly positive, with some that were requested to return now that we are reaching post-COVID-19 restrictions.

- Continue educational activities outside of Mass: The Chosen videos with discussion brought life to the study of Christ. Alpha, bible study, book club and other events help with our spiritual growth. Parish picnic, rummage sale, Trunk or Treat, Christmas caroling, coffee and donuts were mentioned to bring in non-members and some stayed!
- Social activities were discussed to get to know one another and bring family and friends into our church environment. This increased people's feeling of acceptance: Potlucks, soup suppers, Theology on Tap, Game night, card parties

- Outreach activities: Monthly Christian Outreach, Mitten Tree, Christmas Giving Tree, Thanksgiving baskets, Crop Walk.
- Calling people weekly when we don't see people at church or for the elderly and homebound
- Sermons are very good from both priests-thoughtful and meaningful. I like Fr. Bert's guitar
 - Enjoy when the priest explains the readings in the homily and connects it to our lives.
- Service to nursing homes makes them feel better and make us feel better too.

When discussing what would make our parish better the conversation often turned toward making the parish more accessible and meeting the needs of members

- More mass times: two on Sunday morning or at least later in the morning.
 - Daily mass is an obstacle because we don't have it.
- Some people enjoy traditional church music. Do a service with only that and publicize.
- Summarize the scripture readings for the day right before they are read
- Need year-round educational events. More Bible studies.
- More education on the parts of the Mass, why we do them; on the Eucharist so people have a deeper understanding of the true presence of Jesus; Education on confession. Don't understand the sacrament. Best if taught by priest or deacon.
- Outreach to elderly, college students, divorced/separated and/or single parents, and other denominations to allow more interaction between churches
- Would like participation in the Blood of Christ again. Can we dip the Body of Christ into the cup?
- More communal penance services. Like the examination of conscience. General absolution.

Discussion around the points of tension or disagreement had common threads with nearly all groups.

- Too many rules or mandates. Pushes people away, especially young people
 - Strict rules such as priest said "we baptize" instead of prescribed language made the baptism invalid. Those types of things push people away.
 - Some rules at our church are manmade, not in the catechism or Catholic requirement.
 - Other Catholic churches follow different rules – people move to the parish that fits them
- Don't have much faith in the 'institutional church' (Vatican) but do in people
- Annulment is not understood. Divorced people are treated differently.
 - Divorced people feel like outsiders and not as welcomed
- The priest scandal caused lack of trust. The cover-up by church leaders demonstrated the church operated as a big corporate entity and not as the people of God. Felt betrayed by my church.
- Asked to evangelize but had bad experience with that. What is best way? Isn't it just about how you love and behave?

The wound of the priest abuse was felt by all. Yet others were even more personal, some from years past prior to current ministry team.

- Refusal to do funeral for a family member
- Past childhood experience with a priest made me very fearful of priests.
- Felt like an outcast when I got divorced. Was shunned
- When their father died parish did not reach out, even though priest during that time knew my father. No one cared.
- When ideas shared with leaders are shut down without consideration
- Kids who went to public school were treated differently during first communion than those who went to Catholic school

- Comment made about what to wear to Mass and that wearing jeans was frowned upon. That drove me away for a while. God accepts me as I am.

One thing that was unexpected was a comment that there is a person who attends our church regularly but is not Catholic. They wondered if that person could participate on committees.

Our group discussion regarding minority opinions:

- Divorce issues: some believe they cannot receive Communion if a divorced single
- LGBTQ – why do we deny communion?
- Church is still a ‘good ole boys’ network’. Don’t involve women as much as they could.
- Share our faith with other Catholic Churches of a different ethnic background.
- The voices that are not being heard are the HS graduates and before marriage
- People who have had abortions (even man who consented to one) feel like they are not truly welcomed. Need help to heal.

The participants gave thought to where the Church needs healing and conversion in its spiritual life, culture, attitudes, structures, pastoral practices, relationships, and missionary outreach

- Corruption in the church: abuse of children and other sexual abuse, misconduct of priests with no repercussions. The members need to understand why, and all need to heal from the scandal.
- Must change rules about ministers of the church: Married priests, women as priests and deacons, Lay Men and Women able to give homily, especially if trained to do so.
 - Can deacons provide the Sacrament of the sick? Are Religious able to do the Sacrament of the sick and preach?
- Mary, Mother of God, is honored for her role in the church. Women need that same honor today as church leaders. St. Agatha of Sicily was a deaconess of the Church. bring that role back.
- Annulment needs to be better understood and simpler to do.
- Bring back communal penance services with general absolution to increase availability of the sacrament to members
- SJV is very accepting of minorities, but as a church we are not, particularly LGBTQ, divorced, others who feel they don’t fit in.
- We do a blessing for mothers, fathers and married. Need to do a blessing for single people.

Dreams, desires, and aspirations for the Church included those for our parish and the Church as a whole

- Our relationship with God is much more than our relationship with people. Must also include relationship with all of God’s creation (animals, earth, etc.)
- Bring back basics of prayer of the saints, rosary, novenas devotions, chaplet of Divine Mercy and others.

Overall participants were delighted with the sessions. Some would like them to be held annually, so that we can improve our church. Some questioned how this information will be used and will the Diocese and the Vatican make changes. The big question: Will we see change?

The following are suggestions for our parish because of the Synod listening sessions. Some could be accomplished in short order; others would take time. We will need to work with our committees to coordinate changes.

- Many suggestions for children and youth are in Appendix 2. Bringing their donation to the front
- Many suggestions are listed in Appendix 3. Returning to pre-COVID activities is desired.

Appendix 1 – Suggestions for the Saginaw Diocese

Participants wished to share some thoughts with Diocesan leaders:

- Coordinate Mass times with other parishes so that they are not all at the same time
- Diocesan web site designed to easily find a mass in your area at the time you wish
- Have daily mass offered in each close geographical area and parishes cooperate to make it available.
- Parishes should share educational offerings. Seems like each parish is a clique.
- Diocesan web site should publish parish educational offerings if parishes desire to share with others.
- Bishop should visit parishes on a regular basis, not just an online presence.
- Lay minister council to work with the bishop on issues with priests, parishes, etc.
- Create a Diocesan Youth Group in various geographic areas
- Faith formation for children, youth and adults should be shared between parishes. Children would get more out of a larger group.
- Bishop Ken did “Everything you always wanted to know about the Catholic Church but were afraid to ask.” It would be nice to have that again. Open it up to anyone.

Appendix 2 – Children and Youth Suggestions

Participants had many thoughts and ideas on how to engage children and youth. It begins with engaging their parents. To do that we need to make it attractive to the children and young people as well.

- Including children in the Mass and activities is important for them to grow in their love and understanding of the Church. Let them serve as hospitality, bring up the gifts, put their donation in the basket up front, have a children’s homily (or dismissal for a special session that includes all children who are guests)
- Include social gatherings aimed at young people (Middle and High School, college age, young families, or post-college singles).
- Have social events for children and their families as well as teens. Bonfires, game night, movie night, etc.
- Offer Mass Sunday evening for those parents/children who have sports or other events during the day on Saturday and Sunday.
- A Junior parish council for youth, or at least youth members of parish council and committees
- Actively reach out to youth and learn what they are searching for and how can we provide it
- Youth gets bored! Need to engage them in church. They leave and go to a non-denominational that is more exciting
- Can we use an enclosed fire pit and have youth and young adult gatherings?
- Theology on Tap for the younger generation
- Videos like The Chosen and Alpha to teach children and youth about Jesus.
- Children’s bulletin to give them as they come in. Include education, events, etc.

Appendix 3 – Potential Changes for St. John Vianney

- Display a photo of the deceased (and their family if possible) at Mass so we can know who it is and pray for them and reach out if possible
- When there is a special occasion (marriage, anniversary, new baby, or note-worthy event) have a picture before Mass.

- Have the birthdays and anniversaries for the upcoming week displayed on the screen before mass
 - Previous priest used to ask people to raise their hands if they had a birthday, then anniversary, then asked if there was anything someone wanted to share with their parish family
- Bring back funeral lunches. Such an important ministry to our parish members.
- Have section or insert in the bulletin that explains the readings and give bulletin prior to Mass
 - Summarize each reading before it is read in Mass
- Can the Trivia question in the bulletin be read out loud? And the answer from last week provided the next week? That is good education.
- Bring back Theology on Tap.
- Provide a guide at weddings and funerals so that people can follow along with Mass.
- Set up sister parishes so that we can share resources and do things together.
 - Can we open a satellite church in an urban area?
- Is it possible to have sessions for those who are angry or disgruntled with the Church to come in and open up about their hurt?
- Send cards and gift packages to college students and military
- Have SJV cards available that parishioners can use to send to people not attending or that they wish to invite to attend. Include Mass times and services offered.
- A book available in the Gathering area with the pictures of all parishioners and their names as a resource – this is more than a parish directory; each member can bring in their own picture to include
- Have a service for people that have lost children
- Live streaming needs to continue. Can we live stream classes and bible study as well?
- When invited by pastor or leader to minister (lector, Eucharistic minister or other) I followed through. Make these invitations more personal and less of an announcement.
- Missals available to use, especially for hard of hearing
- Can we openly share the prayer line, for example on web page or Facebook so we all can pray?
- Religious bookstore with religious items
- Support pregnant women to prevent them from seeking abortions
- Phone calls and/or visits to the sick and elderly
- Improve technology, especially sound system and gathering area technology.
- Do more giving of things and direct service: Give portion of SJV income to another non-profit, give to Hidden Harvest or East Side Soup Kitchen, Contact Outreach at other churches and join to do outreach, Parish service together such as East Side Soup Kitchen