

Synod 2022 Summary

St. Gabriel Parish, Auburn MI

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In response to the call from our Pope for a Synod on Synodality our parish held three listening sessions during the timeframe of March 20, 2022 to April 8, 2022. A total of 25 faithful participated in these sessions. All of the participants were active parishioners, but with a variety of experiences. Additionally in an attempt to reach those who may not have felt comfortable gathering in a group or were unavailable for the group listening sessions, opportunities were provided for their input to be channeled in other methods such as the Parish website, email, phone, and written response to the coordinator. The synod and parish plans were introduced and discussed within the Education Commission and Parish Council for full awareness and input. Outreach outside the parish was not done to gather input from others; therefore, the input received is a fair representative of active, participating Catholics. Much learning, growth, and community would have been gained if others were involved. As a parish, if a similar opportunity were to be presented for reflection and sharing it would behoove us to move forward with action earlier and cast a broader net seeking involvement and input.

During the listening sessions participants were asked to sign in, wear name tags, and enjoy some simple hospitality of drink and snack. After opening prayer, further explanation of why all were gathered, and review of groundrules, participants were invited to share openly and assured of respect from fellow attendees. All participants were given time to respond to the questions and table facilitators made efforts to keep conversations moving and allow participants equal time to listen and share.

To facilitate discussion our parish used the standard questions and discussion guide. The focus of the conversations and comments was truly on our parish, what most considered the “local church”. The overwhelming message seemed to be how diverse parish ministry and resources must be to properly serve their community as well as the fact that there are many opportunities for our parish to grow in what is offered outside of Sacred Mass. To serve the many groups as best as possible, our parish also needs to grow in the use of technology.

For the most part, participants felt like the liturgical celebrations at this parish are fulfilling, well participated in, and well done—one of the most positive things about St. Gabriel. For some, the music ministry and choir is what causes the strongest tie to this parish. There were strong feelings about the importance of music and their ability to remain involved in this ministry as well as appreciation for having a choir and being able to be part of it as well as cantoring. Opinions were also shared about how enriching it is to be able to join in song with the entire congregation. For others, the best thing about being a member of the parish is the feeling of family they have throughout their experiences and how at home they feel coming to mass here. Another positive discussion point that was common to all sessions was the parish school and how valuable it is to our community. All agreed that the school activities brought life to the parish and the school is appreciated.

Participants expressed how much the parish, mass, and people were missed when churches closed in due to the pandemic. It felt so good to come back; however, they wish more would come back as they can see that some have not returned. Therefore, they hope to find ways to draw more people in. Our parish is good a funerals—they are hospitable and offer comfort during a time of need. The parish structure with the commissions and parish council is solid and we are financially sound. Many expressed appreciation for this. It was agreed that not all pastors have the gifts of management in this area, but this parish has been blessed in recent years.

The biggest wound or tension that was brought up and shared mostly related to the division brought on by the joining of the parishes almost 20 years ago and now most recently the physical closing of the St. Anthony Building. Most people who joined the conversation were aware of at least one family that no longer is a part of the parish due to these wounds. There is a lack of understanding on why things are as they are.

The other wound that was expressed by many is the fact that their adult children no longer practice their faith. This is a grave concern for many. Many thoughts and ideas were discussed in this space but it seemed to come back to the faith not drawing these young people in. Possibly related to the fact that it seems there isn't a place for teens-young adults within our parish. Once Faith Formation has been completed, and the sacrament of Confirmation celebrated, there are few opportunities for these young people to lay out their own roots. Part of this does come from the fact that during this time many leave home to attend college; however, ideally there would be a way to help these youth feel vested in the parish community and/or to help them have a strong appreciation for their faith. Two main ideas for this group were to first have a full time role on parish staff dedicated to ministering to our youth and young adults and second to offer opportunities and invite them to be more involved through parish ministries such as lector, cantor, eucharistic minister at an earlier age, as well as to offer simple social activities like coffee or game nights etc.

Opportunities to embrace technology were discussed at each session. It was acknowledged that our parish may not utilize the tools available such as social media, website, apps, virtual meetings/faith formation, livestreaming of mass, and helping people find resources that might be needed. Through conversations with all groups, it became apparent that this should become a priority.

Last one of the biggest discussion points seemed to always come back to ministering more fully to people in all places and stages of life. It is obvious that the parish and church is prepared and very good at helping people prepare for and celebrate sacraments; however, what about the groups that do not fall into these categories? We offer couple marriage prep and couple mentoring to prepare for marriage; however, we may not offer opportunities for the recently married to network and gather with each other to form solid bonds within the parish or support for the life issues they may be facing such as infertility or new/young parenthood. What about the single within the parish, how do we involve them and allow them to form bonds so they too feel part of the parish family. There are others who struggle with church teachings, their identity, or homosexuality. How is our parish reaching out and ministering in this space? We heard loud and clear from many participants that their joy comes from being a part of this parish "family"—and they expressed the importance of it feeling like family. People in every life stage want to have this feeling.

Dreams, desires, and aspirations for our parish and church discussed or brought up include the idea that all truly are welcome. It was felt that as a parish we do welcome, but it was challenged that we welcome others like us . . . the level of diversity within our community is low. We need to find ways to be more inclusive and reach out to those who do not feel like they can or deserve to belong. Another hope is that within the broader church, it can find a way to be less patriarchal and hierachical. There were some who expressed ideas such as married priest and/or women priest to address the vocation struggles our church is facing. In the same vein; however, many felt that we need to help people understand the importance of lay involvement and the value this truly offers our parish communities.

In closing, this exercise, though only brining a small number forward at our parish was enlighting and energizing. Within our parish we will share the summary of the listening sessions with all commissions and make it available to all parishioners for their review, prayer, and consideration. We provide our input with the confidence that the Holy Spirit will carry the right message from our voices to the ears, mind, and heart of our Pope. However, we also recongize the value that our parish may gain from selecting key suggestions and ideas and addressing them fully here in our parish. Detailed, itemized input collected during our parish listening sessions is also attached here for reference.

**St. Gabriel Parish
Detailed Listening Session Input**

Positive	Difficulties	Suggestions/Ideas
Participating in mass/Liturgical services	Secular society interferes	Follow up with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those in hospitals • families from funerals • those who left the church or parish • those who left due to closing of St. Anthony building • Young families
Sacraments celebrated fully/Worship/Penance Services/Children’s mass	Judging others in need – how did they get there?	Other forms of faith formation. What are we offering from confirmation to death?
Bible Study Group, Hearing witness stories	More teenagers involved/engage the youth	More one-on-one reaching out
St. Gabriel is a family that supports us	Recognizing the kids	Give awards to kids
Serving others brings joy. Our parish does all of these things well: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching religious ed/Sacramental Prep • Food pantry • Giving Tree • Choir • Commissions • Ushering • Cards for Sick provided by youth • Youth Mission Trip • RCIA involmen • Lector 	Get others involved/cast broader net	More activities for young people. A full-time youth minister is needed to focus on this.
School is great and fosters involvement. School is a blessing.	Missed community during covid	Participation is a two-way street, how do you get people to seek it? How do you engage?
Good deeds in bulletin	Most unwelcoming parish, shared desire to get involved but no response – then given holidays	Adult faith formation
Trunk and treat	Lack of direction from leadership	Mentor or partner families for new parishioners

Positive	Difficulties	Suggestions/Ideas
People of the parish are a blessing/Relationships with others/Feels like home	Catholic Church has lost its way	Visit other parishes to see other experiences. Partner with other churches to learn what they have to offer and try to leverage or use best practices.
Easy to recognize Jesus is in charge here	Don't feel part of the church	More frequent invitations to volunteer and about available ministries
Different prayer experiences	Not a very informative bulletin	Better communication to parishioners
Social gatherings	Same people come forward to help all the time	New and fresh perspectives on how to look at ministries and activities
Joy comes from all together in a common setting and people trying to be better Christians	Although it seems we have a generous parish, it is Hard to find where to give of talent, time, and treasure	Parish Mission to revitalize
Just part of life, who I am	Wish more people would come back to church.	More local outreach/Reach out when people are not "there"/those who have left, young adults, gay and broader community.
Vatican II was life giving	Hard to get people to volunteer, but once they do, it is typically enjoyable for them.	Go green. Make sure that all bulletin inserts are online like bulletin itself.
Working at diocese	Division exists, some of it deep. Still a void since merger of parish and pending closure of St. Anthony.	Develop a network of support groups. Ideas: Singles group, Widows group, divorced group, men's group, couples club, women's group, mom group, etc.
Bishop Ken	Hurtful words from others	Educate on all vocations: Marriage, Single, Religious, & Priest.
Enjoy when the choir is not there, able to focus and participate more fully.	Kids leaving home and not continuing the practice of their faith.	Scavenger Hunts for adults
Communal penance	Not welcome to all – especially the LGBTQ community	Welcoming committee
Parish structure	Feeling separate from the church	Broadcast mass online
Our funeral celebrations and dinners are done well	So many people hurting- not offering enough to help	We are good at ministering to those in the pews, but more outreach is needed beyond that.

Positive	Difficulties	Suggestions/Ideas
Felt like coming home after the pandemic	Not diverse	Listen
Attend mass because of the people. They are family.	Get better at including all groups (elderly, young, medium, couples, singles)	Better community across the diocese
People are friendly	Other Christian churches draw in youth because they are more vibrant and inviting.	Help lay people see the importance of their role in mass.
People don't make church a priority	Feels like our diocese is going backwards	Ask about visitors and welcome during mass or figure out a way to identify and welcome visitors
The spirit is moving people in this parish	All males in church hierarchy	Should be trying to reach out to those outside of the church
Joy comes from learning the songs and rituals as a new Catholic.	Technology not embraced or used to its fullest	Invite younger people to lector or have a mass where Youth serve once a month.
Church is a great place for young teens and women to grow.	Lack of community across the diocese	Establish more for people ages 20-40 who may not have a family.
A place where one can be themselves.	Church feels like it is moving to more rule and more patriarchal	Offer more social opportunities that don't require a lot of planning (coffee for young adults or singles or other groups)
	Renaming of parish was a waste of time energy and money	Utilize technology more fully.
	Didn't know it was important to become a registered member	Need ways to guide people to practical services. Possibly update website with resources for people going through different things (fertility issues, grief, unmarried/single wishing to meet others, those dealing with mental illness, sick.
	Google maps does not guide people to the right address for West Campus.	Use technology to point people to others in the parish community who may be facing the same life event.
	Feels as though the pastor has his "favorites"	Married or Women Priests
		Having a space or chapel to pray in private to deal with life's issues would be welcome.
		Support vocations by talking about them more.

Positive	Difficulties	Suggestions/Ideas
		Find ways to make use of more people's talents. Could we utilize technology somehow for people to list skills or talents so parishioners might know who to reach out to for things. Could we offer a community board?
		Offer virtual bible study groups
		Share new parishioner highlights or stories.
		Find a way to draw more people to volunteer. Many come for mass and leave immediately. Maybe a "sound off meeting" with rules would be a way to get their input?