

# St. Raphael – Holy Angels Synod Listening Sessions Summary



Message from Fr. Gene and the  
Synod Implementation Team

Synod Listening Sessions were conducted at our parish in February and March of 2022. These sessions allowed participants to voice their joys and obstacles in their journeys with the Catholic Church. It also allowed them to pray and discern about how the Holy Spirit is prompting us, as Church, to improve the ways we journey together.

Fr. Gene and the Synod Implementation Team of St. Raphael-Holy Angels Parish (SRHA) thanks the over one hundred ten people who participated. These included adult parishioners; Life Teen Ministry; the Youth Choir; eighth grade students in St. Raphael School and Religious Education students preparing for confirmation.

The information that follows is a summary of the SRHA raw data that was sent to the diocese and included in their report. This summary combines the efforts of a small team of parishioners that reviewed the raw data, summarized the results, and grouped the comments into specific categories.

In keeping with the format from the diocese, the data has been summarized into 3 sections – 1) Joys 2) Obstacles/Challenges and 3) Improving Our Journeying Together. Under each section, the categories are listed in order of importance, based on the frequency of comments that participants had.

**Save the Date:** In May, **everyone** is needed to discuss this summary and add their input on how best to use this data. This includes both weekly and occasional church attendees. If you would like to participate, you can attend either the May 13, 2023 morning session **or** the May 20, 2023 afternoon session. These sessions will shape the direction that the parish takes in the years to come. Look in the bulletin, or on our web site for additional details, as the time draws closer.

Thank you to all who participated and may the Holy Spirit continue to inspire and provide all of us with guidance and wisdom as we journey together.

## *Joys of Journeying Together*

1. **Sacraments, Rituals, Prayers and Devotion:** A majority of comments expressed joyful memories centered around “receiving sacraments”. They also expressed the importance of prayers and how their “family life centered around the church.”
2. **Importance of Community, Fellowship and Family:** Coming together as part of a church community and sharing their faith with family and friends was a common theme for many. Some commented that “Church is family” and “parish always important”.
3. **Catholic Education and Religious Education:** “Catholic education is a positive experience” and “enjoyed time in religious education.” Many commented on the catholic school education and what it taught them.
4. **Being involved in the Parish and being of service:** Comments included: enjoy working at the food pantry; being an altar server; and being involved in ministries.
5. **Attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist:** Comments included: “The Eucharist is important” and “Joy of attending Mass with my family”
6. **Love of God, Faith and Church:** Comments included: “Deep faith overcomes everything” and “Church is joy”

Other joys of journeying together included: Music; Support during difficult times; Involvement in small groups like RCIA, Youth group and retreats; Having the support of role models and Being part of a Catholic Organization such as Knights of Columbus.

## *Obstacles / Challenges / Not Journeying Well*

1. **Excessive focus on a compliance with rules, some of which appear outdated:** The lack of renewal or transformation within the Church was seen in that many noted the rigidity of the Church. Some felt that Church’s teachings on birth control to be overly restrictive and others unfairly excluded from the sacraments due to divorce. In general, many felt that the emphasis tends toward following rules that do not help them gain a stronger faith.
2. **Lack of inclusion and feeling welcomed within the Church:** The lack of community within the Church also comes up in different ways. It often mentioned that there is not enough involvement. While many people expressed Community and Fellowship as a joy, the Church is also described by many as not welcoming nor inclusive, and in general, not meeting needs of its parishioners. The division between liberal and conservative Catholics is also noted. Feeling not an equally valued member of the parish based on my gender, race, ethnicity.

## *Obstacles / Challenges / Not Journeying Well (Continued)*

3. **Difficult life issues (relationships, death, addictions, turmoil in the world) have caused faith in God to be challenged and doubted:** Difficult circumstances have caused me to question where is God in all this? How to live as an authentic Catholic in the secular world of today? Time pressures have made it difficult to make time for God, time for church.
4. **Family members (including youth) have fallen away from the practice of the faith:** Many mentioned family members or they themselves leaving the Church for a time. Life issues were also cited as a reason for falling away. There was a pattern of people falling away during their young adult years, and it was mentioned that there is a shortage of programs for this age group as well.
5. **Hypocrisy within the Church. The handling of the priest abuse scandal has shaken my confidence in the Church:** The defects and failings of those within of the Church was been an obstacle. This includes the disillusionment with priests due to the sex scandal as well as the Church's mishandling of this issue. In addition, many also cited the hypocrisy of churchgoers that folks are not practicing what they preach.
6. **Range of observations about the celebration of Mass:** Service is too long or too short. Homilies should speak to us in today's language and focus on the reality of our lives. Preaching focused more clearly on the Gospels would be welcomed.

Other obstacles included comments on the lack of education about the faith. Many cited that defending their faith in a secular world was something they felt unprepared to do. Lack of involvement in parish activities and ministries. Much of the work is supported by a small group of parishioners.

## *How the Holy Spirit May Be Prompting Us To Improve The Way We Are Journeying Together*

1. **Need to be more Welcoming and Inviting:** Fixing the issues that still exist in that the church doesn't "look like me". The need to be more welcoming for all, and a place to be comfortable with. Too many clicks and too much "That's MY pew".
2. **Communications:** "Synod was a great start in listening. Pope Francis is a "breath of fresh air" with his compassion to all people. "Need to be more honest and truthful with each other." "Church needs to be more transparent when dealing with people" Specific mention about the treatment of nuns and Fr. James.
3. **Parishioner Participation/Support:** One word, one experience shared can bring others' back. Church is a work in progress, it is important that people be heard. Need to feel that what they have to say is valued.
4. **Faith:** Turn to Jesus, who is ready to guide us on how we can build a fraternal community at all ages. Need to share stories of our faith journey together - more coming together. The beauty of Christ needs to be demonstrated.
5. **Youth Engagement:** Get the youth back, invite them back – going to be hard. Need to find a way to get the new generation more involved and get them back to church. Focus on kids and teens; more activities for us to build community; help Church grow and strengthen faith.
6. **Golden Rule:** Be kind to each other, even if someone else is not kind to you. Try to be better and help each other. It seems like helping people is getting lost. Love of God and Love of Neighbor!

Other comments on improving through the Holy Spirit included:

- **Prayer** - "Pray more together as a church community."
- **Catholic Education** - You learn more when you share with each other
- **Forgiveness** - Spirit – be more forgiving; Can't hold grudges
- **Sacraments** - Attend church more often and more use of confession
- **Communal Activities** - Work as a community. Journey together

### *Next Steps:*

#### *Universal Church:*

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has published their summary of Synod listening sessions. Next, the U.S. and Canadian Synod Teams will gather in late winter 2023 to compose the Continental Synthesis, which is due on March 31, 2023. This document will be part of the Universal Phase of the Synod to be held in Rome in October 2023 and again in October 2024.

#### *Saint Raphael- Holy Angels Parish*

The next step, for our parish, is to gather the various parish ministries and parishioners to discuss how best to use this information. From there, the pastoral council will begin to prioritize and develop a plan of action. The final step is to execute concrete ways to move our parish forward on our Synodal journey together.



*"Let us journey, together!"*