



Submitted November 30, 2022 by Valda Walsh



Background

All sessions were led by Father Earl and/or Father Pottie with the exception of the session at St. Augustine's in Chester. That session was led by Michael Dunn.

A summary of the reflections is recorded here for our Parish use and purpose.

St. Margeurite Bourgeoys – October 29th @10 am (16 count)

St. Joseph's – October 29th @ 1:30 pm (12 count)

St. Anthony's – October 30th @ 12:30 pm (11 count)

St. Augustine's – November 13th @ 10 am (17 count)

In total, there were 56 people participating plus the facilitators; Fr. Charlie, Fr. Earl and Michael Dunn.

Overall, the engagement carried common themes. People are feeling a little lost and disconnected yet hopeful and aware that we need to each make efforts to make this work. All feedback was then categorised as either an opportunity or a challenge and collated into a summary table.

What was heard

There were a number of common themes that emerged from each session. These included:

- Importance of clear, concise communication
- Recognition of challenges such as distance, size and lack of ordained priests for the Parish
- All who attended wanted to build the Parish with respect and understanding of individuality of each faith community
- The sense of belonging is key to growth in inviting people to our churches
- Welcoming and hospitality are key components for our Parish and its growth
- Small groups and gatherings are very important to all communities



What was heard (capture)

1. Where do you think God is calling our Church right now to grow and progress?

- I think we need to wake up to the reality of our challenges. The distance is a reality of the Parish that we are challenged with – the solution may not be utopian. Be grateful for what it is and continue to work with what we have.
- Distance is going to be a challenge. We need to work hard to reach out to our various faith communities.
- We should be open to see the Holy Spirit to work with us in this new world using the virtual devices and connections. ‘Community’ may not be the person sitting with you at a building.
- Bring people together in a group
- Create a sense of belonging.
- There are lots of big things we can do but we need to start small – then build on it.
- Continue to welcome everyone to increase the sense of belonging.
- Share church functions. Create a community event such as a Christmas dinner.
- Share in smaller groups then build on it.
- Small groups is important then bring into a larger gathering.
- Sharing is important – especially around prayer
- There are so many things happening in our Parish – perhaps if we decide to set up a carpool ie if we decide to meet in the church parking lot to offer to share the ride
- Use the technology to help build community – online
- Invite others to share their events to the larger group.
- Diversity is part of being community. The diversity we experienced is not an obstacle but a building block to building community. The Holy Spirit is the source of community but also the source of diversity (Romans 12).
- Awareness, Connection, commitment, belonging, hope, need, Ubuntu (I am because you are), Effort, Future, accountability, patience, ideas “I am because we are”
- Small is beautiful
- Getting to know each other – move back and forth to other churches
- Establishing an event in each church that all are invited to, stating that this is for all to join
- Hope, desire to make it work –forget past, move on – walking in hope
- Each church community needs to be able to put on what they want to put on and invite all to it. Less control from the entire parish.
- Focusing on similarities and work on finding likes
- Starting new parish groups eg. CWL
- Autonomy in different churches but all could join
- Developing logistic strategy because of the distance. Hoping things get better won’t work.
- Realizing that it is up to each individual to make this work
- List Parish Masses in local newspapers; Masthead News, Bridgewater newspapers
- Fear of the unknown is affecting people and we need to find ways to have it not control us

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- Find better words = we shouldn't use the word 'negative'. Move beyond it and move away from by using 'uncertainty' or 'questioning'
- COVID-19 has been a real disruptor in the community. Major cessation of all things social & we need more social
- Joy and gratitude that we have this circle and find a common thread in Christ. We had this day and hope to have more.
- Better communication – smaller form of the bulletin on a weekly basis for those who don't have technology either for financial reasons or age or inability.
- Car-pooling for parishioners who need drives (winter)
- Standardized announcements
- More chances to get together socially
- Hospitality is very important, how we can make sure new parishioners are not overlooked.
- Need financial statements and updates on the state of affairs with the Parish as well as individual churches.
- I am fearful my church will close
- Whatever directive is needed –stability of clergy instead of the revolving door of priests
- Visit sick and bring communion
- Aware, Hopeful, Productive, Listened to, comforting, grateful, thankful, perseverance
- Build stronger and draw from our youth
- Clarify the administration piece
- We have to say "Yes"
- Continue to value community (at the Faith Community level)
- Let each other know what each other is doing
- Has to be a clearer path into the Church (such as invitations to small group gatherings)
- Evangelization within and without
- Need small groups gathering
- Who is who in our faith community
- Allow community through autonomy
- Collaborate as an inter-faith ministerial group
- Personal discernment
- Listen & learn to grow together
- Think global and act local
- Mass should draw them in
- Need an adequate number of priests
- Have lay led liturgical services
- Plan of implementation (from Transition team)
- Build trust
- Evangelization programs
- Focus on what we have in common
- Continuous creative criticism
- Support local parish initiatives and faith community events



Summary:

The disciples were of one mind and one heart. They shared their lives and goods with one another. In today's world we first need to develop a sense of trust to build community. Below is the summary of the shared opportunities and challenges to developing the trust and building community:

Challenges:	Opportunities:
Distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car-pooling • Online events/Masses that only a priest can provide
Priest's availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lay led liturgical services (nonsacramental)
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality – make welcome spaces • Standard announcements • Copies for computer lacking/illiterate for the bulletin board/sharing • Know who is who in your faith community • List Parish Masses and events in the local paper
Community is too large/ spread out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend each others' events • Car-pool to events • Have multiple small group faith sharing • List Parish Masses and events in local newspapers • Individual discernment – focus on similarities • Clarify roles of HAP and local faith communities within the entire parish • Unity in diversity of local-based initiatives
Aging population/lost people (drop of about 50% of pre-COVID numbers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality – create a sense of belonging • Evangelization - Welcome people to share in our faith community and its ongoing programs in faith formation. • Listen and learn • Recognize it is up to each individual to make this work • Hopeful and generous in specific tasks and asks • Small is beautiful • We are strong in faith
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming aware of serious financial needs of the Parish • Generous donations to the General Appeal, the piano, Coats for Kids and countless special initiatives

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Inspiration:

Faith, Trust, Aware, Hope, Productive, Grateful, Comforting, Thankful, Welcome, Community, Leadership, Journey, Distance, Diversity, Inclusion, Connection, Belonging, Patience, Effort, Need, Ubuntu, Small, Love, Christian

A tilted rectangular card with a light yellow background, displaying a word cloud of various terms in different colors and orientations. The words are: trust (green), faith (yellow), inclusion (green), comforting (green), community (green), diversity (purple), grateful (blue), leadership (yellow), journey (green), distance (green), aware (yellow), and hope (green).

trust faith
inclusion
comforting
community
diversity grateful
leadership
journey
distance
aware
hope

APPENDIX A

Agenda

Welcome & Prayer

Praying with scripture

Proclaim

Personal reflection and sharing

Journeying Together

Personal reflection

Group sharing

Closing Prayer/Next steps

Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for joining us in this parish wide Listening Circle. As we introduce ourselves I would like you to each state briefly, what former church/parish you attended. We will be recording (writing) a general sense of the conversation here this afternoon, without names. But we will first listen, then listen again and share what we heard in the first go around. By the third go around, we will then try to capture the highlights of what was shared. You may opt to pass when your turn to share comes around. It is important we all have the opportunity to share and feel heard. All feedback is anonymous.

The purpose of this process is twofold: to *pray* and to *listen*. We are gathering as Holy Apostles Parish to *pray* together and to *listen* to the unique contributions of each person.



Listening Circle Participant Guide

Candle Lighting

Jesus Christ is the true light of the world to which no darkness can extinguish.

Holy Apostles Prayer

Lord God, giver of life and source of every gift,
we come to you in faith and gratitude;
nourished by Word and Sacraments,
in our beloved Holy Apostles Parish.
To see the Kingdom of God more fully realized
in our parish is Your will and our privilege.
Help us always to use our gifts of time,
talent and treasure wisely,
and teach us to share them generously,
to bear witness to the love of Christ in our lives.
Please bless our efforts as we seek to be a Christ-centered,
welcoming community, respecting each other
and serving those in need.
Create in us a spirit of trust,
so that as we have been given, so we will give.

We pray this with grateful hearts in Jesus' name.

Amen

Praying with Scripture

Scripture Passage

Acts of the Apostles 2: 43 - 47

⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having goodwill of all the people.

Personal Reflection (5 minutes)

Take some time to pray and reflect on the scripture. Write down notes on your thoughts or what jumps out at you in this space below:

Reflection Questions

1. With the scripture in mind - What is your experience in the HAP amalgamation? Was it positive or negative? What are you grateful for? What are the challenges?
2. What did I hear from others' experience? Remember we are here with Christ Jesus – focus on the Holy Spirit alive among us – Community.
3. Let us all share a word or two that we feel we can carry forward. Where do you think God is calling our Parish to grow and progress?

Your notetaker will be taking notes on key *themes* in your responses.

You do not necessarily need to produce a response to each question or arrive at any official "statement." Rather, the notetaker will compile the general direction and sense of our conversation, and any key ideas that come up.

There are no right or wrong answers – it is an exercise in listening.