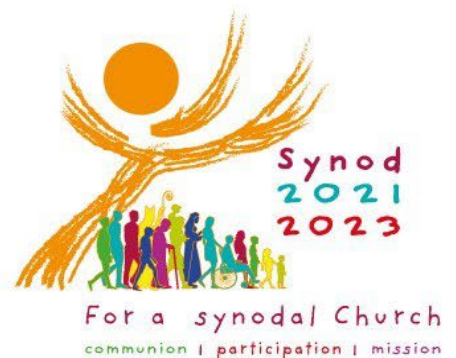


Walk together as a Church with the Holy Spirit

Submitted February 4, 2022 by Valda Walsh



Background

The experience of leading the Synodal Process at Holy Apostles Parish has been rewarding and humbling – I am grateful for this opportunity.

As I travel on my faith journey, to be able to listen and carry the voice of many has been a positive experience. Though COVID-19 and winter storms, coupled with power outages, has created its challenges, the Holy Spirit continues to find a way to seek where the flame continues to burn in each of us. Below are the particulars and highlights of the journey thus far. ~ Valda Walsh

On October 16, 2021 The Assembly of the People of God was attended by:

Elizabeth Roeding, Barbara LeBlanc, Valda Walsh, Alain Blondin, Lee Ann Blondin

The session ran from 9 am to noon. We participated in scripture, prayer and reflection on Synodality and then were trained to carry out a similar experience in our parish. Back in our parish, our numbers were reduced (Alain and Lee Ann had to step down) and grew by 2 (Father Earl Smith and Dr Maryn Anderson) stepped up as staff to help out.

On November 17 and 24th, 2021 engagement sessions were held with Finance Council and Pastoral Council, respectfully. Each session was planned for 1 hr but actually ran about 1.5 hrs. There were a total of 9 participants in this stage.

Three in-person sessions were planned for January at various locations; St. Anthony's, St. Joseph's and St. Marguerite Bourgeoys. Due to COVID-19 restrictions then further complicated by weather and power outages, only one Zoom session was held on January 22, 2022. 23 people besides the Synod team, attended.

The itinerary for the sessions was thus; Welcome and prayer, Scripture and reflection, Journeying together and reflection.

All sessions were led by Valda Walsh and recorded by Elizabeth Roeding and Barbara LeBlanc.

Besides the guided sessions, parishioners were also encouraged to email the team with questions and/or reflections. Several responses came in this way, as well. On request, there has been a single one-to-one session. We remain open to this going forward.

Reflections were submitted to the Archdiocese before February 4th by both Valda and Liz (each following the sessions).

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

Praying with Scripture and Reflection

Scripture: Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-8, 11b

1. What struck you from this depiction of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles?

- The Holy Spirit is **inclusive** - speaks to each person in a way they can understand.
- Not everybody was hearing the same thing, yet they all understood the message.
- They were afraid but quickly calmed when the Holy Spirit entered
- The tongues of fire dance on EVERYONE, not just a select few.
- Reminds me of the political world gatherings today when the translator speaks into each delegate's ear. They hear the same thing but each bring their own language and experience to the message.
- There was a division of classes; Jews and Gentiles but they were together and all received the message of the Holy Spirit equally
- There was no reward or promises ie "I will enlighten you only if you do this..." He landed on each and asked them to worship (in their own way).

2. Where is the Church today? What are our strengths and weaknesses?

- Not a lot has changed since the Acts – still a division of people.
- We are **losing our youth**. Not listening to their needs and 'feeding' them.
- Without youth, our future, the Church is doomed.
- The Acts refers to many being together. This means **community**. The current restructuring is moving further from this concept. Priests now live alone and carry a huge burden with large geographical areas to shepherd. This model is happening with the formation of large Parishes, creating barriers to faith communities as well.
- Strengths:
 - We have been around a long time – **universal**.
 - We believe in the true presence of Jesus in the **Eucharist**
 - Encouraged to pray to the Saints for intercessions
 - The Encyclicals on fighting climate change.
 - Sacrament of Reconciliation – Confession really is a saving grace
- Weaknesses:
 - We enable **transgressions** by discriminating against other faiths and people.
 - Lack of inclusivity. Many from LGBTQ2s and their families have felt unwelcomed yet we say 'All are Welcome'
 - Our structure brings laws made by humans (the precepts) at the same level as God-made laws; living the structure of the Church and not commitment to Christ.
 - We offer to pray and encourage/reward attendance at Mass but use outreach as a second thought. Social Justice and care of our fellow man should be priority of every Christian.
 - Because of the history of concealed abuse, we are no longer fearless and proud to be Catholic – there is now a **shame** attached to it.
 - No place for the youth nor **empowerment** to truly listen to them.

Journeying Together and Reflection

1. Can you think of an example of when you felt that you were "journeying together" with a group or community in your local Church?

- Music Ministry – There is something spiritually fulfilling when you know your faith journey is shared by others just like you
- Eucharistic Ministry – To feel empowered to bring the Body of Christ to sick or shut-in makes me feel supported directly by Christ. It is also so connected with Music, Liturgy and the pastoral delivery (sometimes we can be the vehicle to request a sacrament for anointing or confession)
- Today and 10 years ago – forming a new Parish and meeting new people.
- Celebrating the Eucharist each and every Sunday and in Palm Sunday processions.
- ALPHA – all people praying and journeying whether they were in the pews of 'my' Church on Sunday or not
- Pandemic online – The ability to very quickly offer Mass and gatherings online opened the window to many that we would not see on a given Sunday. Connected in a being moved in a whole new way.
- Father Roberto and his organized trip to Rome.
- Hospitality - the **inclusiveness** is healing.

2. Call to mind a time when a major decision was made at your parish. What was the decision? How did that make you feel?

- **Creation of Holy Apostles Parish**
 - Felt **abandoned** by the Archdiocese.
 - Did not feel consulted on the name or the process
 - One-way (ie **NOT listening**) consultation on area covered to form the Parish shows lack of respect
 - Changes in Mass times and no reflection of the needs of community
- By the Vatican (and/or Diocese)
 - The precepts of the Church as an example. Rules and order are important, but they discriminate against people using a human judge on who is deemed in a state of grace and who is not.
 - **Evangelization without reconciliation** – We feel **shame**, frustration and question our relationship with the Church because of negative effects of transgressions. The Church needs to make a concerted effort to acknowledge and put past transgressions and rebuild trust and credibility before it can evangelize.

3. Bearing in mind these experiences and reflections, where do you think God is calling our Church right now to grow and progress?

As Christians we seem to have lost our commitment to Jesus over the structure of the Church. One parishioner categorized our issues as either ‘root cause’ or a ‘symptom’. One suggestion on where we are called may address a symptom (dwindling numbers in the pews) but does not address the root cause – which could be many and varied.

- Need to step up and **empower** (not just with words but create the space) the laity to act. A prime example is our **youth**. We Confirm them, tell them they are the future and to get involved but when they step forward to actively pursue their calling to read, or serve, we tell them they are too young or not suitable.
- Look past the practice of only ordaining celibate males. The root cause of dwindling vocations shows in many symptoms; transgressions, empty churches, large, unmanageable Parishes, lack of desire for many to follow their ‘calling’ knowing they are entering a universe with little support and lots of work.
- The heart of our faith – the Eucharist. Welcome EVERYONE to the table, not just those that humans have deemed worthy. Jesus made space for the sinner and those that needed Him most.
- More focus on commitment to Jesus and less on the structure of the Church. We continue to value the Mass but there should be equal or even greater emphasis on being the Body of Christ in community through outreach. (just like the homeless shelters – great example). These are the actions that ensure the laity are not just being told to act but provided the empowerment by the governance to carry it out.
- We are at a different time in this secular world (COVID – 19 as example). People need truth. The relevance of religion is eroded or the perception it is at odds with reality or science. There is an equally starving world; starving for spirituality. Perhaps the Church can demonstrate that it still has relevance on issues of social/government institutions, health and educational institutions and spiritual institutions Bridging the gap between religion and science while addressing the desire/need to feel fulfilled spiritually.
- On the Empowering AND the Science ideas – the Church should provide for opportunities/host forums around pressing social issues of our age; climate change, racism, systemic poverty and injustice, relationships (marriage, gay trans-gender); all in the context of faith.

A focus on root cause is important. With overworked priests (a symptom), the structure needs to change to encourage and empower the laity to share in the work. This can be seen as an opportunity as we heard from many quite willing to step up.