Common Themes – First Week – Synod Listening Circles hosted by the Wheaton Franciscan and IBVM communities (February 8 and 12, 2022)

*Initial confusion about what was meant by “local’ church."

A general distinction was drawn between the “institutional church” sometimes referred to as the “corporate church or big “C” Church and the People of God church or small “c” church (where two or more are gathered).

*There was a sense that the big “C” church/institutional Church is*

- Hierarchical
- Exclusive
- Dogmatic
- Impersonal
- Rote
- Judgmental
- Rule driven
- Parish Church does not meet spiritual needs

People are moving away (or moved away) from the institutional model of church

There was a sense that the People of God or small “c” church is more spirit-driven and supportive. A local church (small “c”) is where we find community, connection, and relationship; where we care for and help each other; where we find belonging, and where we walk with others.

*Seeking church (and Church) that*

- is radically welcoming – all God’s children with special emphasis on those who have been consciously excluded or pushed to the margins ... women, divorced Catholics, LGBTQ+ persons, and those who have had an abortion.

- is invitational – encouraging ALL to fully share gifts, as well as needs.

- practices the Gospel through word and deed – bringing the Gospel alive in today’s world, meeting today’s social needs.

- is not judgmental – modeling the love and mercy of Jesus

- meets the physical needs of the people, specifically the poor and marginalized.
  Physical/Acute needs -- food, shelter, healing, etc., care of creation.

- meets the emotional and spiritual needs -- Need to be told until we know deep in our souls that we are loved and lovable (beloved children of God). From this place of love comes welcome, acceptance, justice, mercy, kindness, compassion, empathy, tolerance, embrace of diversity
Values needed for the Church and the Individuals who make up the church

— Listening
— Empathy
— Kindness
— Compassion
— Tolerance
— Acceptance
— Mercy
— Reconciliation
— Love
— Vulnerability

Common Themes – Second Session – Synod Listening Circles hosted by the Wheaton Franciscan and IBVM communities (February 22 and 26, 2022)

Prayer and Community are essential to living the gospel life.

Prayer is both individual and communal.

   Individual Prayer includes many forms including being in nature and meditation, attending prayer services or Mass over Zoom or Livestream.

   Praying alone, while not physically with others, is done in solidarity with others, across time zones, cultures, and styles of prayer.

   Individual/personal prayer calls for inner work.

Communal prayer/ritual brings us together.

   Communal prayer/ritual needs to be meaningful, inspirational and challenging. This may include relevant homilies, music, and prayers.

   Communal prayer/ritual needs to be connected to “real life” and world events.

Prayer -- individual and communal needs to move us to step out of our comfort zone and live the Gospel.

Prayer requires listening to what is happening within and around.

Living the gospel is challenging. Prayer and community broaden perspectives – we can’t do it alone.

Community

   Community is a place where one can be: Seen, Loved, Heard, Listen, Understood, Vulnerable, Supported, etc. Community is a place where one feels safe, accepted, challenged.

   Community roots us, supports us, and connects us so we can meet the challenge of living the Gospel.
Community broadens the scope of living the Gospel: it provides models, options, different ways of seeing things; opportunities to ‘try things out’ – new ideas and actions.

“Can’t imagine living the Gospel without community!”

What more is the spirit calling us to as we journey together

Relationships are important – We are all connected – we connect with prayer

To prayer/ritual that is more inclusive, invitational, reconciling, understanding, and value-driven.

To change to meet the needs of the time and to live the Gospel more relevantly in our world today.

To see other points of view

To enhance the role of women and to respect other forms of life as a vocation

To remain courageous and hopeful

To greater kindness, tolerance, and patience.

To find ways to journey outside our comfort zone.

To acknowledge that we can be insular/narrow-minded.

To open our churches to every expression of community

“The radical call of the Gospel is now and calls for a response now!”

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PREPARATION FOR SESSION 3

As we prepare for the third and final Synod Listening Circle hosted by the Wheaton Franciscan and the IBVM communities please consider:

**In Session One the common theme was a desire for church/Church that**

— is radically welcoming of all God’s children with special emphasis on those who have been consciously excluded or pushed to the margin;

— is invitational and encourages ALL to fully share gifts, as well as needs.

— is not judgmental – modeling the love and mercy of Jesus

— practices the Gospel through word and deed – bringing the Gospel alive in today’s world, meeting today's social needs.

**In Session Two the common themes expressed were the importance of prayer and ritual that is inspiring, challenging, and relevant in today’s world, AND community that is supportive in the challenge of living the Gospel.**
Common Themes – Third Session – Synod Listening Circles hosted by the
Wheaton Franciscan and IBVM communities (March 8 & 12)

Anchored by prayer and community and understanding of the desire for a church/Church that is radically welcoming –

what are some specific things (ideas, actions, ways of being)
that we can do to create the church/Church we long for?

Responses to the focused question were categorized into three broad areas –

♥ concrete things that the People of God can do to create the church we long for
♥ concrete things the “local” church to create the church we long for
♥ concrete things the “hierarchal” Church can do to create the church we long for

Important Note: You will see that all of the suggestions classified under “People of God” also belong in the other two categories. Likewise, the suggestions under “local” church apply to the “Hierarchal Church. For the sake of brevity (although it is still a long list) an attempt was made to place the suggestion within one category.

People of God (That is all of us!)

– Recognize God’s love for all persons and include others who are different from us.
– Be invitational and welcoming; reach out to others and invite them to join in programs, Mass, services, events, etc.
– Be more aware of the awesome responsibility of being role models in witnessing the Gospel life.
– Be non-judgmental and inclusive – invite and welcome people all people.
– Be present to each other physically as well as spiritually and emotionally
– Beware of getting too comfortable or forming closed circles/cliques.
– Live Catholic Social Teaching
– Transform ourselves and our church community by growing our sense of “we” and “us.”
– Embrace values that support the whole and call for change to happen.
– Change will be bottom-up, spearheaded by smaller, energetic faith communities. The revolution will be from within, not dictated by the outside.
– Do not be passive. Continue to learn, explore one’s own spirituality, participate in social justice, and be willing to speak for the voiceless.
– Work with church leadership and suggest ideas and actions.
– Actively look for a life-giving and spiritually satisfying group wherever that may be.
– Find a group within your parish of like-minded people and try to influence your parish.
– Don’t sit around and wait for something to happen … work to make it happen
– Hold Church leadership accountable for their actions, decisions, etc.
“Local” church

- We want to see our church and communities more welcoming. Our group culture should be one of greeting, listening, and connecting to every visitor or stranger in our midst...with sincere warmth and love.
- Not discriminate against those who may be marginalized by society or by the church. This includes women who have had abortions, divorced persons, LGBTQ persons, and non-Catholics.
- Welcome back those who have been cut off from the church... i.e., divorced, or hurt by the church. Welcome divorced Catholics. Provide support groups. Appreciate feelings of loss among those who cannot receive communion.
- Help individuals feel comfortable; accept all who come without judgment.
- Provide compassion and support, not blame, to persons and families dealing with mental health issues and suicide.
- Respect life womb to tomb. Broaden the concept of “Right to Life” to include capital punishment.
- Encourage teens to be readers—support them; do not expect perfection—develop an atmosphere where folks can learn. This is being invitational.
- Offer more ways for people to be involved.
- Re-envision religious community. How do we form communities with laypeople around current charisms?
- The need for home-based faith-sharing groups of like-minded people.
- What draws people in: invitation, welcome, music, an invitation to involvement, beauty that reflects the seasons and the cultures of the community
- Extend “church” outside of mass....be visible/get involved in the local community. Walk the talk.... “show who we really are.” Actions speak louder than words.
- We should consider more diverse artwork in our worship space to make it more appealing to other cultures.
- Catholic outreach should be continuous and include such things as regularly streamed masses and special celebrations, along with constant use of media to announce events to the general public.
- Communications (backed up with our prayers) should concisely invite people of all faiths (and no faith) to our worship, celebrations, and social events.
- To our public, “catholic” should mean “universal”, not “exclusive”
- We need “spiritual EMTs” and pastoral training.

“Hierarchical” Church

- The Church needs a loving and meaningful “global glue” that brings all people together and exhibits Gospel values.
- The Church needs to include/enthusiastically support women’s leadership and talents and recognize and value women’s and men’s differences and unique gifts.
- Promote leadership by women and former priests in the church community and the Church
− Return to the best parts of the early church where people gathered outside of a building, and all were welcomed—radically welcoming.
− Pastors/priests need to listen and take a risk—let the needs of the congregation come first.
− Pastor/priests need to be open, welcoming, and inviting!!!
− The faculties at seminaries need to have a broader representation of women and more diverse backgrounds from different cultures and theologies.
− Seminary training needs to improve and become more applicable to the times. Otherwise, we are just perpetuating the misery and focusing on unhelpful differences: men vs. women, priests vs. laity, etc. Specific seminary training needs: know how to read your audience, encourage personal spirituality, stronger and more relevant preaching, and focus on living a Christian life (not being a “good Catholic”).
− There was a lack of ongoing formation for priests at the Diocesan level. We need accountability for priests that offers a mechanism for feedback to the Bishop that isn’t intimidating. And one that also respects how hard it is to be a Catholic priest in today’s world.
− The Roman Catholic hierarchy needs to be open to women priests. The Church loses the moral high ground when it denies that women have a spiritual calling to the priesthood.
− Priests (and all vowed religious) should be required to do missionary work so they can have a connection to the “least of these.”
− Share resources…. among all dioceses. There is no need for multiple certificates for Eucharistic Ministers.
− Welcome those who wish to serve by removing rule constraints.
− Improve the preparation of priests to help them understand the changes we need.
− Require increased clergy accountability and transparency.
− Assist priests with administrative work to allow more time for pastoral care.