



Synod
2021
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For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Saint Aloysius Parish Summary to Bishop Caggiano

INTRODUCTION

Convened by our pastor, Rev. Robert Kinnally, the Saint Aloysius Synod delegates scheduled a number of in-person listening sessions – both open to the broader community, and specific to parish ministries, such as listening sessions for teen members of the Saint Aloysius youth group or the Men’s Ministry. Additionally, the delegates hosted coffee hours after Masses so that informal conversations could be had. In order to invite members of the community to participate in these offerings, the delegates utilized the parish’s digital presence via social media and the website, as well as the parish bulletin. Flyers were also distributed at significant liturgies which drew large numbers of visitors from within and without, and announcements were made at the conclusion of liturgies as well. To supplement the in-person opportunities, the delegates also designed an online survey that was made available through the aforementioned avenues, so those members of the community who might not be able to attend an in-person session, or might feel more comfortable sharing their stories through a screen than face-to-face, could still participate in this time of listening.

Following the period of listening and collecting information, the delegates collated the information and, through a process of discernment and prayer, compiled this overview of the Saint Aloysius Synodal findings.

OUR COMMUNITY'S EXPERIENCE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

STRENGTHS OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

It is so beautiful to see that so many members of the Saint Aloysius community are in love with Jesus Christ and on fire for our shared faith! Whether it is the richness of 2 millennia of tradition, the beauty of the Mass, the graces of the sacraments, or the universality of a faith that connects people across the globe, our respondents shared how captivating and sustaining our Roman Catholic faith is. The simple truth is this: even for those on the margins of our community to whom we reached out, none would consider response for this Synodal process unless there was something, some part of our faith that resonated with them in some way – even if singularly through our witness. This is the true strength of the Church: that the core of who we are and what we believe speaks volumes.

CHALLENGES OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The most significant challenge with the universal Church articulated by respondents could be articulated as a perception or optics issue: the overwhelming majority of respondents took umbrage with the Church via a perception of the institution as harsh, judgmental, lacking in pastoral care, and exclusionary. This was not limited to the Church's stance on social matters (including: the treatment of divorced Catholics; the perceived exclusion of LGBTQ people; the limited role of women in the Church; the continuing stain of the abuse scandal that many felt has still not been fully addressed), but encompassed the experiences of what some might term "average" Catholics as well; no one person was exempt from this feeling. For those familiar with the Gospel and Jesus' message of love and mercy, this discordance stood out.

MOVING BEYOND RAMPANT DIVISION IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Regrettably, this goes hand-in-hand with a sense of rampant division and fighting within the Body of Christ that is as painfully visible from the outside looking in as it is from the interior lived experience. Saint Aloysius is not exempt from the toxic division which runs rampant in the Church. The reality of polarity was clear in the feedback we received: in equal measure, respondents want the Church to say more and less on various topics; think Pope Francis is leading the Church astray and is God's greatest gift to our Church; and wants the Church to lean more to the "left" and more to the "right" in response to social issues. Needless to say, the "big

tent” reality of our faith is on full display here! This is concordant with the well-documented reality of the division that plagues the Church globally and in the United States. While there is no singular solution to heal this wound, the Church writ large has the responsibility of taking steps small and large to find ways to negotiate peace and move past this disunion. The guiding principle suggested by respondents which resonates is simple: The Church should be guided in its approach by the love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

ADDRESSING AND HEALING FROM THE SCOURGE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

One very specific challenge that arose again and again was the need for the universal Church to address its role in the evil that is sexual abuse. Very few, if any, respondents identified this as a need on the local level of the Church; indeed, both our parish and the Diocese of Bridgeport have been transparent in matters not only of sexual abuse reparation, but also in terms of finances, accountability, and other best practices. However, many members of our family of faith feel that the global Church has not done as well in responding to this evil, and that the stain on our faith still remains. Although policies may appear to be in place, a sense plagues the people of God that accountability has not been met on the highest levels in the Church. Owning our responsibility, demanding legal accountability for those who engaged in or covered up the abuse, and bringing about justice for victims are of paramount importance to our faithful.

CONSIDERING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

A final significant concern with the universal Church from our respondents pertained to the role of women. For those unfamiliar with Saint Aloysius, the community includes many men and women who are highly educated and accomplished in their professional and personal lives, making great impacts on the world and their communities. Therefore, being part of an institution so critical to their identities as the Roman Catholic Church, wherein half the population is fundamentally limited by gender, despite being the majority contributors to ministries and services of the parish, is in fundamental opposition to how the community understands justice, common sense, and organizational effectiveness. The continued question around the role of women in leadership in the Church – in ordained ministry as deacons or priests, but also in decision-making roles throughout the institution – came up consistently, including the urge for more equity.

OUR COMMUNITY'S EXPERIENCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

STRENGTHS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Regardless of differences in politics, social issues, or liturgical preferences, consistent in all feedback collected was the ringing endorsement of this parish community. Our respondents celebrated the hard work and compassionate availability of our clergy and parish staff; the intentionality and beauty of liturgical celebrations, homiletical preparation, and music; the breadth and depth of parish ministries; the commitment of the parish to serving young people and those in greatest need; and so much more. It truly was a litany of gratitude for the vibrant, engaged, generous gift that Saint Aloysius Roman Catholic Church is to its people, its town, and the larger community of New Canaan and beyond. As a family of faith, we remain grateful to Bishop Caggiano for his support of Fr. Kinnally, and to Fr. Kinnally and his pastoral team for their leadership in making our community so special.

CHALLENGES OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

One interesting point regarding the local Church that arose from our Synodal process was how few members of the parish community felt a connection to the local Church on the diocesan level. For the majority, their experience of the local Church was truly subsidiarity, focused on the lowest level – that is, the parish – with few concerned with the Diocese of Bridgeport. The case could certainly be made that this is a barometer of the success of the parish model: if a diocese supplants the parish as the primary avenue of spiritual nourishment and community, that is a marker of concern for the health of the parish. Therefore, a vibrant and healthy local parish functioning as the local model of a Church with various levels is a good to be celebrated.

We found respondents to be less critical of specific minutiae of the parish functionality and more thoughtful in ways that the local church can grow in its already abundant commitments.

Prayerfully honoring what we heard during this Synodal process, Saint Aloysius proposes the points found throughout this document for consideration. Our parish community intends to use these guideposts for the next chapter of life as a local family of faith, and we offer them to the Diocese of Bridgeport and to our Holy Father Pope Francis, as well.

CATECHESIS AND FORMATION OF ADULTS

If we had to pick a singular issue that was raised in the vast majority of responses in some way, shape, or form, it would be this: a concern for more robust catechesis and formation of the adults in our community. Whether regarding the Church's teaching on major social issues, through the lens of evangelization, to strengthen appreciation for our clergy's well-prepared homilies, or simply for a personal deepening of one's faith, so many participants raised this matter that we were struck by how clear and persistent that the Holy Spirit was being with this point.

How did Synodal respondents identify this need? For some, it was a desire to understand the Church's teachings better so as to evangelize others or defend the faith. For others, it was a sense that their spiritual hunger was yawning and something was missing in their faith lives. Still others saw a lack of catechesis and good formation as one of the root causes of the division in our Church and consider this one possible antidote. Whatever the motivation, the need was clear. Gratefully, no blame was cast in terms of why some felt this need existed in the first place, but only a desire to remedy it was expressed. Whether in the form of lectures, small faith sharing groups, Bible studies, speaker series, or book clubs, many avenues were proposed to form adults of every stage in the faith and cultivate a better catechized community. As a community, we look forward to exploring tangible ways to meet these needs for adults at every age and stage in their faith journey.

CARING FOR THOSE ON THE MARGINS OF OUR FAITH

A consistent chorus from respondents was that they were raised on a faith of love and mercy, and yet have not experienced the Church to model the same when it comes to those on the margins of our faith: specifically, those who are divorced or who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Most respondents were not lacking clarity as to what it is that the Church teaches (although some were lacking) but how our pastoral practice as the Body of Christ can more accurately emulate that of Jesus Christ and our Holy Father, Pope Francis. A hard-and-fast line in the sand with no sense of care for the individual and/or the family is not a model that resonates with anyone in need of a community's loving care. A discordance between belief and practice thereof chafes at the hearts of those in our faith community. Consideration of ways to

ensure that all feel welcomed in the loving embrace of Christ's Church, honoring the dignity of each person and the challenges of each circumstance, is of priority for consideration.

NAVIGATING CRITICAL LIFE ISSUES

While many respondents underscored the Church's emphasis on abortion as the "preeminent life issue," many others felt that the debate around abortion, and the ways the Church encourages addressing it, fills the space in such a way that other critical life issues cannot be properly addressed. This has become increasingly relevant in our political discourse and governmental practices. While this is not for the Saint Aloysius community to litigate, our responsibility is to ensure that we are modeling the values of Catholic Social Teaching by honoring the dignity of the human person, from conception to natural death in all aspects of life including war, immigration, the death penalty, gun violence, access to health care and living wages and serving all of those in need. Saint Aloysius has a very strong pro-life ministry and an equally strong commitment to acts of service and charity as a parish, and we have been challenged to look at how we can take a more comprehensive approach to protecting the sanctity of human life.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE FACE

Because Saint Aloysius has a very vibrant youth ministry program that received great support from respondents, it is clear that young people are on the hearts and minds of our community in a way that is commensurate with the global Church's attention to this demographic. Questions swarm of how to maintain retention and engagement of young people despite disengagement and disaffiliation, trends which Christianity has experienced across the board and with which the Church has been grappling for some time.

One component to understanding these issues is to acknowledge authenticity as a core value of young people, who perceive inauthenticity and hypocrisy in our institution and thus do not wish to be a part of it. As we have already mentioned, the toxic division and spirit of judgmental exclusion in our Church are not invisible to those within or without, and young people want no part of it. Complicating all of this is the mental health pandemic which chokes young people: the influx of anxiety and mental health concerns create a significant obstacle that prevents their

flourishing as the people God made them to be, and the Church has not responded effectively in being a home for young people navigating these realities.

A significant barrier to entry that supplements those is a lack of “being the Church they want to see”; this is to say that the Church creates space only for those of a certain age and life stage, with implicit and sometimes explicit expectation that a role in the Body of Christ can only come after “dues have been paid” and a certain age has been reached. We know how untrue this is: from the young saints who inspire us, to the disciples called in youth, to Jesus Himself, who sanctified this stage of life with his presence, to be young is a sacred time so worthy of our engagement. Our challenge, therefore, is to find ways not only to amplify the voices of young people through wonderful accompaniers and advocates, but to make space for young people themselves to be protagonists and leaders in our faith community.

CONCLUSION

It was a sacred privilege for the Saint Aloysius Synod delegates to facilitate these moments of listening and learning and compile this report for the Diocese of Bridgeport and, in turn, the national and global Church. To be part of a synodal process is to decrease so that the Holy Spirit might increase, to carefully read the pulse of a community for where the heartbeat is animated by the Holy Spirit. The challenges before us as a Church are not light ones, but they are sacred in their own right because they have been laid forth by the people of God, inspired by how the Lord has moved in their lives and hearts. We look forward to continuing this synodal way, discerning together our journey as a family of faith and, in the words of Ephesians, “trusting in Him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ever could ask or imagine.”