



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission



Immaculate Conception
Catholic Church

May 15, 2022

ICC's Synod Report

What We Have to say!

At the end of March, our parish submitted our summary of what we heard during the nine listening sessions we held at Immaculate Conception in January, February and March 2022. This report will be combined with reports from parishes throughout the Diocese of Richmond to create a diocesan report, and that report will be used to write a national report, and then submitted with reports from around the world for consideration at the Synod of Bishops in October of 2023. The purpose of the gathering in Rome is simple: to discern what it means to listen to one another as a Church, and how we might continue that journey. Take the time to read what we heard at ICC, and consider how we might better dialogue with each other in the future.



SESSION ONE: COMMUNION

Who Is and Is Not On the Journey?

Our parish (ICC) journeys together well. We are welcoming, inclusive and uniquely diverse in terms of race, culture, income and ages – to those that arrive on their own. We do not, however, reach out actively to those “on the margins,” and there is no plan to identify the missing or to reach them. This includes the homebound, those who “disappeared” during COVID, youth, young adults and families, and “virtuals” (those who are participating only virtually). The broader Catholic Church excludes or marginalizes many from the journey. Women are marginalized by the power

structure and there is a lack of diversity in the clergy (mostly white men) with minorities, married people, and women notably excluded.

Young people find the church unrelatable and unwelcoming, particularly in its treatment of women, LGBTQ communities, and its structure of celibate white male priests. Like the larger society, the Church is divisive and becoming more so. It is hard to “journey together” when so many are excluded and marginalized by the Church.

(Continued on page 2)



“It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium.”

-Pope Francis

COMMUNION (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Who is and who is not listened to?

At ICC, Father seems open and cares what others think, and is present to all, even after daily Mass. "Old Guard" parishioners tend not to reach out to newer parishioners. It is not clear how one can have their voice heard. There are also no opportunities to address/discuss race and other larger and controversial issues.

The wider institutional Catholic Church listens to itself, and the clergy and Bishops make the decisions. The laity is without guidance or leadership on how to get listened to. All the groups left out of the journey are also not listened to.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CALLING US TO...

- Empower the laity to speak up.
- Invite the new and uninvolved into dialogue.
- Reach out to the missing, the homebound, young people, the "virtuals," and the marginalized: "No matter what, you are welcome here."
- Ecumenical ministry.
- Women and Married priests and deacons.
- Listen to and respect everyone, even those with whom we disagree.
- Appreciate other cultures.
- Help families and individuals learn and celebrate faith at home.
- Connect our faith to issues in society today (especially racism).
- Be grateful, listen more, love more and recognize that we are a work-in-progress.

How do our liturgies promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy and encourage them to live lives of faith?

Our simple accessible style of liturgy is engaging. The music is inspiring, meaningful and uplifting. Liturgical ministers are friendly, inviting, diverse, respectful and joyful.

Father's homilies tell us how to live (mission) out in the world and call us to check ourselves, including the "second homily" at the end.

*"I am renewed and encouraged by the wisdom, insight and the different and diverse perspectives I gain from our ICC community in all of its forms, both large and small."
-John*



Dates:
February 13 and 16, 2022

SESSION TWO:

COMMUNICATION & DIALOGUE

How do Catholics communicate in the world today?

Individual Catholics communicate through actions, interpersonal encounters and materials. Some communicate through their silence (walking away from the Church); others communicate by their example of good Catholic principles and values in their opinions and lives (personal morality, helping the poor, combating racism). We communicate after Mass, while volunteering, at home, or in the workplace. Books, speakers, publications, on-line groups, social media and on-line Masses offer a range of communication about our faith.

The Pope is a great communicator (Instagram, national press) but not on other levels: Pope to bishops, diocese to individual Catholics, or between parishes.

Digital/social media makes information very accessible, but with a loss of human connection, reliability, civility, and availability of access (elderly & poor).

(Continued on page 3)

How is the Church dialoguing, collaborating, and resolving conflicts with members of other Christians, non-Christians, and people with no religious affiliation?

While this dialogue and collaboration is valued by the universal Church, it is not prevalent in the US Church or our diocese; both seem to be less and less open to collaborating or resolving any type of conflict.

At ICC, some have experienced this in the past (LARCUM, VBS collaboration among congregations, diversity circles) but don't see it happening today.

What areas/issues in society is/should the Church [be] focused on?

The "Pope Francis Church" is clearly focused on peace, climate/environment, care for others (especially the marginalized), poverty, human rights, synodality, embracing everyone, the Church's humble roots, and interfaith dialogue. Many complained that the U.S. Church and Bishops have essentially become an arm of the Republican party, focused on abortion and gay marriage (to the exclusion of other justice issues), and sexual abuse. The Diocese focuses more on money (e.g., Lenten appeals) than social justice.

"This [faith-sharing] group has sustained me throughout the past year and hopefully for many years to come."
- Louise

The Church should pay more attention to:

- Catholic Social Teaching, particularly racial justice, gap between rich and poor, climate/environmental justice, nuclear weapons, hunger...political, not partisan.
- Engaging/including those we have lost or excluded (LGBTQ+, youth/young adults, elderly/homebound).
- New Church leadership models which expand the role of the laity and women (including ordination).
- More nuanced discussion on abortion (economic factors, contraception).

SESSION THREE:

CALLED TO MISSION

How does our parish equip/empower people to go out and live the gospel of Jesus Christ in their daily lives?

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CALLING US TO...

- Consider new leadership options within the Catholic Church (less clerical, patriarchal).
- Address the gap between Pope Francis and the U.S. Bishops/dioceses.
- Better interconnect Catholic parishes and organizations.
- Reach out, share resources and learn about and embrace other denominations, and non-Christian organizations.
- Focus more on social justice issues.
- More nuanced discussion on abortion (economic factors, contraception).

In Our Parish:

- Greater effort for recognizing and utilizing people's gifts to support the work of the parish.
- More small groups on critical issues done in a way that honors the human dignity of everyone involved.
- Keep up the work of personal, in person interaction.
- On-going Adult Faith Formation.
- More deacons/staff and greater collegiality between priests and laity.



Dates:

March 13 and 16, 2022

Many mentioned small faith sharing groups and adult formation as important to equipping and empowering people to live the gospel.

Parish outreach ministries (e.g., ICC Food) offer (see EMPOWER, next page)

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CALLING US TO...

- More/better communication.
- Train priests how to work with laity.
- Develop and implement an intentional way to identify/form people for ministry and leadership.
- Ecumenical ministry.
- An active, synodal parish council.

Empower (continued from page 3)

opportunities to live out the gospel locally. Care for Creation, the tree and water filter projects, and selling Fair Trade goods help parishioners to connect and build relationships with the global family.

Fr. John is a gifted homilist. His homilies relate scripture to the modern world (political and global issues) and reference ways to live out the Gospel in our lives.

What obstacles do we face in living and professing our faith in the public? How does our parish overcome those obstacles? What is still needed?

Misunderstanding and prejudice about Catholicism in our culture and the lack of inter-faith dialogue are obstacles. More guidance and tools to share our faith and teaching on the differences (and similarities) between Catholics and other Christian denominations are needed.

How are lay leaders given responsibility? To what extent do they have authority to make decisions?

This depends on the pastor and his ability/willingness to delegate.

Our pastor delegates and trusts lay leaders to help guide and facilitate. Some ministry leaders are given a lot of responsibility at ICC, working in collaboration with Fr. John.

Clericalism is an issue. People make decisions in all walks of life; in Church, only the ordained make these decisions. Lay leaders can make schedules but not much else. Priests/clergy are not trained to work with lay people. Sometimes, it's unclear what ministries exist, who the leaders are, what their mission is and what authority they have. An organizational chart would be helpful. We also need to reach out to new people and make personal contact.

*"My gifts are appreciated. I have found a home."
-Mario*

What opportunities does the parish offer for Ministry formation and leadership development for laity?

Most were unaware of formation opportunities for lay people. Everyone is encouraged to participate, but training/formation and mentoring are needed to understand "why" we do what we do, not just "how."

Paid staff (often perceived of as "auxiliary clergy") are relied on as leaders. There is no visible leadership outside of staff and ministry leads.

In what ways do parish leaders offer opportunities for dialogue?

Small groups, Synod sessions, adult formation, stories and Fall fellowship are opportunities for dialogue. More of these are needed, including socials, coffee and donuts, and fun events.

How are decisions made for our parish?

It's unclear how decisions are made. Fr. John (as "CEO") sets the vision, parameters/boundaries, and relies on staff/ministry leads to implement. Laity want involvement in decisions; leadership requires humility to listen.

This newsletter is a report of Immaculate Conception's Synod on Synodality listening sessions that were held in January, February, and March of this year. About 100 parishioners participated, including our parish Youth Group, and we sent this report to the Diocese for consideration in the diocesan report.