

# Synodal Process Listening Sessions: Parish Report

The purpose of the listening sessions was to assess how we as a church are journeying together at a parish, archdiocese, national, and global level. In this report, we will focus only on feedback in areas that we as a parish can control; we will not discuss other issues that arose during the sessions, such as priestly celibacy or the impact of scandals within the worldwide church. Your thoughts in areas affecting the global church or the archdiocese were communicated to the archdiocese and will be included in its report to the Synod of Bishops.

## Concerning Father Vu and the Staff

Parishioners repeatedly praised the dedication and hard work of both Father Vu and the staff. Parishioners enormously appreciated the humility, compassion, loving care, and commitment to keep everyone safe and healthy. They help to hold the parish together, especially during the pandemic.

A number of parishioners expressed concern about the future time when Father Vu will be. That same concern, incidentally, was expressed when Father Ramon was reassigned. The ensuing discussions noted that we should be accepting of, celebrate, and be thankful of the individual gifts that each priest brings. (And to be thankful that our parish is still large enough to have a priest.)

Parishioners also stressed that besides being our spiritual leader, our pastor is a human being who needs our support.

## Concerning The Mass

There was unanimous praise for our choir – for the time, effort, and passion of the musicians, for Margaret’s leadership and careful curation of music appropriate for each mass, and for the way in which the music enriches the message of the mass and helps us to recognize that we are in the presence of God.

There was universal support for streaming our masses, and unanimous support for streaming in the future.

Some parishioners also hoped that Father Vu could leave his microphone on during recitation of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Without it, it is difficult to pray in unison, and in some cases, portions of the Creed have been skipped.

Many parishioners expressed their appreciation for expressions of cultural diversity (such as homilies and prayers of the faithful in multiple languages, the observance of a particular culture’s traditions). They were hopeful that these expressions of diversity can be expanded.

There was also a discussion of our parish’s behavior before mass. There was an equal division between those who wanted greater reverence and those who advocated for greater freedom to converse and get to know others before mass.

## Hospitality

Many parishioners had a very strongly held belief that our parish is a very welcoming community. Unfortunately, a significant number felt equally strongly that our parish is unwelcoming. Much of the reason for the negativity could reflect the current racial and gender divisions in our society.

Overwhelmingly, we heard that our parish should be multicultural, multigenerational, inclusive, and diverse. As someone said, “All are welcome. Be curious about people who you don’t agree with or who are different from you.”

One of the methods suggested to identify those who are new or visiting is to ask them to introduce themselves (if they feel comfortable doing so) during mass. This allows us to know who to invite for coffee and donuts or to have a welcoming conversation.

Also, hospitality does not happen at the front door or the welcome table. It happens everywhere in our church, and it is the responsibility of each of us to make particularly those we don’t know feel welcome.

## Children and Youth

A substantial number of parishioners had high praise for our children and youth programs, which they felt was a real gift to participating families. However, there was significant concern for youth and teens who aren’t experiencing a connection to the church, as well as for young adults who are leaving the church. This is an area for further reflection and prayer, as well as sharing of thoughts about possibilities and direction. For example, there was enthusiastic praise for the Trekkers program as well as the junior high program for students serving in the Skagit valley, but no comparable program for youth who do not feel comfortable with these. What can we offer these young people?

As part of the problem of attracting greater participation from young people in the life of the parish, one suggestion was that we seek ways to involve youth more deeply in the mass. At Holy Family ~~at~~ mass on Sunday at 5:00 PM, for example, all ministries of the mass (lectors, eucharistic ministers, altar servers, sacristan, and choir) are served by youth, and a youth dinner and meeting follow.

Given the current shortage of vocations, a number of parishioners suggested that we find ways to encourage knowledge of the role of deacons, nuns, brothers, and priests in the Catholic church.

Another suggestion involved developing ministries that encourage multigenerational involvement so that older adults can get to know youth and youth can get to know people of all ages. This could include confirmation, where several parishioners suggested that sponsors have a more active role in the classes.

## New/Returning Catholics

We need to build connections between new or returning Catholics and existing ones. Currently, we don’t know who is returning; there should be some organized way of making them known to the parish so that existing parishioners can embrace them.

Possibly, we need to develop a program for returning Catholics, especially one that is oriented around the Catechism and the mass.

Several people suggested that sponsors play a more active role in the RCIA program.

## Events to Build Community

Recently, we had different groups sponsor Stations of the Cross followed by Soup Night. We need to have more events like this.

Our parish has the only Senior Singles group on the East Side. There was strong advocacy for continuing this program, and a hope that it could be publicized so that seniors in other parishes would join.

Groups like Mom's Morning Out, the Hiking Club, and both the Men's and Women's Retreats, Faith and Brew with Father Vu, the auction, the Crab Feed, events for married couples, and participation in Adult Faith Formation classes were singled out as excellent programs for building community. We should encourage parishioners to extend personal invitations to those otherwise not attending these events.

## Faith Formation

A consistent request was that we offer adult faith formation classes. Actually, our parish traditionally has had a strong faith formation program, and many of the classes requested either have been or are being offered. How can we better publicize these offerings?

There was also a request for Father Vu to hold seminars three to four times a year. Along with this was the feeling that, unless our pastor teaches a course, it does not really count as Catholic religious education.

## Social Justice/Community Outreach

Many parishioners stressed the importance of the parish continuing to emphasize social issues such as racism and environmental destruction. Some of this involved a request for social justice classes which already exist or were held at St. John Vianney.

A few parishioners felt that SJV should reaffirm our commitment to Vatican II.

There was also praise for the work of St. Vincent de Paul, for support to Afghan and Ukrainian refugee families, and for using some of our property to grow food for the community.

## Communication

We have so many activities at the parish that the newsletter can seem overwhelming. One suggestion was that the top of the newsletter include a table of contents with links to the pertinent articles, which eliminates the need for scrolling. It would also be helpful to indicate which newsletter entries are new.

Many parishioners felt a sense of isolation from other parishes and from the archdiocese, so that we are working without a sense of what other parishes or other Catholics are doing.

Some parishioners enjoyed participating in the listening sessions so much that they did it multiple times, while others suggested that we make listening sessions a regularly scheduled activity.

## Ministries

Some participants requested ministries that already exist at SJV. The problem is not one of the absence of the ministry, but of awareness of its existence. The question then is what more can we do to make parishioners aware of the ministries we do have.

There was overwhelming praise for the diversity and the multiplicity of ministries available in our parish. (That said, some parishioners stated that finding out what ministries are available is a daunting task.) Many parishioners expressed sorrow that they have become less active as their lives became busier or they've grown older. Listening session participants stressed the importance of active participation to feel part of our church community. We – each of us – are the church!