

Summary ~ St. Perpetua Church, Lafayette, CA Adult Synod Listening Sessions



Listening Sessions were held in person and online during February and March 2022. Eighty-three parishioners participated in the sessions; 17 identified as male, 65 as female and one as “other.” Seventy-eight were Caucasian, three, Asian and two, Hispanic. Fifty participants were 65 or over, 19 were between 50 and 65, nine were between 35 and 50, and 3 were between 18 and 35.

1. WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU ARE FACING IN LIFE RIGHT NOW THAT YOU HOPE THE CHURCH WILL ACCOMPANY YOU IN?

- There was great grief among participants that their adult offspring no longer practice their faith, and grandchildren are not baptized. It’s difficult to pass on the faith and its importance in a culture that doesn’t value church amid competing activities. Many adult children of participants as well as teen and young adults see the Church as irrelevant, unwelcoming and not concerned with the big issues facing the world.
- There is a need for compassionate, non-judgmental acceptance and support for the laity as responsible moral agents in complex and difficult life situations, including divorce and remarriage; affirmation of the identity, challenges, and choices of LGBTQ+ people, and problem pregnancies.
- Our church is very welcoming as are many others. However, people don’t feel welcome or valued in some churches, a perception reinforced by what they see and hear from the bishops at a local and national level. It’s a problem that the parish experience, positive or negative, is dependent on and controlled by the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of the clergy who come and go. The parish belongs to the people, not the pastor.

2. HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF SHARING IN THE CHURCH WORK OF BEING CHRIST’S LIFE AND LOVE FOR THE WHOLE WORLD?

- We will continue to live out our faith in daily life, embodying Jesus’ message of love and compassion, organically connected to the larger community where there is need. We will continue to develop a strong sense of service and to pass this on to our children. One participant said, *“The best testament to our faith is what we do in the secular world outside our church community.”* Another stated: *“There should be more opportunities for service in the Church to help the marginalized. This would bring compassion and humanity and reduce judgment [of others].”*
- Our parish will continue this process of synodal listening in its life and governance as we transition to a new pastor. We will strive to be a community of equals that affirms the gifts of all – youth, women, and men.
- Women experience themselves as called, gifted, and ready to serve, including as ordained ministers. One woman had considered this call; another specifically named her call to priesthood: *“I have a deep love for the Church and my local parish community. I also carry a long-standing call to ordained ministry, a gift for preaching, theological education and training, and pastoral experience. I dream of a Church where the service of women like myself will be received fully and affirmed sacramentally.”*

JOYS and OBSTACLES

- Participants consistently report deep love for the Church. They find joy in the Church's liturgical life – the Mass, music, and sacraments – and its universality across languages and cultures. They particularly experience joy and nourishment in good homilies, family engagement in the sacraments with their children, adult initiation through the RCIA, and the return of adults to the Church. They desire more diversity in preaching and would appreciate adaptation of worship to better include children and young adults.
- Participants find joy in their local faith community with its shared faith and values, mutual support of one another in both joy and difficult times. They grow when they engage in liturgical ministry and are active in social justice and outreach efforts.
- Participants are distressed about the lack of inclusivity in the larger Church, its moral rigidity, its rejection and judgment of many, its clericalism and male-only leadership, and its top-down governance. They believe that many bishops, including our own, are out of touch with reality. They do not consult with the people they serve or listen outside a silo of the like-minded. Participants want Church leadership at every level to be transparent and accountable to the faithful, and they critique what they see as the trappings and attitudes of monarchy. They report that many of those who no longer practice their faith, especially young people, have left the Church because of these things and because they believe the Church will never change. One older parishioner who remains because of the community and good homilies observed: *"We teach our children to be kind. Why would we bring them to a place that is not?"* Many are concerned about Church priorities that they perceive to be antithetical to the Gospel message or that have nothing to do with pastoral needs. *"We sing 'All are welcome' and 'welcome all who sorrow and despair' but the Church creates sorrow and despair by not accepting people who, for example, have divorced, who aren't heterosexual."*

4. THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

- Participants repeatedly cited their longing for a Church that better embodies how Jesus behaved and what he preached in his day and time. That is their top priority. They desire an inclusive church where all, in fact, are welcome and feel that they belong, including people of all sexual orientations, the divorced and remarried, non-traditional families, and returning Catholics. Liturgies would speak compassionately to their experience and be relevant for youth and young adults. Many voices would be heard in homilies and in leadership.
- To endure, the Church must become more relevant. It should evaluate its structures and traditions for their ability to respond to the needs of the modern world and contribute to human flourishing. We should keep what is still meaningful, and as one participant said, *"cast off the baggage of an earlier time."* Priorities at every level should reflect what Jesus would do in 2022 and beyond; they should focus on real issues facing humanity, such as the environment, racial justice, and poverty, not on rules and dogmatic orthodoxy. The Church should update its theological positions on human sexuality and sexual orientation, birth control, and divorce and remarriage in light of the latest scientific, sociological, and psychological knowledge. Moral norms should be compassionate, respect the complexity of these issues, and be applied consistently.

- Participants spoke of the essential role played by women in the functioning and ministries of the Church. They expressed concern that tying ordination to male gender and celibacy is putting the sacramental nature of the Church at risk. One elder went so far as to ask, “*Who will bury me?*” The belief that women should be allowed to answer their God-given call to ordained ministry was raised emphatically and consistently in every group; no one offered a different viewpoint. Women should not be dismissed because of their gender, but have their gifts appreciated and affirmed. Women’s voices should be heard from the pulpit, and they should be given positions of authority and leadership in the Church.