

St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Albany
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Synod Listening Session
Summary of Responses from Dave Rowell

Participants in Group: Mike Burgess, Jean Stern, Pat Doyle and Dave Rowell

- 1. What have been your experiences of Church? What have been your joys, hopes, and disappointments? When have you felt connected? When have you felt disconnected?**

Joys/Hopes/Connected

- a. The strongest joys/hopes and connections centered around the local church. Participants generally felt community and welcome in most of those places during their lives especially here at St. Vincent's.
- b. One participant mentioned feeling very connected because the homilies often dealt with the issues of the times and brought in Catholic social teaching to that end.
- c. One participant commented that the Catholic Church as an institution has done a lot for the poor in its outreach.

Disappointments/Lack of Connection

- a. In local churches, people felt disappointed in several instances:
 - a. When pastors preached a message that did not connect with their understanding of the faith;
 - b. A participant who had been single did not always feel welcome in a church community centered on the needs of families.
 - c. One participant as a child remembered that his mother was not welcome in the community after her divorce leading her ultimately to leave the Church.
- b. The other areas where participants felt disappointments surrounded concerns largely centered around the institutional church.
 - a. The failure of the Church to fully use the gifts of women in the diaconate and the priesthood was a source of great discontent;
 - b. A sadness about young people who are not connected to the Church who deem themselves as spiritual but not religious and finding the Church's institutional structure as not relevant to their lives.
 - c. Locally, concerns were expressed by the lack of pastoral concern and compassion in handling the loss of pensions for former employees of St. Clare's Hospital.
 - d. Several concerns centered around current and past actions of the U.S. Bishops:
 - i. The horror of the clergy sexual abuse crisis especially with the cover up and the lack of accountability.
 - ii. Their lobbying against LGBTQ concerns;
 - iii. Their overemphasis on abortion as seemingly the only pro-life issue
 - iv. The recent denial of the San Francisco Bishop of Communion to Nancy Pelosi
 - v. Their recent closure of the Catholic News Service wanted to ensure that their message comes out directly through USCCB auspices.

2. What might the Church learn from your experiences? What new dreams and surprising visions for the Church might the holy scripture be inspiring?

- a. Participants emphasized that the Church needs to focus upon fully using the gifts of both clergy and laity and push Church decision making as much as possible to the local level consistent with the principle in Catholic social teaching of subsidiarity.
- b. This emphasis can be accomplished through several means:
 - i. In our diocese, we need to open up to broaden administrative responsibility for local parishes to include lay people and women. It was noted that the Albany diocese under our current bishop has sought to have an ordained priest have final administrative responsibility for each parish.
 - ii. We need to fully involve local parishes in the decision making when transitions are made (e.g., questions surrounding consolidation of churches and who has leadership responsibility over the church -e.g., parish life director or ordained clergy)
 - iii. We need to have diversity in our local parishes so that people can choose where they are most comfortable (e.g., Masses for younger people, other communities that are more traditional in their worship).
 - iv. We need for local pastoral leadership to first emphasize “belonging” in welcoming people to the community over “behaving” and “believing”. People must first feel comfortable and welcomed. Focusing initially on “believing” is too divisive.
 - v. We need to restore the Vatican II legacy and its spirit.

3. What actions can you take? What actions should be taken by the parish or diocese?

- a. Our parish needs to provide workshops to educate people on what was intended to be accomplished by Vatican II.
- b. Our parish needs to reinforce our welcome and outreach to the community.
- c. The diocese needs to provide parishes with more input on parish leadership and parish structures.
- d. In light of the defunding of the Catholic News Service, the diocese should upgrade the diocesan newspaper to keep us informed of the issues before the church and the bishops' responses, in a timely manner.
- e. Each parish and diocese need to do a five-year plan on all aspects of diocese/parish development. This will bring many issues to the surface that will need to be addressed and resolved surround the diocese-parish relationship and the roles of the laity and the clergy.