



## *Called to be a Listening Church*

### Report on the Diocesan Phase of the Synod 2021-2023

#### Archdiocese of Regina

The Archdiocese of Regina has approximately 120 parishes and over 100,000 baptized Catholics, which is about 30% of the local population. The diocese spreads across the southern part of Saskatchewan, extending from Manitoba to Alberta and from the international border to about 51°30' latitude. In all, it is approximately 155,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The Archdiocese is served by 67 priests, half of whom come from beyond the diocese. In addition, there are 12 permanent deacons, 52 sisters, and 21 retired clergy. There are eleven women's and nine men's religious communities, two secular institutes, and two associations of the faithful.

Located in Treaty 4, these are the traditional lands of the Nêhiyawak, Nahkawé, and Nakota and homeland of the Dakota, Lakota, and Métis peoples. Treatment of Indigenous peoples by governments, the church, and settlers has been a shameful part of our history in Canada and continues to be a source of trauma and injustice. As Treaty people, first peoples and settlers are committed to walking together on this land in a spirit of reconciliation. We are convinced that the path of reconciliation provides us with a model for right relations in church and society and offers a new understanding of synodality. Synodality means walking together in truth and justice, listening to the Spirit calling us to healing and wholeness.

#### **Steps on the Path to Synod**

The diocesan phase of the Synod was inaugurated with a Synod Mass on Sunday, October 17, 2021. The Synod Team provided resources for parish use, prayers, and other materials adapted from those available from the Synod General Secretariat. Printable resources were distributed through the Archdiocesan website, and online workshops were held for parishes and groups to introduce the concept of synodality and provide practical guidelines for leading parish consultations.

Recognizing that many Catholics have family members and friends that have drifted away from church for various reasons, a resource was developed for Kitchen and Coffee Conversation. This simple outline provided entry points for conversation with people that might not want to participate in a parish gathering. So that nobody was left out, individuals were encouraged to send their responses directly to the Synod team or use a website form to send their personal reflections. The Synod team discouraged using surveys in parishes and did not provide survey questions on the Archdiocesan website.

Several groups were identified to receive invitations to contribute, including women's groups, religious orders, schools, youth groups, Indigenous people, victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse, LGBTQ2S+ persons, divorced and remarried couples, and various specialized ministries in the diocese. There was notable difficulty in framing the Synod's fundamental question for those on the margins. We discovered that asking, "How is the church 'journeying together' with you?" can be a triggering experience for those traumatized by the church.

Work with victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse has been ongoing in our diocese. To facilitate their participation in the Synod, the Archbishop's Delegate and the Victim Services Advocate offered direct contact for those who did not feel able to participate in a parish or other consultation. Their comments about the Synod and the church today were collected. It has been reported that this synodal process has been a positive (while also painful) experience for some victims of clergy sexual abuse. Others shared considerable pain and the experience of a church and its leaders that have failed them. In their comments, we hear a continuing need to accompany those the church has harmed and be a more transparent and accountable community.

Our four Catholic school divisions were invited to contribute to the Synod, resulting in opportunities to meet with three school boards. Schools were encouraged to engage in conversation with students of all ages, adapted as necessary. This conversation could connect to aspects of the curriculum that focus on dialogue, intercultural learning, anti-racism, and inclusivity. With creativity, several teachers discussed the Synod in their classrooms. Three of the school divisions submitted reports at the division level. In addition, some schools reported individually. Parishes were also encouraged to reach out to the schools in their neighbourhoods to plan consultations with parents and teachers on how schools and parishes walk together to form children, especially those preparing for sacraments.

Within the diocese, 56 of the larger parishes, both urban and rural, submitted reports. Many rural parishes are gathered in clusters centred on larger towns with the ministry of a single priest who travels considerable distances for Mass, parish meetings, and pastoral visits. Some of the parish clusters held consultations that included some or all of the parishes within their area, and so as a whole, it was not easy to assess the full participation of parishes. We estimate that 50-60% of parishes participated in the Synod, but those parishes comprise as much as 75-80% of the Catholic population in our Archdiocese. A number of conversation groups and at least fifty individuals submitted their reflections by email or through a website report form. We did not conduct a diocesan survey, but some parishes developed their own questions and each of the three school boards that reported used a survey tool.

Other groups that reported included Development & Peace-Caritas Canada, Campion College Board of Regents, the Sisters Association of the Regina Archdiocese (SARA), Centering Prayer Community, Spiritual Directors, Emmaus Family Support Ministries (a mental health support network), victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse, and two women's groups. Special consultations were held in Regina with LGBTQ2S+ participants, Indigenous Kohkums (grandmothers), survivors and intergenerational survivors of residential schools, divorced and remarried Catholics, and youth. A report was also received from the Mary of Magdala Community, a worshipping community of Catholics committed to the full inclusion of women in all ministries.

The diocesan phase of the Synod concluded May 28 with an Archdiocesan Synod Gathering in person at two parishes in Regina and Swift Current, linked by video conferencing. This report was circulated in draft form on the website, by email, and in print. About 150 people participated, and many more joined the live stream. Three ecumenical guests were invited from the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches. A positive spirit of engagement was sensed from the participants, with an eagerness to share their own experiences with the universal church. Several participants registered surprise at the issues raised in this report and offered constructive suggestions for improvement.

### **The Experience of the Journey: General Observations**

There are some critical and clear indications among the many experiences, issues, and ideas found in the reports. Principally, there appears to be a restlessness within the church. More than a simple clash of cultures that are liberal and conservative, Charismatic and traditional, lay and ordained, the restlessness in our Archdiocese appears to be about an expectation of change. Some asked for more tradition, orthodoxy, and similar ways of adhering to the faith; others asked for a more pastoral perspective, an openness to the Spirit, and the inclusion of groups typically on the margins. Most respondents passionately shared their hopes and vision for a church that actively participates in the community and is inclusive in worship and service. Our challenge is recognizing that these need not be opposing values but can be creatively expressed within the Catholic imagination. Our challenge is to articulate a vision for mission.

Respondents frequently use the term ‘the church’ in reference to bishops or priests or, at times, in relation to a nameless and anonymous institution. The Vatican II language of ‘people of God,’ or similar inclusive terms, were used intentionally by some respondents but rarely. Many of the concerns or issues raised by the respondents can be traced back to a perception of a clerical, rigid, patriarchal, or institutional church. Several interventions called for an intentional focus on the role of laity in church governance and ministry. These concerns are noted in the responses regarding women in the church but point to a more fundamental shift in the hierarchical and pastoral structures of the church.

Most people received the Synod invitation to walk together enthusiastically, although some interpreted it as a “capitulation to modernity” or a “flawed attempt at relevance.” Other respondents expressed scepticism about the Synod process, the ability to speak freely, whether narrow interest groups will co-opt the Synod, or whether clerical defensiveness will intervene to control the outcome. “Will our voices be heard?” It has become clear that most respondents value the opportunity to share and participate in collective discernment. Some respondents “have been strengthened by this process of gathering and listening to one another’s hearts.” “Some are excited and grateful that the Catholic Church seems willing to listen and acknowledge its members who are trying to model Christ, but still feel that they cannot believe or practice some of the traditions.”

A common theme in many responses was an apparent disconnect of church leadership from lived experience. This was identified in various aspects of leadership and management of the church, including a frequent concern about preaching in our parishes. Those calling for lay preaching and other lay ministries cited the experiences of marriage, raising children, and career as areas in

which celibate clergy are frequently ineffective in their preaching. Other respondents noted an emphasis on piety and doctrine rather than equipping parishioners for the challenges of the 'outside world.' A related concern is the language of the homily. In our increasingly secular world, it was felt that "we need to communicate in language suitable for the listener."

### **Call for Inclusivity**

Numerous responses explicitly called for greater inclusivity, with many citing Pope Francis' frequent calls for the church to go to the peripheries. Inclusivity was understood differently among the respondents, some of whom understood 'inclusivity' as an attitude of tolerance, openness, acceptance, and welcome. Others spoke about the church reaching out to marginalized groups such as women, Indigenous, young, old, disabled, LGBTQ2S+ persons, and divorced and remarried Catholics. Some noted that racism persists in our society, especially regarding Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and visible minorities. Inclusivity is about forming and nurturing our communal life together. Some respondents suggested that inclusivity requires a heightened value for community and the need to live out our faith by acting and living like Christ.

Inclusivity was understood to involve an essential synodal skill: active listening. "We need to strengthen our spiritual, psychological, and philosophical instincts." "We must listen with mercy." The church as a whole must be moved to compassion and action in support of those cast off from our society to make a preferential option for those most in need. "We need to learn to walk together and do this in an active concrete way."

In this report, we offer our recent Archdiocesan experience of walking with Indigenous peoples as a model of synodality. Yet, we have not successfully included Indigenous people in the Synod consultations. We acknowledge that the past year has been particularly difficult for Indigenous Peoples, especially those who are survivors of residential schools. Indigenous people have challenged us to set aside our carefully constructed Synod questionnaires to listen to the experience of the survivors. Walking with Indigenous Peoples at this particular time in our history reminds us of the need to accompany and listen. One Indigenous respondent wrote, "We may not need 'buildings' for healing but have more sharing circles like this one... this is 'walking together,' this is healing for me and all of us! The healing comes when we gather together and walk together."

A series of responses were received from people associated with the Tridentine (Latin) Mass community. These expressed a general desire for orthodoxy, traditional teaching and practice, catechesis of all ages, and continued access to the Tridentine Mass. Interventions at the Synod Gathering by adherents of the pre-conciliar liturgy described experiences of exclusion and a desire for greater acceptance by church leadership.

Interventions at the Synod Gathering noted the absence of seniors' voices in the draft report, calling for more attention to "giving dignity to the sick and dying." The anonymity of the reporting process made it difficult to identify contributions by seniors; however, the consultation phase did not detect specific issues related to ministry with seniors. Pandemic experiences in Long-Term Care facilities in Canada, the lack of palliative care services in many parts of the

country, and the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia suggest that issues affecting the elderly should receive greater attention within the church.

Many respondents requested inclusive language in liturgy and the naming and imaging of God, identifying male-gendered language as an ongoing source of alienation. Others pointed out that in addition to attention to language, we must also envision a just community that includes a diversity of culture, language, race, gender, education, wealth, and social status. The peace of Christ that we profess at Communion must be expressed in the church community and the world in which we live. They envision parishes reaching out in their neighbourhoods to the marginalized and alienated.

One could summarize comments on inclusivity as a desire for change in parish culture so that people demonstrate behaviours and participate in the world as ‘companions on the journey’ who walk with others in the way Christ calls us. Such a change has implications for our parishes’ leadership requirements.

### **Youth and Family**

Insights regarding youth in the church are drawn from parish and individual responses, consultations at a major Archdiocesan youth rally, and extensive surveys conducted by our Catholic school divisions. There was a consistent concern about the lack of youth attendance and involvement in church activities and calls for more targeted youth programming. While an active youth ministry is operated out of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, it is a matter of concern that only one parish in the Archdiocese has a paid youth minister. It was noted that it is difficult to attract youth ministers if parishes do not offer a living wage and that unrealistic expectations about youth formation have led to a high turnover in youth ministry personnel.

Critical steps to engaging youth were identified, including involving youth in projects and decision-making so that they feel that they are part of the church, letting youth bring in new ideas and participate in leadership roles (such as parish and finance councils), and forging closer connections between parishes and schools to aid a coherent formation from sacramental preparation through adolescence. Some high school students asked for more catechesis. Several respondents suggested a more interactive Mass. Others proposed the need for safe places for youth to talk. Several suggestions were received about assisting parents in evangelizing their children. Numerous ideas were proposed to assist parishes in developing their ministry with youth. These included youth groups, Christian field trips, catechetical podcasts, social justice work, cookies after Mass, games nights, and visits by parish priests and other parish leadership to local schools. Liturgical proposals included youth Masses, modern music, contemporary language, and involvement of children and youth in liturgical ministries. Following the restored order of the sacraments, some parents are concerned about whether their children are old enough for Confirmation. Others are contemplating delaying First Communion until their children are old enough for Confirmation.

One youth respondent pleaded, “Help us find our why to be involved?” Young people expressed a longing to belong, but many feel the current church structures are closed off and uninviting. Adolescence is challenging for youth searching for identity and a sense of purpose in life. The

church is being asked to walk together with youth on this journey and assist them on their way. Dealing with issues that teens face, parishes are encouraged to strengthen safe environment protocols, help with bullying (including online), and help with mental health and self-esteem. As noted above, a disconnect from lived experience was strongly emphasized by youth, who called for preaching that has more relevance to today's world.

North American societal patterns complicate the challenges for pastoral ministry to youth and families. "People of the church community don't accept people entirely unless they are a nuclear family." An overview of responses would suggest that families are struggling and seeking support from their church. Respondents called upon the church to assist families by equipping them mentally, physically, and spiritually. A number of interventions were received suggesting improvements to marriage preparation programs and greater clarity about the annulment process. "Prayer is essential but must be matched by practical assistance, especially for marriages in crisis."

Interchurch families offered a distinctive response to the Synod. An interchurch family is one in which one spouse is Catholic, and the other is a baptized active member of another Christian church, participating to some degree in each other's church. Once seen as a problem, these families make a vital contribution to ecumenical relations as they can serve as a bridge to other churches and frequently become key leaders in parish and other ecumenical bodies. Yet, most interchurch couples choose to remain anonymous in their Catholic parish. These couples often felt treated as pastoral problems and described the periodic transfer of parish priests as the most disruptive experience in their spiritual and family life. Recent consultation with interchurch couples indicated considerable interest and hope for the Synod and pastoral practice in the diocese. However, many of the same couples indicated that after some decades of struggle in Catholic parishes, they primarily worship in their other church, where they find support and acceptance.

### **Parish Vitality**

For many Catholics, the parish is a building, a place of worship, and the ministries associated with that place. Few people experience the parish as a community whose ministries are experienced in the homes and businesses of the whole parish. Ministry is thus limited to things in the building and by the priest, reinforcing clerical divisions among the faithful.

Submissions recognized the great importance of Catholic schools to evangelization and passing on the faith. There were many requests for substantive faith formation for all ages; children, youth, and adults (including Catholic teachers). Observations were made on a lack of connection or collaboration with local Catholic schools. Others respondents noted that the family is the principal place of evangelization and needs support from both parish and school. Interventions at the Synod Gathering highlighted the importance of parish-based evangelization projects. Programs such as Alpha, Word on Fire, and numerous podcasts and Catholic speakers were mentioned. Others mentioned that evangelization is strengthened by sacramental life, particularly the Eucharist. "Building faith involves evangelizing and teaching, but people seem too busy, too self-satisfied with their grasp of the faith, or think they are somehow too incompetent to learn more. Aside from the exceptional situation of RCIA classes, there seems to be little or no

opportunity besides a 5-10 minute homily on Sunday for the wider church to ‘walk together on the road to Emmaus’ hearing Jesus’ teachings explained and getting excited by them.”

Numerous respondents indicated the importance of parish outreach to the neighbourhood and involvement in community projects and concerns. Communication within the parish was noted as a perennial problem, with many parishes struggling to communicate more than the bare essentials of the parish or diocesan programs and activities. A lack of Catholic media limits the awareness of Catholic news and opinion from beyond the diocese.

Shifts in rural population were confirmed to have detrimental effects on many parishes’ vitality. Age and other demographic shifts are also factors. These factors have contributed to low attendance and financial stresses in recent years, thus leading to numerous parish closures. However, many parishes have reported an undue focus on parish finances. Travel distances, administrative load, and other factors related to the clustering of parishes take a toll on rural priests, making it difficult to respond to new pastoral opportunities.

It was noted that parishes need to be open to new ideas and appreciate the gifts that others have to offer. During the COVID pandemic, many parishes were able to adapt and innovate. Respondents have expressed the value of moving “out of our comfort zone.” Others have expressed a desire to improve parish efforts in acceptance, listening, living Christ-like lives, welcoming newcomers, deepening trust, learning about Indigenous history, loving one another, dialogue, and sharing gifts and talents. Some respondents cited Pope Francis calling for a “culture of encounter,” for the parish to be a “field hospital,” and for the church to live on the peripheries.

Many respondents expressed the importance of the Eucharist to parish life and called for education on its central significance to the Catholic faith. This is evident in those parishes which no longer have Mass every Sunday. The formation of basic faith communities was proposed in some responses. Several basic communities might be led by lay ministers under the pastoral leadership of a priest. Other ministry proposals included the deployment of parish nurses, who would connect the church’s healing ministry to pastoral ministry within the parish. A number of respondents noted the need for mental health training for clergy and other parish leaders.

There was a recognition that a central factor in the vitality of a parish is the degree of community involvement. Doing things for one another and one’s neighbours builds community participation and commitment and leads to a flourishing parish.

Quite a few responses from Regina respondents call attention to the lack of Mass times accessible for people working shifts or weekends. It was noted that in several other dioceses, youth Masses scheduled late on Sunday are also helpful for shift workers.

One parish reported some unique experiences related to their multicultural context. This francophone parish has many parishioners who are first-generation Canadians. These newcomers have come from francophone countries around the world and bring their distinctive cultural and linguistic experiences. This parish held numerous sessions for the Synod consultations, including one in Kirundi. As a parish formed to preserve a particular linguistic heritage, they now embrace

a plurality of languages found nowhere else in the diocese. Many of the same pastoral challenges exist in other parishes, yet they have a distinctive expression in light of the ecclesial culture brought here with these parishioners.

### **Leadership: Lay & Ordained**

Parish leadership is a key aspect mentioned throughout the submissions and is deeply connected to parish vitality. The pastor was seen as the principal leader in a parish but is not alone in this responsibility. The parish pastoral and finance councils and other designated leaders were seen as essential to the health and strength of a parish's pastoral mission. And many additional people in the parish are essential to accomplishing the many tasks that help a parish flourish. Questions of leadership are also linked to the role of the laity in the church. Some respondents raised the topic of lay participation in decision-making and governance as a meaningful form of leadership.

We heard how a clericalist model of church in which priests and bishops are the sole decision-makers aligns closely with our consumerist society, with priests relegated to servicing the spiritual needs of a passive laity. While noting that, by virtue of baptism, all of the faithful have responsibility for active involvement in ministry within the local community, frustration was expressed with how lines of authority and decision-making clash with potential lay leadership with their particular expertise or gifts. There was acknowledgement of the heavy workload of priests vis-à-vis the bottleneck of decision-making that needs to be addressed.

Patriarchy was named as a serious and pervasive issue for the church to address. When patriarchal structures and language are no longer tolerated in secular society, women are confronted with difficult and conflicting choices in their Catholic faith experience. The alienating experience of non-inclusive language has already been noted. The inclusion of women and their gifts in all aspects of church life, particularly in liturgy, ministry, and governance, was identified as an urgent concern. Support for married clergy and the ordination of women was expressed in numerous individual, school, and group submissions and the comments reported from parish consultations. In addition to specific calls for women's ordination, there were many calls for fuller participation of women in roles not restricted by ordination.

Lay leadership was noted in various liturgical ministries, the faith formation of children and the whole community, and advocacy for social justice. Leadership in justice work is the particular apostolate of the laity. Associated with a desire for more lay participation in ministry are the more specific concerns about women's roles in ministry.

Respondents identified a need for the whole church body to be responsible for pastoral care within the community. More specifically, caring for one another is a duty of every disciple and cannot be reserved as the exclusive ministry of one portion of the body of Christ. In this regard, it was noted that parish pastoral councils are too focused on finances, buildings, and maintenance and not enough on building the faith of the people entrusted to their care. Some respondents reported experiences in which priests rarely consulted the parish councils on pastoral decisions or consistently overruled them.

Numerous respondents expressed appreciation for priests with a welcoming attitude, while others shared stories of pastoral disasters that began with poor pastoral leadership. Some respondents identified the process of priest placements as a factor inhibiting strong pastoral ties. For some respondents, a lack of involvement of parish members in priest appointments contributes to a continued disconnect between the priest's gifts and the parish's needs. Respondents proposed various changes to the education and formation of clergy, including training in leadership, parish and financial administration, and mental health triage.

Many submissions mentioned the biblical notion of servant leadership. Leaders, clergy and lay, are called to be authentic in their ministry; they are to "walk the talk." There was an emphasis on continuing spiritual formation and pastoral education of clergy, noting that they must be supported with appropriate resources. Many respondents reported that clergy are frequently ill-equipped to address the pastoral challenges of their people. Questions of accountability, transparency, and authoritarianism in parish and diocesan leadership raise concerns for laypeople who have considerable management and leadership experience within their own fields.

Many respondents identified a need for leadership to be focused on people. For some, this means simplifying rituals, legalisms, and "excessive religiosity" to become a more pastoral church. Others spoke of the need to focus on social issues that impact the poor. Some respondents have a perception of inaction on matters of priority.

Respondents also noted that our diocese has trained lay spiritual directors who could be more widely utilized. Other submissions addressed the need for mental health training for priests and parish leaders. It was reported that 80% of people who suffer from mental health challenges seek help from their local parish or pastor first.

### **Engagement with the World: Dialogue in Church & Society**

The Synod themes invited consideration of how the church relates to the world. Some respondents understood the church as separate from the world, a shelter from the storm, or a people set apart. Others called for greater engagement with the world and its troubles. Connected to the earlier discussion about "Who makes up the church?" many respondents implicitly identified the church with the clergy. In contrast, the laity are called to engage with the world. Respondents mentioned social justice, ecumenism, and interfaith relations as areas where the church engages the world.

*Social Justice:* Many recognized the link to our Catholic social teaching of solidarity, the commitment to walk together with the oppressed. Sharing in the same journey as those who experience injustice, we become advocates for the voiceless. Authentic to the mission entrusted to us, we proclaim the Gospel. Numerous justice issues were mentioned in the responses, more than we can list here; however, education and action on care for creation was a repeated call. It was noted as an overwhelmingly important issue and should be integrated into homilies and parish action. One respondent wrote: "If the Church is to flourish, social justice must be at its heart." The contribution of religious communities must be noted here. Within the Archdiocese, as elsewhere, religious communities were recognized as continuing to lead the Catholic community in calling attention to systems of injustice and structures of sin.

*Ecumenism:* A consistent theme among an overwhelming number of responses was support for ecumenical cooperation and dialogue. Some called for the churches to speak boldly together on social issues. Others called for sacramental sharing with other Christians. One respondent invited us “to be aware of opportunities to pray and socialize together” with other Christians. A few responses suggested more involvement of youth in ecumenism. Recognizing the challenges for rural parishes as noted above, respondents were encouraged by efforts to unite rural people struggling with similar issues in maintaining their churches.

*Interfaith relations:* The church’s commitment to interfaith relations was also supported by several respondents. One suggestion included promoting Centering Prayer, “which transcends geographical, cultural, and religious differences.” Some responses suggested that the Catholic approach to other faiths and spiritual traditions could be a valuable framework for positive respect for Indigenous spirituality.

In addition to the dialogue beyond the Catholic Church, some respondents also expressed concern about the quality of dialogue within the church. Numerous respondents offered their approval and support for increased synodality. A few voices were critical of the synodal path, objecting that bishops and priests are endowed with decision-making authority and must continue to do so. Most respondents did not consider synodality to conflict with traditional modes of teaching and authority.

### **Acknowledging Trauma by Our Church**

Several respondents addressed tragic errors within the church for which many people continue to suffer. Numerous respondents identified the harms of residential schools and clergy sexual abuse as areas of particular shame. Other concerns were raised regarding the treatment of women facing pregnancies outside of marriage, domestic abuse, bearing difficult marriages, discrimination and exclusion of LGBTQ2S+ persons, and the continuing exclusion of women from ministry. Recognizing that there are many injustices globally, several respondents stressed that we must demand better of ourselves and our church. Yet there are many stories of how current church laws and teachings perpetuate pain and trauma. “The systematic alienation and degradation of any group of people is abusive and sinful.”

There was a strong call for truth and reconciliation action within our church. In addition to the clear voices of the survivors and intergenerational survivors of residential schools, respondents from groups, parishes, youth, schools, and many individual respondents raised the need for education about residential schools. “When I think about the history of our country and the church’s role, it makes me want to cry, so much pain and trauma.” They offered specific suggestions for their parishes and the universal church. “The church has had and still does have a lot of secrets. It’s time to open the doors, let the secrets out and for the truth to come out.” Many respondents offered sharp condemnations of church authorities who have failed to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls for Action, particularly the failure to express true contrition in church apologies for residential schools, to release church records, and to complete the best-efforts fundraising campaign. One respondent commented, “I don’t think the faith community all agree on the consequences that have plagued [First Nations, Métis, and

Inuit] people. I don't believe our community wants to accept the consequences of our true history of settlement."

Loss of Indigenous language, culture, and identity resulted from the experience of colonization. To address this, Indigenous respondents call upon the church to assist in revitalizing language, culture, and ceremony and establishing healing centres across Canada. "Bishops and those in leadership need to learn our spirituality, traditions, beliefs, who we are."

A clarion call to the universal church is that "the Doctrine of Discovery needs to be repudiated... the basis of colonization. This has to completely go!" Suggestions for the local church included that an appropriate land acknowledgement be developed and used at every Mass, education through the Kairos Blanket Exercise, holding sharing and healing circles, and the presence of an elder at the altar with the priest. "So much of our kinship/family circles have been broken through the residential school system and ongoing intergenerational effects... but these kinds of circles can help us create new family ties and kinship with each other, and together we can heal and 'walk together.'"

### **Church Teachings: "Tensions and Traditions"**

This document closes by highlighting responses which bring the reader back to the "restless anticipation" described towards the beginning. "Catholics are not so much fallen away, but driven away," summarizes how several respondents described their experiences of rejection by the church. From women, we heard of sexism, misogyny, and spiritual abuse. As noted above, several responses from individuals, parishes, and other groups, called for a re-evaluation of the current teaching on the ordination of women. Numerous responses noted the potential for women deacons with approval.

It was stressed that both the divorced and remarried and LGBTQ2S+ have suffered first from a judgemental church and society and secondly from misunderstandings of the church's teaching. Pastors and people have perpetuated restrictions not substantiated in the official doctrine and canons. One LGBTQ2S+ person emphasized the importance of a pastor's welcome, indicating their own good experience as an example. Both groups called for relaxing current norms to permit full sacramental life and acceptance. LGBTQ2S+ participants specified that "allowing the sacrament of marriage would be a clear sign of full acceptance." Divorced and remarried couples indicated that "annulment rules remain painful, confusing, and anger-provoking." There was a suggestion that the church get out of the legal aspects of marriage.

As one respondent explained: "we need to identify those who have left the church and those thinking about leaving." Others cautioned about only reaching out to those who have left with the aim of bringing them back. "We need first to understand the reasons why people leave." Some respondents identified church law as the cause of hurt and suggested a "return to Gospel-based values" instead of church law. Many respondents viewed church teaching as rigid and lacking inclusivity.

There were many examples of respondents not agreeing with church teaching on matters relating to access to the sacraments. For example, there were numerous calls for sharing the eucharist

with other Christians, the divorced and remarried, or those in irregular situations. Some respondents addressed matters of pastoral policy such as the baptism of the children of unwed parents and the anointing of people choosing assisted suicide.

There were calls for changes in the church's teaching on contraception to permit non-abortive forms of contraception. Other comments called for greater tolerance for abortion. These opinions appear to reflect the struggle that Catholic families have in living within complex and imperfect relationships and realities.

### **A Concluding Note**

One can sense the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual energy that has been expended across the Archdiocese as part of the Synod. A great desire for journeying together as church was evident, and there was much goodwill. We can confidently point to the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit in this synodal consultation. Following the Synod Gathering, a participant sent the following:

*“Above all, as a ‘listening church,’ we need to be on our knees before God, asking and begging for the grace to know what God is calling us towards and being willing to embrace this with humility and a willingness to sacrifice all else. ... Our serious failures in listening and in obedience require our firm and joyful commitment to repentance and amendment.”*

Yet, we acknowledge that the enormous energy expended and the goodwill accompanying it does not mean that we are a fully synodal or “listening church.” Not only did we discover that the synodal process had flaws but the acutely compressed time frame for the Archdiocesan process created unreasonable expectations and unrealized goals in hearing those from whom the church needs to listen and learn. This is evident in this critique transmitted through the Victims Service Advocate:

*“The synod process could have been an opportunity for deeper conversations with those who have been sexually abused by clergy in the Archdiocese. Instead it was a missed opportunity, not only by the Archdiocese, but the larger church as well. ...*

*“For many who have endured clergy sexual abuse, the synod process itself felt harmful, disrespectful and dismissive, showing a great deal of disregard even for those trying to make a change. The church needs to move towards being a more receptive, transparent, and accountable community. ... Had a trauma-informed perspective been used, there could have been a much different outcome. ... NOW is [the] time to come to the realization that the impact of clergy sexual abuse reaches deeply into the lives of many.”*

Other voices felt that the Synod process amplified the voices of those seeking change in church practice or teaching and did not adequately represent the voice of the many parishioners. While there is open criticism and detailed suggestions for change, many respondents expressed the value of their church community and the central place of the church in their lives.

It must be evident that this phase of the journey to becoming a synodal church is only the first step. The synodal process of encounter, listening, and reflection needs to be part of the fabric of our church here in the Archdiocese of Regina. Pope Francis reminds us that we “must move not occasionally but structurally towards a synodal church, where all can feel at home and participate.”