



Who Do We Want to Become? Listening Summary.

Introductory Note

Last month we had our latest set of listening sessions on the question of who we want to become as we found the one new parish. From this input the pastoral Council is going to create priorities and a vision for moving forward, which will be the topic of the next set of listening sessions. At the same time we wanted to provide this summary in a timely fashion to keep you all apprised of what

was heard at the September listening sessions. - In Christ, Fr Thompson

Listening Session Synthesis and Summary from Pastoral Council

Across the three sessions, parishioners discussed the need for evangelization ministries, with a special emphasis on Youth/Young Families, Marriage (enrichment and preparation), and equipping current parishioners via catechetical instruction and other Christian Formation opportunities. There was also concern to remember un- or underserved groups like fallen-away Catholics, Catholics who have a barrier in their lives to receiving Communion (often a marriage issue) and the needy. There was also discussion about supporting all parents in their vocation as first and primary educators of children (be it home education, the parish school, other private school, or state school); how using the school, or otherwise, we could serve this need better.

In terms of the ministries of the parishes and the goal of future unity, participants expressed again the need to focus on youth and young families, Evangelization and the Christian Formation that parishioners would need to carry it out, charitable outreach to the marginalized, and a desire for more social events and spiritual retreats and speakers. The Spanish session in particular expressed a desire to call children and youths more into service in the community, especially in liturgical roles. As a practical matter, people expressed the need to combine like ministries as we consolidate (but that this could be an opportunity to be more focused and effective, and a way to shed outdated habits and structures).

One excellent input was that we need to build our foundation first in the new parish. I.e. When we plan the new parish, start with the essentials such as worthy worship, making that as full and ideal as possible, and then start looking at other ministries and events that build upon that.

At the same time, there is not a lot of awareness among parishioners of all the ministries and events and opportunities available at all the churches. The solution is communication but also fostering social connections and community now.

Fr. Thompson's observations

I want to begin by once more encouraging everyone to participate in future listening sessions more, and more fully; the practicality and impact of the questions being asked is only increasing and I am listening and setting priorities from the input. I also must emphasize that the process is continuing apace. I worry that when the tangible effects begin to roll out in earnest it will be upsetting and painful to those who perhaps tacitly assume nothing will change beyond the letterhead.

In terms of content, we heard loud and clear a need to be oriented toward youth and families. That said, I feel the need to offer something that might be challenging for some. Young people and families who go to Church, and especially those seeking the Church in OCIA or returning after leaving for a time, often hunger for certain things: a challenging faith that calls us to conversion over comfort, a faith that forms and is not formed by secular worldview or politics, a sense of community and social belonging that begins with God. Aesthetically and intellectually, many are attracted to old wisdom and traditional beauty, yet always applied in the here-and-now, integrated into our present church culture with Charismatic fervor. If we are going to put our focus on bringing youth from the margin to the center, we will need to embrace these hungers of their hearts as well.

I think we can do this (indeed, shocking no one: I think we should and must!), but I also know this may be a major challenge for some of us. To illustrate, something troubled me in the listening sessions, both during table summary reports but also what I overheard as I walked around: There were several incidents where participants expressed or mentioned the desires of young people and families, and/or asked if certain ministries were well calibrated to the future, but were interrupted or shut down by other participants. While we should not lose sight of the desires and wisdom of our elders, of course, we need to realize that this vision of serving the young will mean passing on primary leadership, decision-making, and priority-setting. This is good and needed, but I want us to be sober and aware that this will mean change, and of what kind.

That said, I don't want to eclipse the other major fruit of the conversation: a need to foster greater unity and shared identity. I can't emphasize enough the need to get to know one another, and to stop seeing the Church primarily as your building, Mass time, or favorite ministry or program. This year we need to continue looking for opportunities to collaborate and invite everyone to everything, aware that the next step is unified activities being required in the 2026-2027 program year. Please embrace this, even if it is hard or frightening, especially if you have been tempted to strategically participate in the process to "save" your church or Mass time or favorite ministry. I am trying to be open and honest, trying to make the changes gradual and incremental rather than sudden, trying to give you space and time; if you do not take it, the things that are coming down the pike now and through the next several years are going to feel jarring and upsetting. I care about you, and I want to spare you that if I can; please see honesty and care in my directness, even bluntness, about this.

The Spanish-speaking session also called attention to a particular need to support those living the vocation of Matrimony and helping ease the way for those who need a civil or non-Catholic union perfected by the Sacrament. This is very important, and we have a number of ideas in mind. They also talked about the importance of children and youth taking on ministries, especially at Mass.

Finally, I was encouraged by the number of these and other practical suggestions or requests that match with things I have been thinking and praying about for a while. Chief among these is a new staff position focused on Evangelization, community life, and spiritual development. I'm taking your input in the listening sessions and elsewhere as a sign that the time is ripe. Now, the laborer is worth his pay; to fund another staff member would likely mean on average \$5 or so more per family per week, not to mention a spirit open to greater generosity in time and talent to participate in the opportunities this person will help build. Remember this when we do stewardship pledges in the upcoming weeks.

In Christ- Fr Thompson