

Synod 2003
Consultation Report

Issue 1: Spiritual Treasure

Responses for creative and effective ways of assisting us to understand and value spiritual treasure that the church to offer in today's world.

St. Michaels Parish Dorrington has been quite committed in its response to this topic. The spiritual treasures that were most commonly mentioned were:

- Mass
- Eucharistic Adoration
- The Blessed Eucharist; especially the strength and peace it brings
- The Sacraments with the strength and graces they bring
- Reconciliation
- Inspiration and example of the Clergy
- Warmth and understanding of the Parish Community
- Awareness of Gods loving presence
- Bible study and how it can inspire deeper faith
- Prayer
- Generosity of others
- Knowledge and Education of our faith
- The goal of our lives; Heaven
- The Commandments

All of these treasures are so strongly connected with our gift of the faith and how we live it and the general response was that our faith need education, inspiration, encouragement and participation.

For all of us to better understand, value and share these treasures, we need to have a deep understanding of the catholic faith- Theology, Scripture, Traditional Sacraments especially the Eucharist, Liturgy History ect.

Catholics in General have such a poor understanding of these things and this inevitably leads to a poverty of faith and ones commitment and relationship with God.

EDUCATION

- Parishes, schools and other church bodies should offer and encourage Bible studies, basic faith studies, education of the sacraments especially the Eucharist and reconciliation, study of the meaning of the man and more advanced studies when necessary (Catholic students on completion of school have an extremely poor understanding of the faith and this is the major cause of losing their faith and not growing in their relationship with Jesus, having no prayer life, non-attendance at mass and their inability to see or to be moved by the spiritual treasures before them)
- Parish Schools and other Church bodies should offer and encourage education on prayer and its supernatural effects, the great need for prayer especially individual prayer as a necessary part of one's relationship with God, how to pray, the many forms of prayer and the benefits of prayer.

PARTICIPATION

- A greater awareness of our spiritual treasure will bring a greater participation in living our faith. Stronger connections should be made between the various church bodies (i.e. Parishes; Schools; Parish Youth Ministry Services; Education Services; The Pius XII Seminary; Liturgical Commission, etc)
- Parishioners need to be more informed as to what the church is offering and how people are inspired by the generosity of others and the participation of those around them in church activities and they in turn will want to help.

Parishes need to work on a plan to grow in generosity and holiness; building a stronger connection between parishioners to bring a warmer and deeper sense of a real Christian Community. Ultimately

this will happen with the effort of each individual and means constantly moving out of ones comfort zone not just with the parish but to neighbors, people at work, in our sports and recreation and every stranger we meet.

Issue 2: Facing Our Spiritual Hunger

The SYNOD process has proven to be quite successful in ascertaining the views and concerns of the St Michaels Parish community. Through the use of qualitative questionnaires the steering committee has managed to synthesise this information and present the results through a series of reports. This report will address issue number two 'facing our spiritual hunger'. It will identify the major themes raised by the parishioners in relation to the following question:

“Have you experienced a deep longing in your life? Something you searched for? Something that was missing and that your Christian faith eventually answered? Do you see something that people today are searching for that you might describe as a ‘spiritual hunger’?”

The most common responses to the issue of spiritual hunger were to do with people’s deep longing to belong and their search for direction and God through their own meaning in life. An eagerness to know more about the church and in doing so grow in spirituality and holiness was also seen as spiritual hunger issue affecting people today as were a hunger for faith and love within the church. Another important issue raised was the relevance of the church today in our everyday lives.

The difficulties faced in dealing with these issues of spirituality and the hindrances and events that finally satisfied the hunger reveal far more about the concerns and needs of the parishioners and the direction the church could take to fulfil these desires in the future.

Disappointments faced in human life were often identified as a catalyst for a deepening spiritual hunger. When looking for a feeling of belonging, an understanding of the love displayed for all people by Jesus Christ often underlined and gave more meaning to issues dealt with in human love thereby strengthening relationships in life and with god making dealing with everyday problems a lighter burden.

By involving themselves in groups such as St Vincent De Paul and parish societies where people have the same beliefs and principles as each other, people are more likely to find a sense of belonging and purpose in their quest to find meaning in life. Not surprisingly, the answers to many respondents’ longings were found through the receiving of the sacraments, prayer and regular mass visitations. Having said this though there were concerns that masses performed by ‘modernist’ priests were not very popular and a return to more traditional masses was preferred.

One of the most important issues to be raised about the difficulties in dealing with this spiritual hunger was to do with education. Many revealed that they realised their hunger through attending gospel educational courses, or alternatively faced no problems realising their spiritual hunger because of a solid grounding in the faith at school.

So how might the church answer the spiritual hunger of people today? How can it reach out to people not connected with the church?

Responses to this question inevitably revolved around educational issues. The establishment of ‘catholic enquires centres’ publicised by newspapers and letter dropouts as well as information being available via the Internet was espoused. Teaching of the catechism and the basics of the catholic faith in schools were considered to be mandatory requirements for the satisfying of the spiritual hunger in young people especially. Listening to the needs of the people and providing gospel study groups so people can strengthen their understanding of their faith and practise their Christian beliefs. It was thought that Catholics should be more pro-active and stand by their convictions by becoming more prominent in community and political organisations. It was believed that the church should maintain its traditional values especially in relation to the format of the traditional mass however relevance to everyday life could be addressed by the priest when relating the gospel to everyday life.

The major themes that were revealed throughout the questionnaires revolved around the search for faith and the meaning of life, the love of God and direction. The major contributing factor to difficulties faced in dealing with this spiritual hunger had to do with education. A solid foundation emphasising the

fundamentals of the catechism throughout the school years was thought to provide a good basis for realising ones spiritual hunger in the future. With this in mind it was also thought that adult education also lead to a greater understanding of the principles of the gospel and gave sense of direction to those who encountered it. The parish societies proved to be popular for the same reasons. The implementation of educational facilities and avenues to access these was thought to be the most effective way of reaching out to those who are not connected with the church as was a more pro-active approach from parishioners in community groups and organisations and also from the parish priests as they relate the gospel to issues affecting our everyday lives.

Issue 3: *The Spirituality of Young People*

Question 1

“What is something about your faith that is most important to you as a young person?”

- The beliefs and traditions that have remained the same over a long period of time
- Being taught the Christian Religion
- The celebrating of the mass
- The significance of the crucifixion and the act of redemption
- The support and strength the faith give through hard times and other times

“What have you noticed about the faith of young people you know?”

- Young people have not been taught the faith properly through our Christian Schools
- Many young people don't know and/or practice their faith, while their parents are often much more dedicated to the faith
- Young people are enthusiastic and inspired in their faith
- Young people tend to keep up their faith until they reach university, after that sport, work and social activities tend to take precedence
- Young people are increasing in the parish and bringing with them a real zeal and passion for the faith

Question 2:

“Why is this so important to you as a young person? How has it helped you?”

- Beliefs and traditions are important because they create a sense of security and reassurance in an ever changing modern world
- Being taught the Christian religion works as a good reminder of their faith
- The mass, the crucifixion and the act of redemption are important because they symbolise the holy sacrifice and God's love of humankind
- The support and strength drawn from the faith holds it's importance in giving faith an important place in everyday modern life

“What effect does this have on young people you know? How has it helped or hindered them?”

- They quality of the liturgy, the character of the parish priest, and the sense of welcoming by parishioners supports the faith of young people
- Less commitment to their faith leads to unbalanced values and priorities
- Day to day most young people live only for the pleasures of the world. Even when trouble comes to them they have no knowledge of God's concern for them and his ever present willingness to help them if only they would ask
- Young people ask more questions about the faith. If they are not satisfied with the answers they seek and find out
- Young people tend to put money first and don't take the sanction of marriage seriously, leading to unhappy and disastrous consequences
- Young people no longer know the basics of Catholic living

Question 3:

“How can the church make Jesus and the Gospel come alive for young people today? What can the Church do to make Christian Faith more relevant to young people? Can you suggest a practical way in which your parish or the Archdiocese can respond to young people?”

- Bring the mass to life by using more modern music
- Have dances or social outings for the younger members
- Make financial provisions made for young people to attend World Youth Days every 2 years
- Give young people proper instruction in the mass which gives them a true understanding of the mass and the central meaning of Christ’s sacrifice
- Emphasise good catechetical instructions in schools
- Help young people to realise their personal connection with Jesus through youth masses
- Involve young people in the liturgy
- Parents should take on an active role in the introducing the faith to their children
- Encourage prayer in young people
- Invite young people to bring their talents into the mass (eg. Instrumental)
- Develop leadership in faith committed young people to influence their peers
- Organise self-run spiritual weekends, workshops and discussion groups

Issue 4: Mission, Ministry and Vocation

Responses for creative and effective ways of assisting us as the local Church to nurture the mission, ministry and vocation of the priests and people of the Archdiocese:

From the responses to this issue the main difficulties affecting each of us in our mission, ministry and vocation (the active part of our Christian life) are:

- The poor understanding and weakness of faith especially among young people
- The business, materialism and falling moral values in films, the media, the working life and the whole of our modern society
- The lack of apparent models of faith and virtue especially for young people
- The lack of involvement of people in church missions, ministry and vocations
- The poor understanding of how each of us can assist in the various missions, ministries and vocation of the church

At the heart of each person’s mission, ministry and vocation is a movement towards God and a growth in personal holiness. The Archdiocese need to help the priests and people in the local church to make a plan and focus on the most important mission for each of us; personal holiness- the invitation to become Christ-like. In having this as our main goal, God will help us to be the most effective in our mission, ministry and vocation.

THE CHALLENGE

The local church, parishes, schools and families need to challenge people to become more involved. Each of us needs to ask- “What can I do to be generous?” “What is Jesus asking of me?” Zeal for the faith evangelization ecumenism and social justice action comes forth naturally from knowing and living the faith.

- A deeper education of the Catholic faith is required for people to become more active
- Schools, parishes and families need to offer studies that cover the most important truths of the faith
- Less emphasis on the sports recreation and other interests and more emphasis on opportunities of being actively involved in church, school and community activities, social justice groups helping the poor, pro-life groups
- A plan to involve educating and encouraging the help of people in the Archdiocese in regard to the mission work undertaken by the church in Australia and overseas. Parishes could sponsor a mission somewhere in the world and get the parishioners personally involved in the lives of those they are helping
- People especially the young need examples of successful missionaries, ministers, and vocation young seminarians, mission workers and representatives from the many aid organisations and local

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church groups (eg SVDP) could speak more often at schools and parishes to invite interest and participation.