

SUMMARY OF SESSION 3 OF THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY AT OUR LADY OF PEACE PARISH IN APPOMATTOX

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 1:

Our older parishioners who were cradle Catholics were not taught outreach to non-Catholics. Our converts are more comfortable with evangelizing. Also, many rural Virginians have anti-Catholic views, which can make outreach hard. On the other hand, our charitable works reach many people and have led to collaborations with local Baptists, for instance with our food program (Mac's Kitchen). Our Halloween "trunk or treat" event brought many local non-Catholic families. We feel we could be doing better with evangelism, and realize that actions speak louder than words.

Our pastor's and our deacon's sermons really help us build the bridge between our faith and "daily life." Father Jim always emphasizes the primacy of the laity.

We would like to take better advantage of programs already offered by the diocese for training of lay leaders. We would also like to do more to involve the youth of the parish.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2:

Our lay leaders are already empowered by the pastor to make important decisions, for example in music, liturgy, and religious education. Our pastor is also good about defusing conflicts and stepping in with help when needed. Our parish and finance councils are effective.

Parishioners feel somewhat at odds with the diocese on a few issues, but generally not with the pastor. We feel that more regular communication between the diocese and its rural parishes might be useful.

We are pretty good at bringing new people into leadership, but we can do better.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3:

We need better training for lectors, eucharistic ministers, and ushers. We note that ushers are called "greeters" in other denominations, reflecting their role as first contacts with newcomers, and their importance in welcoming and informing guests and helping them connect with the community.

We need better communication between parish committees and ministeries, and between them and the general membership. Chairs and members of committees should be

widely known. More information could be published, including on the website. A monthly parish newsletter aggregating such information might be of use to members. Some way of soliciting and receiving feedback from the membership would also be good, such as a suggestion box.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 4:

Decisions are generally made by committees and approved by the pastor. Consequently, decisions tend to be made by those with the leisure and interest to do committee work.

For the most part the parish runs smoothly. We are hobbled by the geographic spread of the parish (it covers three counties), including the difficulty for our older members of driving long distances or at night.

Also, we have no paid staff. Our deacon's wife runs the office on a strictly volunteer basis. Because everyone donates their time, we must always remember to have a spirit of gratitude rather than a spirit of criticism.

We might benefit from more meetings on topics of general Catholic interest, such as Pope Francis' encyclicals or on topics of general concern.