

## The Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas Synod Summary - 2022

**The Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas** covers a land mass of over 725,000 square kilometers in northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The Archdiocese consists of 50 parishes, with 78% of whom are Metis, Cree, Oji Cree and Dene indigenous people. The total catholic population is 44,980. We have 17 Priests, one Deacon and one Sister who are ministering to our parishes and missions. We are very blessed to have a number of lay leaders who lead Sunday services and who help with sacramental preparation and funerals.

The Archdiocese includes a number of diverse cultures but is primarily indigenous. The first sessions for our synodal practice were held as “listening circles” which encouraged each person to speak what the Holy Spirit called them to say. Each session started with prayer, smudging of sweet grass when possible, a scripture reading, a reading of the questions to be discussed, followed by a few quiet moments of meditation. While speaking, when possible, a talking stick or spiritual item was passed from person to person. This allowed each person to take a few quiet moments of reflection and prayer before speaking; calling on the Holy Spirit to guide them in their thoughts and words. Synodality or listening circles are to be practiced for the next several years in the Archdiocese.

### **Building Up Involvement**

One of the main things that was mentioned during our listening circles was the importance of **being involved** within the Church. Whether it was being a lay minister, a reader, taking part with music or volunteering with parish activities and committees, being involved in the church empowered people to feel a sense of worth and belonging. Being encouraged and asked by others within the parish to be part of the church helped to create a sense of community and family. Parish functions are needed to help enhance and encourage fellowship and growth within a parish community. Sacramental teachings, catechism and preparation helped to build a strong spirituality for many as did family commitment, guidance and encouragement. Many expressed how important it is being part of a faithful, practicing family. Growing up within a faithful family encourages spiritual growth and commitment for later in life. Many people expressed how they have always felt like they have belonged to the church.

### **Youth**

It was mentioned many times how vital it is that we work with and encourage the **youth** within our parishes and communities. We need to involve them within the church; encourage them to start as altar servers, and readers. Get back to basics with catechetical teachings. Encourage and renew hope within the youth so that they feel evangelized and encouraged and welcome within the church. How do we do this? How do we encourage people, especially the youth, to want to come back to church – to feel welcome within the church? Why do we want them to come to church? These are just a few questions that are being asked and need to be reflected on and talked about.

### **Common-Law Relationships**

Being in a **common-law relationship** or people living in alternative life-styles has been a challenge for most of our families. Not being able to take part in communion or sacraments, nor being part of the church ministry has made some people feel unwelcome and unneeded. We need to look at finding a way to involve these people more and find ways to encourage them to take part within the parish. Not having a sense of belonging or having a sense of feeling out of place discourages a community feeling.

We need to discern our practice around living common-law and receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation.

### **COVID Impact**

**COVID had a huge impact** on how our people were able to practice their faith in the last two years. We were able to have online masses and rosaries, but the loss of community, being able to gather and the gift of communion was evident and felt by many. Technology and social media have been beneficial in some ways as it helped us have some semblance of normalcy by live streaming rosaries and masses, but it is not the same as being together as a community. In some ways COVID brought us closer in our spirituality and faith. Taking time together as families, in the home, to watch and take part in the Mass and Rosary brought some families closer together in their faith practices.

### **Every Child Matters and MMIWG**

The present state of the media has been very negative towards the Catholic Church and faith; particularly due to colonization, abuse suffered at **Indian Residential Schools** and the recent allegations of finding unmarked graves. The media is having a negative effect on our youth and most times the media only portrays the Catholic Church and spirituality in a negative way. Some people are scared to come to church; to even say they are Catholic. The allegations of unmarked graves located around Indian Residential Schools have renewed feelings of anger and disillusionment as well as triggering past memories of abuse for many. Our parishes have orange shirts, red dresses and other signs and symbols that reflect our participation in Every Child Matters movement and MMIWG.

As the majority of our people are indigenous and live in some of the most remote communities in the north, they face many daily challenges. There are many suicides within families and many have experienced abuse (including substance, physical and sexual). There are some people who have feelings of guilt, who are feeling judged and many struggle with grief. All of which can discourage them from attending church practices. A sense of being abandoned by God due to what is happening within their life and/or to them is something that some also struggle with. However, these communities have some of the strongest, most faith filled parishioners within them. They have a very strong faith in not only the Church, but with the Creator.

### **Incorporation of Cultures and Language**

The results of intergenerational trauma due to colonization and abuses suffered at Indian residential schools has greatly affected the spirituality of many of our people. **Traditions and cultures** were discouraged within church practices. This is something that needs to be changed and reincorporated within our indigenous parishes. Smudging, drumming and readings in traditional languages need to be brought back and encouraged so that people feel welcome within the church while being sensitive to language barriers both ways. Indigenous traditions around funerals need to be respected and allowed. There is a desperate need for healing and reconciliation. The discouragement and anger that people feel should be acknowledged and talked about. We make peace with the past; acknowledge what was and what happened but also find a way to move forward from it. We need to take more leadership and be more present to others within the parish and within our communities.

People and society are constantly changing and the church needs to change with them in order to have growth and life within our parishes. The Papal Visit from Pope Francis this summer is a huge step for our indigenous communities and people towards healing and reconciliation.

## **Ongoing Dialogue**

It is evident that the **dialogue** needs to continue. The first listening sessions are just starting points for our people. People need to feel that they can speak about what is happening within their parishes. Not only talk about the challenges and the struggles, but also the positive things that are taking place. There are many positive things happening within the church and people want to be heard and need to be heard.

We need to listen more with an open mind and an open heart and let the Holy Spirit guide us to a better sense of community and Church. All contribute to the gifts of the church and people should know that; feel that. We need more gatherings and more teachings. Especially for the youth. We need to continue to build on the sense of community while embracing our spirituality.

Some messages shared during our listening circles were:

- “Keep our eyes on the Cross. He died that we may live.”
- “We need to be bold”
- “We need to have faith in the church.”
- “I feel I’m not good enough.”
- “So many lost people turn to drugs. They have to learn to turn to spirituality.”
- “We need to talk more about Jesus’ life.”
- “Sometimes I feel like the children are missing out as there is no one to teach them.”
- “We’re recognizing more and more the importance and richness of our indigenous languages and how challenging it is keeping them alive.”
- “Gossip: If you just think of what people say about you it will never get better. Just pray for them.”
- “I feel a weight has been lifted off my shoulders after church.”
- “Culture: We have already embraced the church and it needs to go both ways”.

People commented that changes need to be done carefully, with deliberation and only after a time of reflection and prayer. Being respectful of not only each culture, but of each other. Change is not an option, but must happen in order for our church to move forward and stay vibrant and active. Like each of us, the church and our parishes need to be constantly working at forgiveness and improvement. God uses our willingness and little efforts for real growth.