**Synod on Synodality Report/Synthesis for the Eparchy of Passaic – Part 2**

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Below are the responses for questions 3-7, presented to all clergy and parishioners regarding the Synod process. These responses were compiled from the reports received, and synthesized into the following:

**Correction**: **Holy Ghost, Jessup, PA, St. John the Baptist, Forest City, PA, St. Mary, Scranton and St. John, Scranton were participating parishes from the Susquehanna Syncellate**, resulting in the total number of participating parishes to 43 or 50% of the Eparchy.

1. **In our local church, who are those who “walk together”? Who are those who seem further apart**?

* People who participate in the parish life, walk together. Those who seem further apart, are those who do not attend the Divine Liturgy, and those who do not participate in church activities.
* We must pay attention as to why are so many people are NOT attending Church. We should look at issues in society that are causing young people to leave the Church. It seems that the Church, in its current state is not reaching these people, it is not filling their spiritual needs.
  + Suggestion – Invite those with talents to contribute. For example, leadership is instrumental in the life of the church, the priest/administrator, could reach out to parishioners and use the human resources of the Church. Invite those to share their talents: accountants, carpenters, cooks, electricians, any such talents to help and support the Church. Personal invitations from a priest are incredibly meaningful and may create a profound sense of community, which could make all the difference in the life of the parish.
  + Reach the youth by suggesting the creation and management of a social media page for the parish, meet them at their level, seek them out.

1. **How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? How are they laity listened to, especially women and young people? What facilitates or inhibits listening?**

* The Byzantine Church is very hierarchical. It seems to elevate priests and bishops to a level that separates them from the laity. The Church body is no longer an uneducated, immigrant Church that relies on the “wisdom” of the clergy. We are so steeped in tradition, at times, there does not seem to be a place for the voices of the laity to heard. Such listening is facilitated by creating opportunities for listening to happen. The church leaders, i.e., the priest, administrator and deacon should be actively engaged with the parishioners, working side-by-side with the laity on parish events and projects.
* The women of the Church are very valuable in a myriad of ways and should be given the opportunity to hold executive positions in Church governance at both the parish and Eparchial levels.
* Some of what inhibits our listening is generational. The problem of people shutting down and not really listening to each other or understanding how each generation of our Church perceives change and feels included. This goes back to the basics of treating each other with dignity and respect and including everyone: disabled, divorced, unwed mothers, sexually confused, children from broken families, gay, those of little means, another race, tattoos, everyone should feel welcome and have a safe space in our Churches, after all this is Jesus’s message.
* Sometimes words need not be said, as our reaction to differences are shown through our body language. Working together, accepting others’ differences, taking the time to truly “listen” to the needs of others, makes us stronger.
* We ignore those who have left and have a responsibility to reach out to them.
* The laity IS the Church, their voices should be heard and not shunned.
* The youth are the future of the Church, reaching out to them in creative ways is the life blood needed in the Church today.
  + Suggestions: In the ECL, the laity should have their names listed with all photos, not just the clergy names, which sends a strong message that the laity are unimportant.
  + At dinners, the clergy should not be separated from the people at a “head” table on a raised platform, they should be seated among and with the people.
  + Designate youth to create and manage a social media page for the parish, as mentioned in Question 3.
  + Invite. Offer a “Welcome Picnic” or a similar fellowship gathering. This would serve as an opportunity to reach those who left, suggest to each parishioner, to bring a friend or family member.
  + A simple yet powerful educational opportunity, would be to provide informational leaflets about our Byzantine Rite, directed from the eparchial-level, within the vestibule of each parish, for everyone; guests and parishioners.
  + As mentioned in Question 2, create an educational space in the weekly bulletin and a dedicated paragraph in the ECL, *“Did you know?”* and offer an interesting fact about our rite, an easy way to teach, about our rich traditions.

1. **How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen**?

* The local media represents the Catholic Church, however, it is mostly the Roman Catholic Church, often associated with scandal and not much, if any, emphasis or understanding on the Eastern Catholic Churches, which is often confused with the Orthodox Church.
* Media is a “missed” opportunity for the Church to enunciate clear public stances on current issues.
  + Suggestion: As a directive from the Eparchy, be more proactive in addressing issues and identify spoke persons/media contacts for the Eparchy, each syncellate and parish.
  + Have press-packets available so a consistent message is conveyed.
  + Use such media opportunities, whether it is television or the newspaper to identify distinct differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Byzantine Rite, e.g., married priests. Social media can be used in a positive and powerful way, an opportunity for the parish youth to be involved as suggested in Questions 3 & 4.

1. **How do prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?**

* The Byzantine Church is rich in traditions and sometimes due to outdated/stubborn thought processes tied deeply to the past, in turn, the Church can become stagnant with forward thinking stalled.
* We are blessed with deep and rich traditions, however, much of these traditions remain a mystery to many, since catechism ended, for most, in the sixth grade.
* Prayer and liturgical celebrations are at the heart of what we do as a praying community of faith, we have a uniqueness to share.
* Our prayer in the Eastern Church is chanted music, which plays a vital role in the prayerfulness of the community and the prayer experience can be wonderful, lifting hearts and minds into the realm of the divine. As generations change in parishes, there is a need for cantors.
* *Formal* training for cantors is needed, directed from the eparchial level, as the cantor plays a vital role in the prayer life of the church.
* When the Divine Liturgy is appropriately chanted it is truly divine, when hindered by a lack of proper cantoring, incorrect tones/hymns, etc., it can be a miserable experience and result in dwindling attendance.
* The homily is THE opportunity to connect the Word of God to our current life and when done well, it is a message that can resonate well beyond the Church walls, a message to take into the world, where God’s work is done.
  + Suggestion: Educate via short messages, mentioned in Questions 2 & 4, *“Did you know?”*, weekly bulletin messages.
  + As our priests are few, so are our cantors. Seek out, invite and encourage those with musical talents, trained musicians to be an integral part of the Divine Liturgy, use the human resources available and make the liturgical celebrations a prayerful experience.
  + Create a cantor pool within each Syncellate, especially for new cantors, this would provide an opportunity to learn and grow and support one another to cover funerals, weddings, etc. This could also serve as a training opportunity for new cantors.
  + Homilies should be limited to 10 minutes, less is more.

1. **What hinders the baptized from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting?**

* Missionary activities should be guided by the Eparchy, as it has a responsibility to communicate the goals and mission of the Church (Similar to Questions 2 & 4). One example, a directive to support the current war in Ukraine.
* Beyond the local parish fundraising, opportunities to be “active in mission” are lacking. We are too insular and do not reach out to a cause or person, outside of helping the churches in Eastern Europe.
  + Suggestion: A need for comprehensive programs on the Eparchial level with appropriate training for lay persons, who could then coordinate mission activities.
  + Larger structures and support networks would also be required to coordinate community outreach and volunteering.
  + A smaller example, but meaningful and mission driven, at the parish-level would be to start a food drive and support a local food pantry, an effort to involve the parish youth and offer them an opportunity to witness greater community needs.

The third and final publication of the Synod on Synodality Report/Synthesis for the Eparchy of Passaic will be published in the February edition.

Note, if your parish participated in the Synod process, the parish-level report(s) should have been shared with the laity. Please see your priest, administrator, deacon or Synod facilitator for parish-level report(s).