

Holy Spirit Parish
Stittsville, Ontario
Synodal Conversations in the Spirit

Parish Background: Holy Spirit is fairly new, having been established as a Mission in 1989, as a Parish in 1994 followed by a joyful consecration of our new Church in 2008. In 2021 when Pope Francis invited all Catholics to take part in the new Synod, two parishioners came forward to lead the Listening sessions with the support of our Pastor. We submitted our report in May 2022, with participation by 39 Parishioners and 436 students. One strong theme emerged around the need to enhance the leadership of women in our parish. So we celebrated St Phoebe's feast day in September 2023 to raise awareness of women in the diaconate for the first 1200 years of our Church tradition. Then in March of this year, led by a team of 6 volunteers, Holy Spirit Parish continued its synodal activities with two Conversations in the Spirit sessions, held April 28 and May 1, 2024. A total of 29 women and men registered to participate, and of these 24 were able to attend one of these. Another is being planned specifically for youth. Our Parish team chose to connect and share with another active parish in our Diocese and found this mutual support very encouraging and helpful. Unlike in the first Synod phase, we were not aware of any diocese-wide coordination.

For the recent Conversations in the Spirit, the focus question was: ***How might we at Holy Spirit Parish more fully model the love of Christ in our Parish and community?*** Participants invited the Holy Spirit to accompany them and listened to the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24). Then, with the help of table facilitators they followed three rounds of the Conversation in the Spirit method to share personal experiences and explore areas of convergence and divergence. By the end of the third round at each session, participants identified a number of **convergent themes** which could lead to positive action specifically for our Parish:

- **Inclusiveness and Welcome:** Participants expressed an appreciation for the current welcoming and friendly nature of our Parish. They stressed the importance of even more welcoming and outreach, especially for new parishioners, leading to consideration of a possible welcoming committee. Inclusiveness would also mean more efforts to actively invite the full diversity of our community, such as older and young, LGBTQ, divorced, and other new cultures to our parish and indigenous Catholics. Our parish could invite non-active Catholics to come to Church...Create a Senior's group, a digital presence for youth, host an annual cultural roots pot-luck, etc. A reminder to go TO those outside and listen to them, asking their needs, while being inviting and open to them. In addition, expanding our regular hospitality after Sunday Masses would be a good way to fortify our welcoming parish.
- **Co-responsibility and participation of all:** Participants felt that people want more opportunities to serve and contribute to the life of the parish, but sometimes are not aware of how to go about this, or need a personal invitation to get involved, or they need to create something new and offer it to the parish. All parishioners, men and women, should have equal opportunities to offer their gifts in service to the parish and to God. There was convergence

that God calls all people. Zoom may also be a way to more often include senior parishioners in meetings etc. The Fall was seen as a good time to invite more parishioner involvement through the bulletin, social media and Mass announcements.

- **Youth:** Attracting and retaining youth was a strong theme throughout. This prompted the team to plan for a special Conversation in the Spirit to be held with our Parish Youth minister. As well, the importance of stirring music at Mass, a possible Youth Mass, use of the internet to connect with youth, were all mentioned. Extensive use of Latin, although well intentioned, was seen as a possible barrier to youth and their parents who may have no knowledge of Latin. Ongoing explanation of the ever present symbols used during Liturgy, communicated through FAQs published in the Parish Bulletin or Social Media, would offer context for Youth so Mass is not perceived as mere ritual. .
- **Faith seeking understanding:** Many expressed a desire for more opportunities for personal faith growth and formation, whether formal or informal. There is a need to bridge the wide gap in ongoing faith development after Confirmation. Ideas offered included a modified RCIA program for practicing Catholics, an “Encountering the Word” session every month or more to explore the Word together, a Lay Reflector’s Ministry to develop familiarity and meanings of the Word. The diaconate was also mentioned as a helpful ministry. There was convergence around the opportunity for women to contribute through this ministry as men do, if allowed by Rome to do so. There was divergence on the idea of women being accepted to the priesthood and recognition that this is also a Rome initiative.
- **Need for some new structures:** To activate the above ideas, a broader and larger group of volunteers will be needed. Specifically, all desired the creation of an elected **Parish Council**, hopefully including Youth and elders and school representatives. This would provide ongoing dialogue, planning as well as support for our parish activities, in conjunction with our five Catholic schools. It would also help the various church ministries to be in tune with each other and to work together. Oversight offered by Parish Council would enable individuals reaching out to parishioners for their participation in activities to do so with the confidence of the backing of this body, adding a sense of legitimacy to those being approached. Also to consider a Liturgy committee (to explore Children’s Liturgy for example) and a Pastoral ministry to deepen our outreach to elders in nursing homes, etc. The bulletin and website can be used to invite input on parishioner needs etc in an anonymous survey for example.
- **Synodality as a way of being “parish”:** In addition to the above suggestions, all were appreciative of the opportunity to come together and discuss these topics in a synodal way, using the Conversation in the Spirit method. There was a peaceful conclusion to each session, in a spirit of joy and hopefulness.

Team Holy Spirit, May 2024