

# St. Agnes SYNOD Report



## St. Agnes Parish, Point Loma

### Parish Synod Coordinator: Thomas Frichtel

March 26, 2022

Synod coordinator comments:

Overall, I thought our Synod went very well. The 75 minutes allocated for the small groups was just about right. Meeting after our closing prayer for a de-brief with our Facilitators and Note-Takers, all expressed enthusiasm about the Synod, and stated their respective small groups appreciated the Pope/Bishop/Parish asking for their input. Some expressed the need for continued opportunities to provide feedback with the feeling that dialogue makes them feel more included in their Church community. Follow-up by our Diocese will be important.

### **“Tell us about a time when you experienced disappointment with the Church.”**

What is the church? A person went to confession with a problem. The Priest only told her “Pray Harder” – no solution. But she got relief from another Priest. Problem: Lack of counseling skill on the Priest part – maybe give those skills to Priests?

Sexual abuse had been handled poorly and just covered up. Homosexual Priests not handled well either. Current Pope should be open to these problems – not putting them under a rug. No accountability. Bad leadership in the church. The law required the rest of us to follow the laws but not the clergy. It is hard to evangelize, when Pedophile is not handled properly by the church.

One Priest just wanted to rule all things his way – did not care about the people in the pews. Wanted to change things his way, some things were “impossible’ to implement. A church member for 50 yrs, almost left this church because of this Priest.

A participant who was married, divorced and remarried – is so sad at Mass, not to be able to receive Holy Communion, while so many others do receive.

I just follow what the Church says to do and I have no disappointments.

Does not like for the Church to get into politics

Denial of the sexual abuse cases and the cover up

We are not evangelizing enough.

Rules so strict as to not let people into Church. Difficult process of annulment (divorced then remarried) so they can't take communion.

Not letting females into the upper management of the church like deacon and priest

I think the children of parishioners who have contributed to the support of the parish should be able to marry there without paying large fees. I have discovered that Catholic churches charge large fees for couples to be married in the church building. I have no problem with non parishioners paying a bit more. No wonder so many young people are not getting married in the Church.

The trappings of the Church and the people involved in it do not affect my Faith. The church is made up of people, whilst Faith is with God. Just want some of the trappings to not interfere with anyone's Faith.

"I'm disappointed when the Church doesn't speak the truth, clear and strong. The Church needs to communicate clear, theologically-based positions on current issues. The hierarchy needs to stop trying to be politically correct and should worry less about offending people. The Church needs to be a rock that we can cling to in these confusing times" – societal dysfunction, moral relativism, erosion of the concept of truth. I'm disappointed when Church leaders try to bend to the times. These issues society is promoting, such as gay "marriage," gender ideology, abortion, Critical Race Theory – I'm convinced they are evil. Starting with the Pope, we need a clear and strong voice to counter it; there will be a trickle-down effect. This is what will attract people to the Church: certainty and truth.

As evidence, the mainline Protestant churches have all tried to conform to "the times" and their numbers are in steep decline. Many won't be around in a generation. The Catholic Church must stay true and constant, otherwise, why would anyone commit their lives to it?

My biggest disappointment is the many cases of child molestation among the clergy. "What a sad state of affairs," especially that it was hushed up, with priests being moved to different parishes without really dealing with what happened. It was wrong that it wasn't addressed up

front – it was going to come out anyway, in the media. That it was covered up, that was my biggest disappointment.

“The Church doesn’t focus enough on youth and young people. My kids don’t practice their faith.” Growing up, they received the sacraments and did all the things they were “supposed to do.” They were involved as children, but as adults, their practice “went away.” “It’s hard to approach this issue with them, and I’m afraid of driving them away. So, I just try to live by example.” Other churches, such as The Rock (a local evangelical church) have so many people, they have trouble with parking space. “What are they doing that we’re not?” There’s not a lot of social opportunities in our parish. That social interaction is what gets younger people involved, but it’s not happening.

Disappointment over the Church's handling of the sexual abuse of children by clergy. "It happened because the clergy were protected by the institution."

There was disappointment with the Church for not doing more with evangelization. "Why weren't we going out to Liberty Station [nearby re-vitalized residential & commercial center] to invite people to our parish?" It would have been a good opportunity to reach out.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, people are struggling more. "I see a lot of mental suffering," said one. People are struggling with their families and the economy. Why can't the Church give more support to those needs?

I come from the perspective of a convert. “There hasn’t been a lot of disappointment! Being Catholic has been exciting. Coming from the outside to the inside, I haven’t felt disappointment.” At most, there have been some frustrations on an individual level. But what exactly does the question mean by “Church”? The word can have at least five definitions in the Catholic context. “Body of Christ” is one of the best descriptions. To conclude, I have had no major disappointments.

One participant said that her grown children don’t practice their faith. They don’t receive the sacraments. Why is this? Maybe it’s because the Church is not relevant in today’s society. If a person’s experience is the homilies I’ve heard, they’ll walk away. I struggle with applying what I hear in the homilies to my life; the homilies aren’t relevant.

“I’m also disappointed that the Church won’t stand up for its principles, what it stands for, what it believes in.” For example, the current issues with Biden’s support for abortion, Critical Race Theory, and gender ideology. These are issues in the news, they are relevant, but the Church offers no guidance.

We have a liberal bishop in this diocese, in contrast to the previous bishop. "I'm disappointed with his stand on abortion. If there was *any* issue that we could all agree on, that the Church hierarchy could agree on, it would be that! My perception is that the bishops are afraid of making waves."

One participant who has experienced divorce and family upheavals, felt the need to talk to his priest. "I grew up Catholic, "he said, "I can talk to a priest. "

When the parishioner approached the priest after mass several times, he felt "unreachable." He was told to make an appointment. "If he had looked in my eyes, he would have seen that I needed help. "

One participant who is involved in First Eucharist preparations for children expressed disappointment when parents expect their child to receive the Sacrament but they do not attend church themselves. "Are your children ever going to know anything about the faith that way?"

Local parishes struggled with decreases in congregants and finances when St. Agnes and Sacred Heart in Ocean Beach closed their schools.

"There's no going back from the sexual abuse scandal, " was said. When a TV ad for a lawyer looking for abuse victims as clients came on You Tube just before a recording of a Sunday mass, one participant was outraged enough to write to the parish and get the ad removed from the video.

One participant was disappointed that Parish Councils did not become more vibrant and life-enriching in the two parishes where she was on their councils.

Systemic abuse of children. Cover-up by the hierarchy. Hierarchy has not asked for forgiveness nor examined their role in the abuse nor looked at the root cause of the abuse.

Church has not taken seriously the deaths caused by the pandemic. Church has not addressed the pain of loss.

Denial of Communion to a friend who is gluten intolerant and who asked the priest for a gluten free host. Priests should be more tolerant of people's needs.

Denial of Communion to gay friend. Priests should have training so that gays won't have to shop around for a priest who will give them the Eucharist.

Dwindling participation in religious education for children in the parish. Parish does not push the program.

Church does not help families with cost of tuition to send kids to parochial school.

Need better educational opportunities for children from the church, not enough tools to use to help us educate our children in our religion. All of the education of our children and grandchildren have to come from the parents.

The church has a lack of "Transparency". I feel that there was not enough punishment, the church needs to take stronger action with the priests involved, stop moving them around (still happening), the priests should have had jail time. The church needs to follow up with their financial payments to these victims.

Abuse of different groups, that the church should be helping besides the abuse of your boys. The church's strong view on abortion, they should be helping these young ladies with more resources so that if they become pregnant abortion is not the answer. Stop it before it gets to that, with education and more resources. Church should be helping people out of poverty.

Church needs to follow up on what they say and do. The Pope says one thing and it does not get filtered down to the rest of the bishops and priests in the same manner as what the Pope has said

Some Priests and Bishops do not follow what the Pope says because they personally don't believe in it, that is not right, the Pope is our leader his word should be followed and personal opinion of the others should not be a factor.

Portuguese Mass taken from our parish.

Too many changes in the Church. This is not what God wants. God the same now as 2,000 years ago.

Abuse of kids, adults, and nuns. Lack of atonement for abuses. San Diego Diocese tried to declare bankruptcy. This attempt still needs to be addressed. Attempt to declare bankruptcy seemed to be the last straw for some friends and they quit going to church. Church has lost opportunities to bring people back. Women have been marginalized. Church is functioning as a corporation and is keeping the status quo. Laity is not listened to.

US bishops discussed possibility of denying Eucharist to President Biden due to his stand on abortion rights. Shouldn't "weaponize" the Eucharist. Eucharist should not be a reward for good behavior. We all need it. Church tends to exclude many people rather than trying to include.

**"Tell us about a time when you experienced joy with the Church."**

Catholic education was fantastic! In high school: Priests, Nuns, and lay teachers were inspiring! One person got a college scholarship from a US Senator "funds" in PA! Great story!

Another participant attended 12 yrs of Catholic school. Was away from the Faith for 50 yrs. Came back to the Faith & a wonderful Priest heard his confession and just laughed, through up his hands and said, "Welcome back"! The Priest was jubilant! That made this person confession so comfortable & easy to come back to the faith. Great story about a Priest, who made it easy to come back to our church!

A participant found great joy/relief at her Mom's funeral because of the Priest, who knew her Mom well -- Priest connected to people so very well. Made her feel welcome & joy, as part of the family.

Taking Holy Communion to the homebound. The most beautiful faith filled experience. Bringing Jesus is wonderful but to hear the stories of the homebound -- brings this Eucharistic Minister such great joy and increases this person own faith.

"I feel joy and contentment knowing that the Catholic Church has the truth. In life, any problem I have, I know the Church has already thought about it, already has the answer. It's freeing. It's like being in the desert, but you have a map. The older I get, the more I see that the Church is right about everything." Following the Church precepts has led to a joyful life.

"I feel intense joy in receiving the sacraments, especially Communion, because I know what the Eucharist really is."

When I met my future husband and became engaged, the pastor blessed our rings and counselled us for several hours on the importance and meaning of marriage. We took six weeks of classes, called "Pre-Cana," and each class was several hours long. Married people would talk to the class about all sorts of marriage aspects, such as finances. It was a joy to have the direction and reason for marriage the Church gave us, and to understand that the Church was concerned with our marriage and the deeper meaning of it. Sixty years later, we're secure in our marriage! We'd have been lost without Catholicism. We have so much joy through Catholicism and our marriage.

Greatest Joy was the involvement of an entire family (how the Priest included) in the baptism of grandchild.

Joy in getting married in the church, been away from the church for a while and then was married in the church. The marriage brought "Joy" into her life and her married life and continues to this day.

The joy of experiencing the First Communion. "The Church is good at ceremonies, " one said.

The Ritual of the church at Mass each Sunday. Helps to reconnect to the family, starts off the week on a positive note. Helps to be connected to family.

Had been away from the church for a while, the structure of the ritual, and how all the readings tie together give her happiness. Receives a spiritual feeling from Mass. Likes the structure of the church.

Once belonged to a small group at another church that met weekly to discuss the readings and she felt a real connection to the church and that gave her joy and happiness

Having received absolution and allowed to receive the sacraments after a divorce and remarriage. The Priest made her feel like she could resume receiving communion and understood her feelings on the subject. She did not leave the church during the time but she did not receive the sacraments. Felt a great joy the first time she was able to receive our Lord once again.

Why is it that some pastors make you feel good and others make you feel worse after mass than before?

We need to do marriage blessings at mass. We need to welcome people not married in the church. Where is the place for divorced people in the Church?

Mention that when The Rock [mega Evangelical church] opened at Liberty Station, St. Agnes and other parishes in Pont Loma lost many parishioners. The Rock welcomed divorced congregants.

The Sacraments are important. They are "moments of completion" when people feel a sense of a goal attained. Why has marriage become a source of agony for so many? The process of annulment is cumbersome. One participant is going through an annulment process. "It's just paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. " When it's completed, he hopes that he and his current wife will be married in the Church.

One participant said she felt a sense of joy when attending a mass on Pentecost at an out of town parish. There were large screens above the altar with the words for songs and prayers.

There were women who danced joyfully down the aisle. Even as an outsider, "I felt as if I was a part of the celebration. "

Another participant also attended a mass at a parish that has several celebrity parishioners noted how uplifting the service there was. "Everyone was happy."

"I appreciate my religion. I was born into it." In my childhood, we'd get down on our knees every night for prayer. That makes a difference in your life. I'm happy with most of what the Church is doing.

"My Baptism was one among many joyous moments." I experienced "ecstasy." "My faith really helps me when I feel down."

There are levels of religion. First there is superstition, then there is social, but Christianity is on another level; it is based in love. "Love overpowers when things are going rotten in life." Joy in the face of bad times indicates a mature faith. People change as they grow older. Small children need rules and regulations. Older kids start to ask "Why?" Someone needs to be there to explain to the "why?" or you're going to lose people. For teenagers it's all about identity. The Christian identity is crucial and needs to be emphasized. As young adults get into marriage and career, that's an age of responsibility. What's needed are principles, or a person could become a hedonist. Later, people worry about the mysteries of life, and their legacy. What happens when you die? At each of these stages, the Church needs to address the spiritual concerns of its members. Specifically, "joy is something you chose, and it's connected to loving."

Another participant mentioned that at a Baptist church, the congregation breaks into applause the first time that the parents bring the newly-baptized baby to church.

Other kinds of ceremonies suggested were a bereavement ministry to assist those who mourn; a welcome committee for new parishioners; a group for divorced parishioners.

With all the ideas that the group offered, there was a sense of excitement and renewal. Unfortunately, we all recognized that with the aging and downsized demographics of St. Agnes, it would take a mighty wind from the Holy Spirit to bring about these changes.

"I feel joy when I receive the sacraments. I've felt joy in the presence of Christ in my life, even in sorrow, as when my mother passed." In the Church, joy comes to me "because it acts as rock for me, a source of truth." "In my 20s I faced a choice, either to believe or fall away. I came to the conclusion that what the Church says is the truth." Joy comes from having a mission and purpose in life, and the Church gives me that.



Distributing ashes on Ash Wednesday

Initiation of Lenten activities

Portuguese choir singing

The rites of the church, especially washing the feet of her catechumen

A talk about forgiveness and putting the “note into the Holy Water” causing a change of heart

Not being Catholic, but going to Catholic Church and the Father tapped him on the shoulder and invited him to come into the Church

Holding hands while saying “Our Father”

As a teenager in the 1960’s following Vatican II while participating in a diocesan program for kids to examine their relationship with Jesus and church. There were small groups for liturgy. Felt it was a time of hope and excitement.

Participation in the “Search” program for kids in the 1960’s.

Changes after Vatican II: the symbolism of women no longer being required to cover their heads, nuns not having to wear habits, Masses in English, singing at Mass.

Holy Spirit and Charismatic Movement of the 1980’s.

A 3-day retreat conducted by a priest who was brought in, gave joy to this parishioner and to many other Portuguese parishioners.

The process which brought her to leading the Portuguese choir.

Devotions, processions, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and the parish Triduum in honor of Our Lady of Fatima.

Involvement in a charismatic prayer group allowed expression of a personal relationship with Jesus. This type of group couldn’t be found on the parish level.

Greatest joy is Communion.

St. Agnes parish’s overwhelming generosity to the Congolese refugee family we assisted 5 years ago. Parishioners donated money, household items, and gave their service by delivering the furniture and other items to the family’s apartment in El Cajon.

Triduum in honor of Our Lady of Fatima.

**“As you leave this experience, what is a hope you have for the Church?”**

Increase the role of women in the decision making of the church. Redefine role of women in the church. If women were allowed more roles, it would be easier for evangelization in the church. A woman has recently added as an advisor to the Pope. Other religions have women in major roles. Big changes needed but it will take time.

Not sweep sexual abuse/ Pedophile under the rug. The church has been around a very long time and it will survive. Great hope for the church!

When the church has special dinners (St Patrick ) and taking meals to the homebound so they are not forgotten. Makes the homebound feel still part of the church. Hopefully the church will remember us when we are old and homebound.

Summary:

1. child sexual abuse – church is hiding – needs to address it
2. Role of female in the church
2. Homebound

Go back to the teaching of the Gospels, Christ and evangelizing

Be more inclusive

The word of Christ does not change. Do what is said in the Bible, follow Christ’s teachings regardless of whether or not it’s socially or political acceptable at the time

More times for discussing and getting together, more talking groups

We are all sinners and open to more people, compassion and Love

Likes history of Bible

Going into the future – All Catholics should be allowed to receive all the sacraments in the church without any fees. I think the only one is weddings, and that should be eliminated or reduced (something to cover added expenses of heating, lights, etc.)

Talking points at the end of our circle:

- Love like Jesus openly and disregard rules
- Power of prayer
- Grow together do not give up

-I don't like clapping in Church

-it was good to see someone different leading us – we need more new blood.

Church as a whole:

Have more of these types of things, so we can become more knowledgeable of our religion and church.

Church needs to be rebuilt after all of the controversy within the church. In rebuilding the church hopefully, we will bring people back to the church especially our young adults.

Church need to do what they say they are going to do basically "Walk the Walk" The need to recognize what is happening and do something about it.

Have an easier way for and older adult to convert to Catholic, should not have to go thru all of the classes that are now required for a convert.

Parish:

Priest needs to have more social events to be able to meet the parishioners, do things with the parishioners. Increase our community involvement, meet the people bring them into our parish

Bible study in person with not just a Priest but others who could facilitate the study. More Parish groups

Our entire group feels that St Agnes needs to bring back events for our parishioners to partake.

Covid is generally over but even if not, we should have the option of having things. The soup suppers after stations of the cross were not started this year and they should have been. Other parish have full on dinners on Friday night for the parishioners, we have nothing. Did not have St. Patrick day dinner, all these things had the parishioners getting together and meeting each other. Covid did a disservice to all of us. Not being able to attend Mass was horrible and we should have had the option to attend if we wanted. If afraid, stay home if not afraid be allowed to attend.

"My hope for the Church is that we attract souls through the good, the true and beautiful." These things attract people of all ages but especially the youth who are searching for meaning, seeking something that's real, dependable, and unchanging. What's beautiful could look different at different localities, but for instance: a beautifully appointed sanctuary, a congregation dressed for the occasion and fully participating, a well-thought-out homily, and beautiful music.

“Tradition could play a big role in evangelization. It doesn’t repel the young, but on the contrary, its magnetic. It connects people to something bigger than themselves.”

The role of the laity must be expanded. We look to our future with young people, although one CCD teacher mentioned that the current materials for that program are out of date and un-inspiring."

Parishioners need a sense of Community and Purpose where they can work together, celebrate together and feel a sense of accomplishment.

The new reform of the Holy See bureaucracy by the Vatican allows any believer, male or female to hold office in that institution, allowing the Church to affirm the canonical mission of every baptized Catholic.

Circle participants mentioned "Why do we not have women priests?" "Why don't we have married priests?" "How can we have better homilies?"

Sense of openness and welcome at the end of the session. Our yellow rose looked a little worn and sad from being passed from hand to hand, but on the whole, people's hearts were lifted up with hope and a vision of renewal.

I hope that the Church can teach people how to pray. You’re not taught how to pray unless you go to Catholic school. I was in a convent for several years, but ultimately determined I did not have a vocation. There, the nuns taught me that every action could be prayer. In this way, you let people know there’s more to you, that there’s more than just outward appearances. Relatedly, participation in Mass is not just with your body but with your mind. Sitting in a pew is not enough, one must fully participate. Being Catholic is more than just saying you are.

CCD is not the answer anymore. *We* were taught by nuns and priests – it makes a difference. The current training for the lay instructors is inadequate and needs to be more intensive. Knowledgeable mentors are key. Sitting in the pew on Sunday is not enough to make a person truly knowledgeable in the faith so as to be expert at teaching it. Kids don’t learn the Ten Commandments; we need to bring this to our kids. Catholics don’t know the Bible well, or the Catholic interpretation. So, it’s hard to debate with Protestant positions on the Bible.

There’s been times I’ve been in despair and couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. All the news about the Church is bad, such as churches closing down. We went to a little Catholic church in North Dakota, and at the end of Mass, the priest announced there would be no Mass the next week, because he had to give Mass in another parish. I’d never heard that before. I’m worried when I see only older people at Mass. There are some families and that’s great. But there are no teenagers or young adults. I hope the overall state of Church participation and vocations gets better.

There are two dimensions to religion, intellectual and spiritual. The intellectual dimension is lacking. It's sad so many people can't explain the faith. Something has happened to the education. Basic principles and theology are not explained. Catholic education needs to be revitalized. Social action seems to be the focus now, but it's overemphasized at the expense of theology.

"On the spiritual dimension, we need to get back to prayer. Prayer connects people to God." Catholics need knowledge of prayer in their background. My dad was brought up in a Calvinistic structure. This caused him to have a problem with religion, because he conflated being a sinner with being a bad person—he couldn't see himself as a bad person. It shows we badly need role models that can influence people at the right times, especially through example. People who are generous, accepting. In college I had all these questions that were really troubling me. Fortunately, I had good, knowledgeable people who were there to answer the questions and to be positive influences.

"I hope the Church will be more of a guiding light with regard to Catholic *tenets* and espouse them with certainty." I hope Catholic leaders will stand up for principles of the Church, pertaining to both the political sphere and to private lives. I'm disappointed they don't do that now. I hope the Church can be something that the youth can turn to for truth: "This is the truth and this is why we believe it."

The Holy Spirit is always revealing itself through the life of the church.

Life and love are stronger than death.

That the Church will not foster judging people, but will shepherd. We are here to love and to shepherd. Hope that Church will not be business-based. Continue with Zoom Masses. Expand priesthood to women and to married.

Evangelization. Christ is present in the Eucharist. We have a living God. Children are our future and need religious education.

Continue our devotion to the Holy Spirit and to Our Lady of Fatima.

A priest to be brought in to the parish to do a retreat once or twice a year such as at Lent and Advent.

Young people need standards of conduct.

Follow what God wants.

The Holy Spirit will not be stifled in moving the Church forward to bring people into the Church.

The Church hierarchy will listen to the responses from the synod and that the laity will demand it. The laity must take a greater role in the Church; we are the Body of Christ.

Our group had a few minutes remaining after we answered the 3 questions. Our facilitator asked each of us to come up with a summation in a few words of what came out of our session. Our responses are below:

Affirming, loving, giving hope.

A safe experience and we should have more opportunities to come together in sacred groups.

Productive.

Interesting.

The strong commitment to our faith by the members of our group. This was evident by our willingness to share our disappointments and joys.