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FROM: Resurrection Parish, Johnstown
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SUBJECT: Comments from Our Small Group Discussions for the Synod on Synodality

In an attempt to gather information for the upcoming Synod on Synodality, the parishioners of Resurrection Parish and St. Clare of Assisi Parish had the opportunity to participate in two, distinct, faith-sharing groups. The groups followed the format laid out by the diocese that contained both scripture and discussion; each group met for three weeks. Father George M. Gulash is pastor of Resurrection Parish and is administrator of St. Clare of Assisi Parish.

The comments listed below are a synopsis of the combined discussions that took place within the group meetings. The members gave their thoughts of changes that should be considered by the Church to make it a more vibrant Body of the Living Christ.

Our first challenge was to focus on the purpose of the Church. We concluded that the Church is a living organism, guided by the Holy Spirit, that needs to lead its members into a closer relation with God, which, in turn, will lead them to eternal salvation. Unfortunately, our current culture has posed many obstacles to this goal. Society has run rampant, overtaking the lives of many, causing them to leave the Church, fall away from their need for God, thus leaving their salvation as only an occasional thought. To counteract this waning away of the

laity's response to the *Mission of the Church*, we felt that several areas should be addressed. They follow below.

Education

Parents are the principal teachers of the faith to their children. However, as we pass from generation to generation, the knowledge of the faith has diminished.

Going back several generations, the "parish community" served as the support group for the family offering fellowship, assistance, and comfort to its members. As they gathered, they worshiped together and by this comradery they gained a strong understanding of their faith. With each passing generation, this stronghold of faith began to erode. Many of the services that parish provided to its member can now be easily gotten from society or the government and as these entities took over, the knowledge of the faith became weaker from generation to generation. This is evident by the lack of attendance at Mass, the disbelief of the Real Presence in the Eucharist, and the eroding of service work to the parish and to the community.

Catholic schools have become too expensive for some, the events in people's lives have taken over their time, and as a result, their daily events overshadow their faith, their need for God and thus any thoughts they may have of salvation.

So as to combat this downward spiral, a new paradigm for Catholic Education needs to be developed for both adults and children.

The Church Needs to Speak with One Voice

As mentioned above, the understanding of our faith has weakened with time. To add to this lack of understanding is the confusion generated by bishops, and some priests, when commenting on the same issue. A prime example is the question – Should the Eucharist be given to a politician who supports abortion? It appears that if you have a question on your faith, if you seek out the "right" person, you can get the answer that you want.

There is one "truth." It needs to be conveyed in a consistent way.

The Pro-Life Movement

When the term pro-life comes up, the first thought that comes to mind is abortion. Although protecting the unborn is critical part, the pro-life movement needs to dwell on the entire person's life from conception to natural death. Oftentimes we protest abortion, but forget

about the homeless, the hungry, refugees, the poor, the sick, the lonely, and those beset with many other needs. Every Catholic can be pro-life by working within their family, their neighborhood, parish, and community. The Church needs to place a greater emphasis on respect for human life from conception to death and challenge each of its members to do their part.

People Living Outside of the Doctrines of the Church

Over the past several decades, “traditional” lifestyles have begun to fade. Gay and lesbian lives are now glorified, transexual changes are becoming more common, raising families outside of marriage seems to be the growing trend, and couples living in invalid marriages continue. Oftentimes, some of these people still seek a relationship with their God but are ostracized by the Church. The parents and siblings of these individuals also feel distressed, oftentimes being forced to choose between a relative or the Church.

It is highly unlikely that the Church will be able to reverse this trend in society, but in some way these individuals, and their families, should be extended “the love of God” by the Church while the Church still holds true to its doctrines.

Support Those Who Are Led by the Spirit

Oftentimes a parish overlooks the people who are guided by the Spirit to do good, taking them for granted. Each parish needs to find a way to subtly support and encourage these individuals in a way that lets their work and actions shine forth and speak for themselves. By the example that these individuals set, others can become motivated to step forward and help to build up the Body of Christ in the parish, in the diocese, and in their local community.

Shortage of Priests

Over the past few years, there has been much talk about ordaining women priests and allowing priests to marry as a solution to the priest shortage. Putting these aside, there could be other possible solutions.

One solution is by giving more responsibility to the laity. Currently, many priest are assigned to administer two or more parishes and/or other assignments along with their spiritual duties. If the administration of the parishes was turned over to the laity, the priests would be free to attend to the spiritual needs of the faithful.

Inter-Relationships between Parishes

Oftentimes people mistake the local Church as their parish instead of the diocese. In communities where several parishes exist, working together for the common good should be encouraged. This trend has begun in a small way, but many pastors and parishioners are reluctant to “give something up” or “step out of their comfort zone.” The Church needs to foster this concept. It already has been done in the consolidation of many of the Catholic elementary school. It should be the Eucharist that unites as one, but oftentimes we let a myriad of other secondary matters separate us.

Since our groups met for only three weeks, we allowed ourselves less than a total of ten hours of discussion time. Nonetheless, both groups enjoyed the faith-sharing and by the discussions that followed, the members voiced some real concerns that they had with issues that are facing the Church. Hopefully, I have condensed them in an understandable way. Should you have any questions or need any clarification, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

George Pisula