



Synthesis of All Parish Consultations
Fall-Winter 2026

Evangelization

Reflections on the PARISH

1. Education and Training for the Laity

Parishioners expressed the desire for formation/training in evangelization so as to more confidently and effectively share the Gospel with others.

- There is a lack of clarity among many Catholics regarding the definition of evangelization and their specific role in the Church's mission.
- Participants expressed a desire for formal training in apologetics to help members explain and defend the faith more clearly to others.
- Suggestions include forming small faith-sharing groups or providing retreats to help individuals learn how to talk about their personal faith journeys.

2. Intentional Engagement of Youth and those Distant from the Church

Re-engaging those who have distanced themselves from the Church is seen as a critical priority for parish growth.

- Much of the growth is driven by word-of-mouth and the visible example of parishioners practicing their faith in public spaces.
- A primary concern is the significant number of parishioners who have not returned to regular attendance since the pandemic.
- There is a call for improved programming and mentorship to keep young people active in the Church after they receive sacraments like Confirmation.
- Evangelization efforts should extend into the broader neighborhood to invite non-practicing Catholics and those without a church connection into the community.

3. Fostering a Welcoming and Connected Community

Developing a strong sense of belonging was viewed as foundational for retaining active parishioners, getting them involved, and attracting new members.

- Many parishes described their communities as having an atmosphere of welcome with a palpable sense of warmth, belonging, and family-like feeling.
- Reflections suggested that visitors and new members often feel disconnected when they are not welcomed or followed up with meaningfully.
- Parishioners desired more social events and fellowship spaces to build intergenerational relationships outside of Sunday Mass.
- Establishing dedicated groups or committees to mentor and walk alongside new families is recommended to ensure they feel fully integrated.

4. Modernizing Communication and Visibility

Effective communication was seen as essential for informing the parish and raising visibility in the local community.

- Some parishes cited effective use of websites, social media, and local outreach events as helping to spread information and invite those who are disengaged or seeking a spiritual home to return to the church.
- Many felt that current tools, such as the bulletin or website, are often insufficient or out of date, making it hard to know how to participate.
- Strengthening the parish's digital presence, including active social media and user-friendly websites, was identified as a key way to reach younger demographics.
- Improving advertising and community presence was suggested to make the parish more visible to the general public.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

Diocesan Unity and Structural Support

Parishioners expressed the need for more priests, stable parish leadership, and diocesan guidance on how to be mission-oriented. They named a desire for churches to pool resources, staff, and hold common events for the sake of shared mission (especially in smaller towns).

Communication and Public Presence

The Church needs to be visible within the broader community. Many parishioners noted a lack of awareness regarding diocesan events. They called for a more public and accessible presence for the Church including: a centralized calendar, a better website, and more frequent marketing communications.

Targeted Formation for Evangelizing Outreach

A significant number of reflections centered on calls for diocesan-led training to equip parishioners with the tools to share their faith and mentor others. Specifically, they cite a pressing need for consistent youth programming and regional youth groups to keep younger generations active in the faith. Also, concerted effort should be focused on welcoming back fallen-away Catholics and better integrating diverse groups, such as the Hispanic community and those on the margins.

Demographically Insights—Evangelization:

Rural v. Urban parishes

Rural parishes focus heavily on their rural identity and the challenges of distance. They recognize the success of their parish community as closely tied to the personal reputation of their pastors and their strong welcoming, family atmospheres. They named leveraging technology to bridge the physical distance inherent to rural settings and a strong emphasis on community-wide visibility and engaging in ecumenical and interfaith friendships as a need. Urban parishes identify needs more closely tied to demographic diversity (interracial, intergenerational, economical) and specific neighborhood outreach including pastoral support of Black Catholics and outreach to young adults and young families.

Parishes By Size (Small <250 families; Medium 250-850 families; and Large >850 families)

Both small and medium parishes emphasize the need to involve youth and young families. Where small parishes focus on visibility within the local ecumenical/interfaith community, medium parishes emphasize need for broader community outreach and more user-friendly digital tools to facilitate communication. Large parishes focus on re-affiliation and connecting with “fallen away” Catholics and those who feel marginalized or excluded. Large parishes also name the empowerment of the laity to act as evangelizers as an area of needed growth.

Parishes with Hispanic ministry

Our parishes that offer explicit ministry to our Spanish-speaking members tend to focus on internal cohesion and improving communication between the different language groups and organizations within the parish. They want to build the courage of parishioners to witness their faith in the broader town, city, community and aim to reach those on the margins such as individuals in irregular relationships or those that feel there is no place for them in the Church.

Diocesan Black Catholic Advisory Board

A common concern is the decline in membership of Black Catholics. While St. Augustine’s was recognized as a vital hub there is a strong desire for personal relationship driven outreach.

Catechesis

Reflections on the PARISH

1. Family-Centered Faith Formation

While parishioners believe that the current OCIA programs and Catholic schools provide a strong foundation for parish communities, the conversations suggested a necessary shift toward catechetical models that empower parents to serve as the primary educators of the faith within their homes.

- Equip parents with specific tools and resources to help them teach their children effectively based on their developmental stages.
- Offer programs that involve both children and parents simultaneously, fostering a shared faith life for the entire family.
- Support and form parents as spiritual role models while also providing tailored guidance for single-parent households.

2. Life-long Faith Formation

Many believe their communities are spiritually rich but are seeking more structured and diverse ways to grow in faith throughout all stages of life.

- Provide deeper formation for lifelong Catholics who feel their religious knowledge has not matured since childhood with a focus on spiritual understanding and relationship with God.
- Spaces for parishioners to engage with advanced study topics, including apologetics, church documents, and popular devotions.
- Flexible schedules for Bible studies and small groups to better accommodate the needs of working adults.

3. Youth Engagement and Young Adult Retention

A primary and urgent concern across many parishes is the significant decline in church participation and engagement among young people following the sacrament of Confirmation.

- Develop active youth groups that combine community-building activities with service projects and spiritual retreats.
- Relatable and engaging religious education for teenagers to take personal ownership of their faith with a focus on personal initiative and peer connections.
- Targeted programming for college-aged individuals and young adults to engage them at times when they are especially susceptible to religious disaffiliation.

4. Enhanced Communication and Diverse Resources

Parishioners named that priests are by-and-large effective leaders and teachers but also desired improvements in how information is shared, including increased availability of resources in multiple languages, which are viewed as essential for building a more integrated and informed parish community.

- More effective promotion of parish/community events by utilizing digital platforms, specialized apps, and social media.
- Expand resources for Spanish-speaking parishioners, including bilingual religious education and the translation of homilies.
- Improved internal communication systems that ensure all parishioners are fully aware of the formation opportunities already available to them.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

Diocesan Leadership on Contemporary and Diverse Needs

Parishioners expressed a high level of general trust in diocesan leadership while seeking more structured support for ongoing formation at every stage of life.

- Desire for continued clear communication and teaching from leadership regarding complex social and moral topics such as immigration, technology, and pro-life concerns.
- Expansion of the availability of Spanish-language resources and bilingual programming to better integrate and support the Hispanic community within the diocese.
- Organization of diocesan-wide events, such as retreats, pilgrimages, and specialized formation series that build a stronger sense of community and shared faith.

Unified Diocesan Standards and Centralized Resource Support

The diocese is encouraged to establish consistent benchmarks for sacraments and formation while acting as a clearinghouse for shared resources, training, and financial equity across parishes.

- Implementation of consistent standards for sacramental preparation throughout the diocese to ensure a cohesive experience and prevent the search for different standards between parishes.
- Development of a diocesan-wide directory of vetted speakers, educational programs, and standardized training modules for lay ministers to ensure high-quality instruction.
- Foster regional partnerships and more balanced funding models to support smaller parishes and schools, ensuring they have the necessary resources to provide robust faith formation.

Demographically Insights--Catechesis:

Rural v. Urban parishes

Rural parishes seek to expand their physical and organizational catechetical resources by establishing parish libraries and forming small Bible and other study groups. They look to national resources such as the USCCB to deepen their knowledge of the faith. Contrastingly, in more urban parishes, catechetical conversation centered on more growth efforts directed to the spiritual interior life, interest in “teaching masses” and opportunities for explaining the liturgy, as well as desire for humility among those who worship in different liturgical styles not viewing themselves as superior to others.

Parishes By Size (Small <250 families; Medium 250-850 families; and Large >850 families)

Small parishes discussed the need to attract young couples and children to sustain religious education classes and the need for better access to Catholic high schools in rural areas. Medium size parishes expressed the need for adult religious education and help moving beyond learning to active evangelization. Large parishes focused on youth and young adults who disengage after Confirmation and how to expand learning to lifelong formation so catechesis does not end in childhood.

Parishes with Hispanic ministry

These parishes heavily emphasized the need for post-Confirmation retention of youth and called for more catechetical events for young adults and young parents with better continuity between lower and higher levels of formation. They want guidance on complex contemporary issues like immigration and AI. They called for a diocesan formation program for bilingual catechists and more Spanish-language materials.

Diocesan Black Catholic Advisory Board

The consultation named Catholic schools as successful entry points for non-Catholic black families but identified the need for better catechesis to help those families understand and integrate into the faith. They also hope for increased visibility of Black Catholic history within school curriculum.

Spiritual and Liturgical Life

Reflections on the PARISH

1. Liturgical Reverence and Education

Parishioners expressed a strong desire to deepen reverence for the sacredness of the Mass.

- Reflections suggested homilies should challenge the congregation more, touch on current social issues, and provide deeper biblical teaching.
- Many emphasized the need for better catechesis on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and the “why” behind various parts of the Liturgy.

2. Expanded Opportunities for Prayer and Sacraments

While many appreciate the current sacramental life, there is a recurring request for more frequent and accessible spiritual encounters outside of Sunday Mass.

- Parishioners asked for increased times for Reconciliation and Adoration, specifically requesting more daytime and evening slots to accommodate different work schedules.
- Often consultations stressed the need to help parishioners develop daily prayer habits that move from a sense of obligation to a personal, loving relationship with Christ.
- There was interest in more communal prayer activities such as the rosary, stations of the cross, and seasonal retreats for men, women, and families.

3. Parish Unity and Community Connection

To foster full and active participation in our communities we need better integration of diverse communities and accessibility.

- A lot of conversation named the need for better integration of diverse ethnic communities to move from siloed communities to a unified parish family.
- Many noted that it can be difficult to break in to established groups in the parish and suggested using greeters, personal invitation, and social events to be more welcoming and inclusive.
- Conversations highlighted the need for improved sound systems for the hearing impaired, better signage, and more effective use of media to communicate events.

4. Co-responsibility through Volunteer Engagement and Leadership Development

The reflections indicated a pressing need to recruit new volunteers and develop the next generation of parish leaders to prevent burnout among paid staff and active laity.

- There was a strong desire to invite young people into active roles like altar serving, music ministry, and leadership positions to keep them engaged in their faith.
- Many parishioners noted that the same small group of people does most of the work and called for personal invitations and ministry fairs to encourage broader participation.
- Recognizing that priests are often overworked or shared between locations, parishioners expressed a desire to take on more administrative and liturgical responsibilities to support them.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

Sacramental Access and Spiritual Development

While many praised the current availability of the sacraments, there are calls for more diverse spiritual resources and training.

- There is a demand for more spiritual directors and better training for lay ministers to support the prayer lives of the faithful.

- Parishioners requested more retreat opportunities for all ages, noting that some regions have fewer options than others.
- Suggestions were made to use technology more effectively for sacramental preparation and to reach those who are homebound.

Engagement of Diverse Communities and Demographics

The consultations highlighted the need to better serve specific groups, including the Hispanic community, families, and young adults.

- There is a strong call for more bilingual priests and resources that respect the specific customs and cultures of Hispanic parishioners.
- Many noted a decline in faith practice among young adults and requested more programs tailored to their professional and spiritual needs.
- Participants emphasized the importance of supporting families through inclusive conferences and more robust family faith formation.
- Some discussions touched on increasing the roles of women in leadership and better-integrating youth into active liturgical roles.

Liturgical Reverence and Tradition

Some parishioners noted that current liturgical practices vary too much between parishes and would prefer more consistency and clear diocesan guidelines. A few expressed a deep appreciation for practices such as the use of communion rails, receiving the Eucharist while kneeling or on the tongue, and the use of Latin.

Demographically Insights—Spiritual and Liturgical Life:

Rural v. Urban parishes

Rural parishes named a focus on increasing the involvement of youth in traditional devotions while also encouraging elderly parishioners to remain engaged and provide input on liturgy and parish life. They seek to organize prayer meetings and spiritual events that reach the broader community rather than a small, recurring group at the parish. Their primary goal for growth is diversifying leadership and involvement. More urban parishes named a high level of satisfaction with their liturgical life but expressed a need for more social connection opportunities outside of the Mass. Their growth efforts are directed toward infrastructure and expansion of existing spiritual opportunities. They want to find more ways for the laity to assist the clergy with administrative and pastoral needs.

Parishes By Size (Small <250 families; Medium 250-850 families; and Large >850 families)

Small parishes want more spiritual events that reach all community members rather than just a regular few and desire to increase rotation of liturgical responsibilities to avoid volunteer burnout and involve more individuals not typically included. Medium parishes cited a need to prioritize recruitment of volunteers to assist with liturgical roles and voiced concern over the workload of their priests. They feel high accessibility to the sacraments including adoration. Large parishes identify the need for improvements to support liturgical participation like better sound systems and written homily summaries. They desire more formal training for liturgical ministers and volunteers and want to expand devotional opportunities.

Parishes with Hispanic ministry

A primary concern is the unity between different linguistic and cultural communities. They want to see greater involvement in ministries and committees beyond attending Sunday masses. They named the desire to strengthen the connection between the laity and leadership and enhancing education on liturgy and the Real Presence.

Vocations

Reflections on the PARISH

1. Clergy Support and Pastoral Stability

Parishioners consistently named the desire for more men to respond to God's call to priesthood. They are especially aware of the need to alleviate the administrative workload of priests to preserve their joyful witness and prevent burnout.

- Conversations named the need for additional professional assistance for pastors who are currently overextended.
- Parishioners appreciated the relatable and vital witness of current priests and deacons.
- They name the need for both volunteers and full-time staff to alleviate the heavy load on the parish staff.
- Folks desired more informal interactions between priests and parishioners outside of liturgical spaces to build deeper connections and witness to vocational complementarity.

2. Youth Engagement and Early Discernment

There was a strong focus on integrating children and young adults into church life to foster a foundational understanding and ongoing discernment of God's personal call.

- Altar server programs were recognized as a primary and successful tool for vocational development of priests and religious.
- Parishioners saw the need for robust high school and young adult ministries to keep youth and young adults engaged post-graduation.
- Some requested that religious sisters and priests visit classrooms to share their personal vocation stories.
- Reflections named the desire for mentorship programs or spiritual directors that connect older, experienced and/or trained parishioners with youth and young adults.

3. Support for Marriage and Lay Vocations

Parishes wanted advocacy for all vocations, particularly highlighting the vocation of marriage and family life, consecrated religious life in women's communities, and lay leadership in the parish.

- Reflections called for improved marriage preparation programs and continued mentoring for newly married couples.
- They perceived a need for religious sisters to be more present and visible in both the school and parish settings.
- There was a heavy emphasis on affirming and encouraging lay parishioners (especially women) to take on more leadership positions in both administration and pastoral ministry.
- The need for clearer guidance and education on how to discern and pursue various paths, including consecrated life and the single state.

4. Parish Culture and Prayer

Parishioners expressed a desire for a nurturing culture of prayer, visibility, and accessibility that promoted all vocations.

- Parishioners support the use of vocational prayers during Mass and designated Holy Hours.
- Many expressed a desire to normalize the discussion of religious life so it is a visible and expected part of parish life.
- The need for better communication and transparency regarding existing vocational outreach efforts, available resources, and practical tips for discernment.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

Clergy Leadership

There is a significant focus on the need for more priests and deacons, balanced by strong appreciation for the Bishop's leadership and the quality of current seminary formation.

- Concerns about a general lack of priests and the need for more deacons to assist with parish growth and stability.
- Praise for the Bishop's accessibility, strong guidance, and his efforts to be present at most parishes.
- Recognition of the high standard of seminary education and the joyful, energetic witness of recently ordained priests.
- Parishioners identify the need for support systems for clergy who are overburdened with multiple parishes.

Youth Outreach and Family Formation

Parishioners emphasize the importance of early and consistent engagement with students and the role of the family in fostering a culture of discernment.

- The need for targeted outreach to high school and college students to keep them engaged in the faith after graduation.
- Suggestions for vocation camps, mission trips, and school visits where priests and religious can share their personal stories.
- A desire for resources that equip parents to discuss religious life as a natural and joyful option within the home.
- Requests for more diocesan-wide events that allow youth to interact with clergy and seminarians on a human level (not only spiritual and liturgical).

Visibility and Pathways for Discernment

The consultations highlighted a desire for greater visibility of all religious (sisters, brothers, and priests) and clearer, more accessible practical steps for those exploring a potential vocation.

- A prominent request for more religious sisters to be active in schools and parishes to provide role models for young women.
- Calls for clearer communication regarding the specific steps one must take to begin the discernment process for various vocations.
- The need for more frequent discernment retreats and increased opportunities for spiritual direction and pastoral guidance across all parishes.

Demographically Insights--Vocations:

Rural v. Urban parishes

Among rural parishes a primary concern is the potential for parish closures due to priest shortages. Therefore, their conversations focused on practical support for clergy and seminarians. Indeed, they often attribute the success of their parishes to the personal leadership of their pastor. Rural parishes highlighted the strong witness to the vocation of marriage among parishioners married many decades and the active role of single adults within their communities. They want youth to have more opportunities to learn about the daily lives of priests and religious and would like more in-person visits. Urban parishes discussed the need to pray for vocations regularly, praised the leadership of the Bishop, and the effective partnerships they observe between priests (and deacons) within cities. They identified the practical need for more clergy to support growing congregations.

Parishes By Size (Small <250 families; Medium 250-850 families; and Large >850 families)

Small parishes want to make sure their communities survive and parishes do not close. They point to great leadership from their pastors and call for more consistent prayer for the priesthood and desire

vocations visits to their locations. Medium parishes seek a more organized approach to ministering to marriages and families through targeted homilies and groups. They do not want to share priests between parishes. They would love to see ministry considered a standard life path alongside college and career options, wanting to foster youth involvement in liturgical ministries to foster openness to vocational calls. Large parishes identified appointment and training of permanent deacons and other professional ministers to support their priests as a significant need. They are grateful for proximity to Catholic institutions and universities that serve as vocational inspiration, and their primary hope is to support their children's vocational discernment.

Parishes with Hispanic ministry

A primary concern named was the need for more Hispanic priests and deacon formation classes to serve their specific communities. They also would love more in person time with religious communities and suggested that representatives of the diocese or religious orders visit their parishes more frequently to make the idea of vocation feel more accessible and normal for youth and adults. They note a positive sense of brotherhood among the clergy and like the proximity to local Catholic colleges.

Diocesan Black Catholic Advisory Board

Participants identified a perceived disconnect between the skills present in the Black Catholic community and their utilization by the Church. Specifically, the need to empower youth and women to take on more leadership and initiative.

Outreach

Reflections on the PARISH

1. Care for the Homebound, Sick, and Vulnerable

Need for parish ministries dedicated to the spiritual and physical well-being of members who are facing physical or personal hardships.

- Generally parishes excel at providing spiritual support through clergy visits and funeral hospitality.
- Improving efforts to reach those who are homebound through regular visits, phone calls, and bringing them the sacraments.
- Providing practical assistance for parishioners during temporary crises such as recovering from surgery, caring for a new baby, or experiencing bereavement.
- Increasing support and fellowship opportunities specifically for the elderly and those who are isolated or lonely.
- Enhancing physical and hearing accessibility within the parish for individuals with disabilities.

2. Community Outreach and Local Engagement

Serve and build relationships with the broader neighborhood and marginalized populations outside of the church.

- Parishes celebrate their partnerships with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Knights of Columbus, international sister parishes, and successful donation drives.
- Expanded efforts to serve the local homeless population and those facing daily struggles for survival.
- Deepening connections with the immediate neighborhood to understand and meet the specific needs of local residents.
- Expanding intentional outreach programs for specific groups such as immigrants, refugees, individuals struggling with mental health issues, and those who have felt excluded from the church, such as divorced Catholics or the LGBTQ+ community.
- Collaborating with other local service agencies, charities, and Christian communities to coordinate community-wide aid.

3. Communication, Organization, and Visibility

While some parishes have effective communication, consultations highlighted the need for better coordination and promotion of existing and new outreach initiatives to ensure parishioners are aware of how to help. Such as:

- Bridging the information gap by using multiple platforms like bulletins, social media, and websites to share service opportunities.
- Developing a more structured and less fragmented approach to outreach by establishing clear priorities and steering committees.
- Increasing the visibility of each parish's outreach in the community so those in need know where to find assistance.
- Clarifying how donations and second collections are used to support specific local and global needs.

4. Volunteer Participation and Sustainability

Though parishes note extreme generosity and strong lay leadership, there is concern to maintain and expand the volunteer base and financial resources for long-term ministry.

- Inspiring a wider range of parishioners to participate in service rather than relying on a small, core group of volunteers.
- Recruiting and training youth to take on leadership roles as the current volunteer base ages.
- Sacrificial giving/tithing to provide consistent financial support for outreach programs.
- Providing education and training on the works of mercy to help equip volunteers.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

Commitment to Social Justice

- Wide spread recognition for Diocese's robust support of large-scale social service organizations, most notably Catholic Charities and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which are seen as effective in addressing poverty, food instability, and refugee needs.
- Commitment to pro-life initiatives, the Christ Child Society, and advocacy for the unborn.
- Bishop Rhoades' personal leadership and his visible support for social justice issues, particularly regarding the treatment of immigrants and the unborn, are noted as exemplary.

Outreach for Vulnerable Populations

- Better pastoral care and inclusive space for the LGBTQ+ community and their families.
- More support for divorced Catholics, including a more accessible annulment process, as well as accompaniment for single parents and widows.
- More professional counseling resources and mental health advocacy.
- Attention to prison ministries that go beyond sacramental visits to offer genuine companionship.
- While current support for immigrants is a strength, there are calls for even more visible advocacy, legal guidance, and practical help like English language courses.
- More consistent outreach to those in nursing homes and the homebound.

Communication

Parishioners express a significant need for more transparent and accessible information regarding diocesan activities and resources.

- Better awareness of existing social services and outreach programs through a centralized platform or directory to help volunteers and those in need of services—many feel unaware of what is available.
- Clear, transparent communication particularly around financial requests, leading to a sense of shared participation in the broader diocesan mission.
- Sharing positive outcomes and success stories was suggested as a way to encourage more active participation and pride among the laity.

Collaboration

The community seeks greater unity and resource sharing between the Diocese and its individual parishes to maximize their collective impact.

- Need for stronger parishes to support struggling ones, potentially through financial pairing or the sharing of best practices.
- Help coordinate outreach efforts across parish lines to reduce redundancy and ensure all geographical areas are served.
- Beyond internal cooperation, there is interest in developing ecumenical partnerships with other Christian denominations to address local social justice issues together.
- Small parishes, in particular, request more direct assistance with facility repairs and growth to ensure they have the same opportunities as larger communities.

Demographically Insights--Outreach:

Rural v. Urban parishes

In rural parishes the primary focus is increasing local visibility so the parish can identify who in the community needs help. These parishes also expressed a struggle in getting youth involved in outreach, noting that sports often take precedence over church-related activities. They note a need for improved communication and organization for those suffering from medical issues, depression, the bereaved, and also new parents. More urban parishes identified needs centered on specialized populations like the homeless, mentally ill, and immigrants. They identify an aging volunteer base that needs to be replenished and want to expand the scope of outreach beyond Sunday Mass attendance.

Parishes By Size (Small <250 families; Medium 250-850 families; and Large >850 families)

Every size parish identified the need for more efforts with immigration and the incarcerated/those in county jails. Small parishes named the hope of increasing the parish's visible presence in the local community to better identify those in need of assistance. Medium parishes similarly noted that while many outreach opportunities exist parishioners are often unaware of them due to minimal or ineffective communication. Larger parishes focused outreach conversations on developing fundraising and assistance programs for specific groups. They also identified the need for expanded support for divorced Catholics and those going through the annulment process.

Parishes with Hispanic ministry

There was high interest in clarity regarding the work of Catholic Charities particularly concerning the current immigration situation. Parishioners specifically requested counseling and support for migrant and immigrant issues and improved coordination of outreach efforts in their parishes and the diocese as a whole. A recurring theme was a cultural disconnection between the parish and the surrounding town. Folks also named a desire for a more accessible and supportive annulment process.

Diocesan Black Catholic Advisory Board

Participants emphasized that both parishes and the diocese need to expand their ministry to incarcerated individuals and their families. They called for more advocacy and social justice for a variety of marginalized groups.

Other Points

Reflections on the PARISH

Spiritual Vitality and Leadership

There is a profound sense of gratitude across the community for the current clergy and the reverent quality of liturgical life. Parishioners frequently highlight the strength of the preaching and the availability of the sacraments as core spiritual pillars. The parish is viewed as fundamentally healthy and faithful, with a leadership style that is seen as both revitalizing and deeply connected to the needs of the people. This spiritual foundation fosters a culture of generosity, particularly when the community is called to respond to specific service projects or financial appeals.

Community Cohesion and Fragmentation

While the parish is often described as welcoming, a significant trend of fragmentation exists beneath the surface. The community experiences a lack of "connective tissue" between different groups, including:

- **Mass Times and Generations:** Attendees of different services and age groups rarely interact, leading to a sense of isolation for some.
- **Cultural Divisions:** There is a recognized gap between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking parishioners, with a strong desire to build bridges and move toward a more unified parish identity.
- **Newcomer Integration:** While social events like picnics are successful, visitors and new members often find it difficult to move from the pews into the active life of the community.

The Engagement Gap and Volunteer Burnout

A recurring concern is the "core group" phenomenon, where a small percentage of parishioners carry the vast majority of the workload. This has led to:

- **High Burnout:** Dedicated volunteers are stretched thin, while many other parishioners remain uninvolved.
- **Generational Disconnect:** Older members are aging out of leadership roles, yet younger families, college students, and teenagers are not yet deeply integrated into the ministries.
- **Need for Personal Invitation:** Parishioners note general announcements are ineffective. There is a consensus that the most successful way to increase involvement is through direct, personal invitations and helping individuals identify their specific spiritual gifts.

Communication and Transparency

Communication is identified as a primary obstacle to growth. Parishioners often feel uninformed about events, diocesan opportunities, and the outcomes of parish initiatives. Key needs include:

- **Modernization:** Improving the website, social media presence, and mobile app usage to reach a broader audience.
- **Consistency:** Establishing a formal communication plan to ensure successes and challenges are shared regularly.
- **Financial Clarity:** Given concerns about debt and the sustainability of the school, there is a strong call for increased transparency regarding the budget and how donations are utilized.

Facilities, Infrastructure, and Accessibility

The physical plant of the parish is a source of significant anxiety. While some facilities are well-maintained, much of the infrastructure is described as aging or inadequate for the current rate of growth. Specific trends include:

- **Urgent Repairs:** Issues with HVAC systems, failing mechanical components, and deteriorating school spaces require substantial funding.
- **Space Constraints:** Inadequate parking and a lack of dedicated "gathering spaces" hinder fellowship after Mass.
- **Inclusivity Challenges:** There is an urgent call for better accessibility, including elevators, improved sound systems for the hearing impaired, and accommodations for those with physical disabilities in confessionals and common areas.

Strategic Vision for the Future

Looking forward, the community desires a clear strategy to move from treading water to active growth. This involves:

- **Intentional Evangelization:** Reaching out to fallen-away Catholics and the surrounding neighborhood rather than focusing solely on internal needs.
- **School and Parish Unity:** Strengthening the bond between the church and the school through shared volunteer opportunities and youth-focused programming.
- **Needs Assessment:** Many suggest a formal parish-wide survey to pinpoint exactly why people are not attending and to develop a data-driven plan for the future.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

Communication and Transparency

The most prominent trend is a perceived communication gap. Many parishioners feel they lack visibility into diocesan activities, leading to confusion about the diocese's actual role—whether it exists to run large-scale events, provide pastoral care, or support smaller parishes. There is a strong desire for a centralized hub or website to coordinate events across all parishes, as well as a request to bring back a physical diocesan newspaper to reach those who feel digitally disconnected.

Transparency is a recurring theme, particularly regarding the future of specific parishes and how diocesan funds are allocated.

Leadership and Presence

While there is widespread gratitude and respect for the Bishop's leadership—specifically his willingness to speak out on difficult social and doctrinal issues—there is a simultaneous call for his increased physical presence. Many communities expressed a desire for more frequent parish visits to foster a sense of unity and encouragement.

Inter-Parish Collaboration vs. Isolation

A significant pattern of small parish isolation was named. Smaller communities report feeling overlooked or treated as mere extensions of larger parishes, often receiving fewer resources and less communication. There is a vocal demand for the diocese to shift from a model of individual parish management to one of collaboration. Parishioners suggested sharing best practices, coordinating retreats, and sharing resources.

Resource Allocation and Staffing

The practice of sharing priests between multiple locations is a point of contention. Parishes under this model feel their spiritual and numerical growth is stunted because their pastor's time is divided. Additionally, there are concerns regarding:

- **Compensation:** Ensuring fair pay for school and parish staff.
- **Infrastructure:** The need for financial assistance for renovations in smaller, older parishes.
- **Specialized Ministry:** High appreciation for Hispanic ministries and religious sisters, coupled with a request for more Spanish-language materials and vocation events.

Identity and Doctrine

There is a call for the diocese to maintain a strong, counter-cultural identity. This is reflected in requests for spiritual leadership from priests and concerns regarding the influence of secular ideologies in educational institutions in our diocese.

Evangelization

While a sense of urgency exists regarding fallen away Catholics and reaffiliation, there is uncertainty regarding the practical application of this mission. Parishioners acknowledge the need for outreach but feel they lack the specific tools, training, or diocesan-led frameworks to move from a general desire for growth to active, effective evangelization.



Presbyteral Special Consultation

October 2025

Evangelization

Reflections on the PARISH

1. Outreach and Methods for Evangelization

- Parishes and parishioners need to develop a posture of courageous, welcoming invitation which recognizes the richness of the faith we have received, offers a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and invests in individualized approaches through relational accompaniment.
- Parishes need clear goals (for qualitative growth, not just quantitative) which reflect an openness to trying new approaches and build a sense of belonging to a unified parish community.
- Parish events that draw the local community to the parish, such as fundraising events and moments of popular piety offer opportunities for evangelization.

2. Forming Catholics to Evangelize

- Catholics lack an understanding of evangelization and discipleship and often have not embraced a living relationship with Jesus as the center of their own lives.
- Parishioners, as well as parish and school staff, require re-evangelization and formation in shared responsibility to evangelize others (under guidance of the pastor).
- Lay people are very involved in parish ministries and many parishes have a culture of lay leadership and initiative.
- Schools are a key part of the parish's evangelizing mission, and there is energy and vitality in the schools and faith lives of students.

3. Unity of Vision and Culture

- Parishes have good offerings, and possess a fraternal and welcoming communal spirit.
- A spirit of unity within a parish and across parishes leads to unity in mission; lack of a sense of belonging within the parish, divisions among parish staff, and competition between parishes are obstacles to this unity.
- Lack of connection between families, division between parish and school, widespread indifference, and cultural brokenness can prevent deep engagement in parish life.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

The faithful are falling short of the baptismal call to evangelize by sharing their faith and inviting others to it. They need and desire formation for evangelization. Priests also need formation and guidance for their role in evangelization, discipleship, and accompaniment.

- The diocese, under the strong pastoral leadership of Bishop Rhoades, has a strong potential for continued growth.
- A unified approach to evangelization at the diocesan level would be helpful; clear communication of diocesan strategy and resources would equip parishes for effective planning and collaboration, ordered toward parish renewal and outreach.
- Specific ideas include a city-wide outreach to the unengaged and evangelization of youth.
- Attrition of Catholics, movement from parish-to-parish, and secular influence present broad challenges to evangelization.

Catechesis

Reflections on the PARISH

1. Renewed approach to Catechesis

- At the parish level, there is a need for openness toward moving away from familiarity, and flexibility in trying new methods of catechesis to respond to today's challenges.
- Catechesis needs to "go deeper" while being holistic and evangelizing. There are opportunities to respond to specific cultural issues and provide better sacramental formation (mystagogical catechesis).
- Catholics need a deeper catechesis, centered around personal encounter of Jesus, to understand the "why" and "what" of the faith. Specific areas for better formation include: the Eucharist, marriage and family life, prayer, and the Church.

2. Youth and Family Formation

- Priests named specific strengths of their parish schools, including excellent administration and staff and high enrollment.
- Current parish programs accounting for different pathways for catechesis are promising, good enrollment in some religious education programs, and variety of ministries.
- There are many influences that compete for the attention of youth; sports and entertainment were named as especially prominent cultural influences. Parishes need better youth programs as well as family formation to invite youth to love Jesus.

3. Adult Faith Formation

- The faithful have a desire to grow in knowledge of the faith and orthodoxy.
- Lay people need further formation in missionary discipleship to take initiative within and beyond the parish.
- Loyal Catholics have not been empowered for zealous mission.
- Adults at the parish need catechesis and deeper formation, especially those who are in roles of leadership (catechists, teachers, parents). There is a desire to train and equip the people for sharing and teaching the faith.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

There is a desire for greater collaboration between pastors/parishes. Additionally, greater clarity and simplicity in diocesan guidelines would strengthen parishes.

- Catholic Schools are a strong opportunity for formation in the Catholic faith.
- Bishop is a strong witness of orthodoxy, as are our parishes and schools;
- Diocesan staff and brother priests are available when there are questions or challenges.
- A unified approach to catechesis with an intentional curriculum for each stage of youth development would be helpful, alongside better promotion of youth and family ministry.
- Navigating sacramental norms and religious education expectations alongside financial challenges makes catechesis difficult for small and/or culturally diverse parishes.
- Parishes need support in doing adult formation and catechist formation, and connecting people to existing opportunities.

Spiritual and Liturgical Life

Reflections on the PARISH

1. Formation Gap for the Spiritual Life

- Lack of formation is an obstacle to participation in spiritual and liturgical life of the parish; we need more Christocentric communities with a culture of prayer and sacramental participation. This is true for personal prayer lives and amongst those who are involved in liturgical ministries.
- Priests noted a formation gap that affects spiritual life of the parish: parishioners need formation in a culture of disciples that fosters prayer, liturgy, and active participation.
- A sense of belonging at the parish is foundational to the spiritual life of the parish, and to inviting others to join or return.
- Greater liturgical unity both between parishes and within distinctive cultures within parishes would foster spiritual life.

2. Parishioner Engagement and Co-responsibility

- There is a noted lack of engagement in parish life from a majority of parishioners. This is felt in a lack of involvement in the liturgy, absence at parish events, and reliance upon a very small, stable group of faithful volunteers.
- Sacramental participation is rising at some parishes, including Baptisms and weddings. Faithful, active parishioners and young families are a sign of life.
- Parishes are wrestling with continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on participation, as well as facing cultural obstacles to participation. Sports and difficulty addressing questions around gender identity were named as specific obstacles.

3. Liturgical Practice

- Many noted that liturgical offerings at the parish are beautiful, reverent, and frequent.
- Some noted a need for improved liturgical practice, including more beautiful music and greater access to Adoration.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

Developing a culture of personal prayer and liturgical participation is a need of the whole diocese.

- Clear communication of policies and intentional pastoral planning would aid pastors in ministry.
- Bishop's presence and Eucharistic devotion fosters spiritual life of priests and diocese.
- There are good resources at the higher levels: through diocesan support and events, and through universities.
- The spiritual and liturgical life of our diocese would be strengthened by a shared strategic vision that is incarnated at the parish level.

Vocations

Reflections on the PARISH and DIOCESE

There is a recognized vocations crisis among priests, religious, and married. Vocational formation must begin in youth; we need to form people to discern God's will, and remove internal and external obstacles to responding to God's call. Also, across the diocese, we need a stronger culture of vocation promotion that is focused on discipleship.

- Some parishes noted a growing culture around vocations at the parish, with a general culture of spirituality, growing youth/discernment groups, and increased vocations.
- The laity need to be formed in deeper discipleship and equipped to take up their mission, so that priests and laity can work together in mission.
- Families are struggling, and there is a need for better formation of married couples in the Church's vision for marriage and family life.

Reflections on our Presbyterate

- Our presbyterate is healthy and diverse, with a strong sense of fraternity and collaboration. The presbyteral council is strong
- Fraternal connection and encouragement are essential to the health of priests and their ministry; international clergy need tailored onboarding and support.
- There is a desire for greater input in the priest assignment process.
- Some priests also noted an opportunity for more pastoral support for priests from the Diocesan Curia.
- With recognition of the need for more priests, some also recognize the gift of a solid base of young priests and a large enough presbyterate that most parishes have a pastor.
- Bishop's orthodoxy and strong relationship with priests is highly valued; he is also invested in the formation and fraternity of priests.
- Priests expressed gratitude and love for their parishioners, who are a help and consolation in priestly ministry.
- Priests desire continued formation in pastoral care, brotherhood, and mental health. Some also noted a need to strengthen seminary formation and the training of additional priests in canon law.

Outreach

Reflections on the PARISH

Serving Specific Populations

- There is a culture of care for the poor within the parish; this is often expressed in material generosity through food and monetary donations.
- Priests recognized populations needing more intentional outreach from the parish: the poor, homeless, homebound, immigrants, and isolated, as well as those fallen away from the faith and those affected by pornography.

Formation for Service and Outreach

- There is an opportunity to form the parish for greater outreach, both by building a culture of belonging and equipping parishioners and ministries to do outreach to the poor, suffering, and fallen away.
- We need a renewed spirituality of outreach, with compassion and love for those who are suffering.
- Priests noted the broad cultural challenges that are affecting the faithful, including political tensions, individualism, and lack of support for families. These realities can be obstacles to outreach.

Reflections on the DIOCESE

Priests reiterated a need for greater diocesan support for the parish, and a unified vision for parish and the diocese.

- The diocese also has a culture of care for the poor and the sick. Priests noted the value of financial resources at the diocesan level as well as hospital chaplaincy.
- Our diocese has a strong sense of belonging amidst diversity, namely for international priests and the Hispanic population.
- Our approaches to outreach need to be rooted and unified in the love of Christ with a view toward belonging in the Church.
- The diocese could be more engaged in addressing social issues facing the whole community, such as a growing homeless population and challenges facing immigrants.



Diaconal Consultation

Integrated Summary of Deacons and Wives

Reflections on the PARISH:

Co-Responsibility

Parishes would be strengthened by operating in a mode of co-responsibility. Pastors are often overloaded or not fully equipped for the particular challenges of leading a parish. There is an opportunity to invite lay people and deacons into the leadership of the parish.

- Shared leadership results in distribution of workload and responsibilities.
- There is a need for better formation in evangelization and discipleship.
- Increase representation for non-English speaking communities.
- Ensure leadership roles are filled by individuals who represent the full demographic spectrum of the Diocese.
- Priests would benefit from further training and support in business/administration.

Young People

Retaining and engaging youth requires intentional hospitality, the use of modern technology, and service-oriented involvement.

- **Mission-Driven:** Involving youth in outreach and service is seen as the best way for them to "own" and hand on their faith.
- **Digital Engagement:** Utilizing tools like Flocknotes and social media to bridge the gap between the Church and the "cell phone" generation.
- **Unique Curriculum:** Incorporating a more distinct Catholic curriculum to differentiate parish schools from public alternatives.
- **Consistent Presence:** Moving away from the idea that faith formation ends after Confirmation or 8th grade by creating more robust education and youth groups that help young people navigate modern life and digital challenges.

Outreach

The Church is called to step outside its own doors to serve the broader community, with a specific focus on the marginalized and the unchurched.

- **The Peripheries:** Strengthening ministries to those in prison and others who feel disconnected from the parish center.
- **Family Focus:** Recognizing that "if the family falls, society falls," suggesting home visits as a tool for accompaniment.
- **Accompaniment:** Meeting people where they are with the joy of the Gospel rather than waiting for them to come to the Church.
- **Hospitality:** Greeting and hospitality is more than a passive role for ushers, but a proactive ministry involving smiles, direction, and even Eucharistic ministers acting as greeters. Ensuring the Mass experience is warm and inclusive, especially for those who feel marginalized.
- **Annulment:** The current annulment process is cited as a major barrier to feeling welcomed. Some specific suggestions:

- Transition from a purely legal/administrative process to one that includes pastoral care. This includes praying *with* individuals, not just processing their files.
- Providing regular status updates to those in the process to avoid silence for long periods of time.
- Notify pastor when one of their flock has received an annulment for pastoral follow-up.

Fostering Personal Relationship with Jesus Christ

Central to the diocesan identity is a commitment to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, grounded in the liturgy and Sacraments.

- **Growth in Holiness:** Attention to forming folks in a life of prayer needs to be given.
- **Accompaniment:** Walking with people to help them deepen their journey of faith and relationship with Jesus.
- **Youth:** Involving pastors directly in school activities and implementing hands-on programs like *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* to build early relationships with Jesus.

Reflections on the DIOCESE:

Bishop Rhoades

Deacons and their wives expressed strong confidence and appreciation for the leadership of Bishop Rhoades. Participants especially noted gratitude for Bishop Rhoades' public witness to the Faith, which has strengthened them in their own Christian witness. There is a desire for greater consultation with and mobilization of the Diaconate in diocesan initiatives.

Communication

The Diocese must have a professional communication strategy that clarifies its mission and actively promotes available resources. Gaps in communication between the diocese and the parish, as well as between parishes, is a major area of need in the diocese.

- Communication of events and offerings at the diocesan level are not reaching the parish leaving participants feeling a sense of not knowing what is going on within the diocese.
- Parishes feel disconnected from other parishes, and desire easier pathways to collaboration and shared ideas.
- Synodal process should be a normative way of being for parish and diocese.

Suggestions include:

- Establish a dedicated PR department to broadcast positive news and success stories consistently.
- Define and communicate the Diocese's core mission and priorities so the faithful understand the "why" behind the work.
- Create systems that allow parishes to communicate and collaborate with one another directly.
- Better promotion of available vouchers, financial aid, and local resources.



Diocesan Seminarian Consultation

Integrated Summary

The Centrality of Sacramental and Liturgical Life

A consistent trend was the belief that a vibrant sacramental life serves as the foundation for all other pastoral efforts. There was a strong emphasis in the consultation on the eucharistic focus and the importance of beautiful, engaging liturgies. Seminararians view the availability of sacraments and adoration as primary strengths in the Diocese and our parishes. They named the desire that parishes be viewed as “hearths”-- a source of nourishment for both the clergy and the laity, providing the fire and zeal necessary to sustain the mission.

The Connection Between Parish and the "Domestic Church"

A major connecting theme was the bridge between the parish and the home. The conversation named that faith engagement must move beyond the walls of the church and into the family unit. They emphasized that the Christian family is the essential foundation for the parish and the broader diocese. We need to assist the lay faithful in refocusing on the sanctity of marriage and the importance of raising children within a prayerful, active home environment.

There was a recognized need to support families more effectively, particularly to address the drop off in participation that often occurs after individuals receive their Sacraments. The consensus is that the values and practices of the parents directly trickle down to the youth, making the domestic church a critical site for ongoing formation. But many families are missing skills in the foundational practices of praying together and teaching the faith, leading to a lukewarm environment in the home and parish.

A Culture of Bold Invitation and Personal Encounter

The conversation highlighted a shift from passive ministry to a culture of "holy boldness." This involves:

- **Vocational Focus:** Making direct and courageous invitations to the priesthood and religious life. Seminararians emphasized that increasing the number of seminararians requires direct invitations, robust altar server programs, and tangible experiences like visits to seminaries.
- **Personal Outreach:** Moving beyond general programs to personal, concrete encounters with people in the pews.
- **Active Engagement:** Taking the initiative to reach out to young people rather than waiting for them to seek out the church.

Intentionality in Education and Youth Identity

There was a focus on strong Catholic identity within schools. Including being intentional about hiring teachers who embody the faith to help students build their identity on Church teachings. While schools were described as "booming," there was also a call to ensure this growth translates into long-term spiritual awareness and active participation in church life among young people.

The consultation highlighted a significant struggle with engaging high school and college-aged individuals. This demographic is often characterized by apathy or a tendency to drift away from their religious roots. Since many people now spend their lives in digital spaces, there is an urgent need for a coordinated online strategy to meet them where they are.

Ongoing Formation and Radical Hospitality

While the consultation acknowledged the strength of our sacramental offerings, the men identified continued formation as a vital area for growth. There is a desire for deeper catechesis that explores the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the Church even after initial Sacraments are completed. Additionally, the consultation pointed to a need for improved hospitality and relational warmth within parishes, suggesting that being open and accompanying others is essential for effective evangelization in a counter-cultural environment.

The seminarians recognized the Diocese for its exceptional outreach to the Hispanic community, a priority that is seen as being led by the Bishop's own example. Further, the Diocese demonstrates a deep commitment to vulnerable populations, specifically providing legal and social support to immigrants and those in destitute situations. It was suggested that much more could be done for families with LGBTQ members, especially with their parents.

Clerical Health and Fraternal Support

The health of our faith community was explicitly linked to the health of the presbyterate. The consultation affirmed our clergy as not only well-educated and prayerful but also fraternal. The feedback highlighted a healthy fraternal bond among our clergy that distinguishes our diocese from others. This internal culture of support extends to international priests, who were described as being well-cared for and protected. The healthy relationships among the priests are seen as a foundation for effective preaching and teaching across the diocese. Additionally, by leaning on one another for support, priests are better equipped to lead the charge in personal invitations and vocational promotion.

A central concern was the significant imbalance between the number of priests and the size of the population, which currently sits at an extreme ratio. To address this, the men recommended focused attention on personalized recruitment.

Practical and Institutional Challenges

The conversation touched on some critical issues facing the Diocese, namely:

- **Communication:** There is a perceived gap in communication between the central Diocese and its local members. Seminarians expressed a need for better information flow regarding personnel changes and parish updates.
- **Financial Pressures:** Parishes are struggling with debt, requiring creative and new approaches to fundraising.

Authentic Instruction: There was a noted lack of "authentic" Catholic teachers in schools, which compounds the issue of poor catechesis for the younger generation.



Our Lady of the Road Consultation

Integrated summary of the unhoused and those who serve them

Identity Rooted in Mission and Spirit

A primary theme of the consultation is the deep desire to anchor all activities in a clear sense of identity. Board participants emphasized that the community's work is not merely social service but a realization of baptismal commitments and the Catholic Worker charism of radical hospitality and outreach. Guests describe Our Lady of the Road as more than a service provider; it is a spiritual and social anchor. The feedback highlighted a few key pillars of success including radical hospitality, consistency, and holistic care.

The consultations strongly emphasized connecting internal contemplation with outward action, viewing the work as essential witness to the Gospel. The community excels at listening to the Holy Spirit and maintaining a personalist approach, ensuring that guests are seen as individuals with inherent dignity rather than through the lens of their poverty. OLR is a dependable anchor for both those who receive help and those who provide it. This stability was attributed to a cohesive structure consisting of a dedicated board, staff, and volunteer base prioritizing being an open and welcoming presence.

The Urgency of Housing and Social Justice

The most acute concern identified was the pressing need for local housing. This is intensified by shifting legal landscapes that penalize those without shelter, which board and guest participants view with significant concern. The consultations highlighted a collective belief that housing is a form of healing and that practicing works of mercy is a direct response to this crisis. The board views hospitality as an act of justice, particularly regarding the most vulnerable, including immigrants and those living on the streets.

Guests view Our Lady of the Road as a vital sanctuary of dignity, though one that is currently operating at the limits of its physical and systemic capacity. While the immediate services provided are deeply valued, there is an underlying sense of urgency regarding the lack of permanent solutions for housing and health. Many guest participants expressed a desire for the Church to act as a bridge-builder, closing the gap between those with significant resources and those in dire need, while advocating for systemic changes that address the root causes of displacement.

Bridging Community Divides

A recurring pattern in the notes is the disconnect between the "haves" and the "have-nots" within the wider South Bend area. The community emphasizes responding to needs not from a position of excess, but from a place of shared struggle. This approach fosters a deep sense of solidarity between the providers and the recipients of care. Board members see a vital need to:

- **Create Bridges:** Strengthen the relationship between the local diocese, individual parishes, and the daily realities at Our Lady of the Road.

- **Build Solidarity:** Move beyond indifference to foster a culture of shared responsibility. The work is characterized as a means of removing the isolation associated with suffering.
- **Open Doors:** Encourage parishes to become every-day places of welcome that do not insulate themselves from the suffering of the poor.

Sustaining Growth Amidst Challenges

While the OLR community was praised for its innovative spirit and willingness to stretch to meet emerging needs—such as emergency winter housing—this takes a toll. The board acknowledged a natural tension between maintaining a bold, radical witness and the practical need for institutional sustainability. They acknowledged the transition from a small, grassroots effort to a more complex operation includes key areas for growth including:

- **Spiritual and Professional Development:** Providing ongoing spiritual and practical training for both new members and established staff. This type of development is a reciprocal process where those serving and those being served provide mutual inspiration and witness.
- **Sustainability:** Developing staff capacity and finding consistent funding to prevent burnout.
- **Pastoral Care:** Expanding the ability to accompany people through grief and trauma rather than just meeting functional needs.
- **Planning:** Moving from reactive responses to proactive, long-term discernment and structural planning.

Guests named a strong sentiment that OLR should not have to carry this burden alone. They suggested that the organization should interact more directly with city management to address the root causes of homelessness and call upon wealthier local institutions, such as the Church and University of Notre Dame, to contribute more significantly to the mission.

Building Internal and External Cohesion

Consultation participants named the need to seek greater unity across various levels of operation. Including:

- **Networking:** Strengthening the ties between volunteers, donors, and various parish houses to move beyond logistical interactions.
- **Systematic Growth:** Bridging the gap between OLR and the wider diocese to create a more organized, systematic approach to their mission.
- **Unity of Effort:** Reducing fragmentation among different organizations serving the homeless to ensure a more effective, unified response.

The Metaphor of Unseen Roots

The consultation converged on the image of "unseen roots" and "stretch marks." Participants noted that much of the spiritual work and the history of the organization happens below the surface, providing the nourishment needed for outward growth. There is a profound sense of gratitude for humble leadership and the mighty teams of volunteers who have sustained the mission for two decades. Ultimately, the community seeks to remain a place where isolation is removed, and where the "bread" of communal life continues to stretch and nourish everyone involved—both those serving and those being served.



Dismas House Consultation

Summary of post-incarcerated experience

The Transition Crisis: Housing and Employment

A central theme of the consultation was the profound anxiety surrounding the transition from incarceration or rehabilitation back into general society. While programs like Recovery Works provide short-term financial relief for rent, there is a systemic shortage of long-term sober living environments and halfway houses. This creates a cliff effect where individuals fear homelessness once their time at Dismas House concludes.

While certain areas, such as Elkhart, are seeing growth in housing districts and job availability, these opportunities are often countered by the presence of drugs in the workplace. Furthermore, there is a significant call for more trade school opportunities to ensure that both youth and adults can secure sustainable, living-wage careers rather than just temporary labor.

Logistical Barriers to Stability

Even when employment is available, two major logistical hurdles prevent individuals from maintaining stability: transportation and childcare.

- **Transportation:** Public transit is frequently non-existent in smaller towns or does not operate during the early morning hours required for many shifts. The cost of daily transit is also a burden, with a clear preference for monthly passes over single-trip fares.
- **Childcare:** There is a critical need for stable state voucher programs for daycare, as the inability to secure reliable childcare directly prevents parents from entering or remaining in the workforce.

The Role of Faith and Personal Connection

The conversation highlighted a shift in how the community views the role of the Church. There is a moving call for:

- **Accompaniment over Charity:** Moving beyond financial contributions to genuine, personal contact with those on the margins.
- **Radical Acceptance:** Creating environments where formerly incarcerated individuals and the LGBTQ+ community feel safe and welcomed without judgment.
- **Institutional Transparency:** A desire for open reporting regarding how church funds are utilized.

The Information and Resource Gap

A recurring pattern is the disconnect between available services and the people who need them. Many essential resources—such as help obtaining government IDs or judicial fee waivers—are currently only discovered through word-of-mouth. This lack of a centralized, well-publicized resource hub leaves struggling individuals unaware of the ministries and programs designed to support them. Additionally, there was a noted need for higher quality in physical donations, moving away from throwaway items toward goods that restore dignity.

Models of Success

Despite the challenges, the consultation identified clear areas of excellence that could serve as blueprints for future growth.

- **Personalized Follow-up:** The Department of Corrections' DuComb Work Release Center was praised for its consistent, low-barrier communication (texts and social media) during the first 60 days post-release. Their model of simply checking in significantly aids adjustment.
- **Localized Initiative:** Elkhart's specific focus on housing districts and job development shows progress, and the delivery of meals to sober living homes via organizations like Meals on Wheels provides a vital safety net.
- **Collaboration:** Increased awareness of Dismas House's mission and better coordination between various non-profits are creating a more cohesive support network.



Holy Cross Village Consultation(s)

Integrated Summary of independent and assisted living

The Rhythm of Daily Spiritual Life

Spiritual life for many is characterized by long-term, steady habits rather than intense emotional shifts. Many described faith as a quiet, calm assurance of being loved by the Trinity. Key practices include:

- **Daily Prayer:** Participants engage in morning or evening prayers, the Rosary, and the Liturgy of the Hours to maintain a connection with Christ.
- **Scripture and Media:** Digital tools, such as the Hallow and Ascension apps, and televised media like EWTN, have become vital resources for deepening knowledge of the Bible.
- **Sacramental Engagement:** While Mass remains central, there is a desire for more accessible confession and communal anointing services, especially for those with limited mobility.

Evangelization as Accompaniment

Participants viewed evangelization not as recruitment, but as a relational process of accompaniment and sharing personal stories.

- **Family Challenges:** A recurring concern was the "fallen away" status of children and grandchildren. Many feel that leading by example and offering quiet prayer are more effective than direct pressure.
- **Diocesan Support:** There was a specific request for the diocese to provide practical "cheat sheets" or guides to help families navigate conversations with loved ones who no longer practice the faith.

Community Dynamics and Inclusivity

The local community at Holy Cross Village is noted for its warmth and acceptance of non-Catholics. However, several trends regarding community health emerged:

- **Post-COVID Rebuilding:** There is a strong desire to revive social gatherings, like Friday socials, to bridge the gap between different levels of care and combat isolation.
- **Intergenerational Connection:** Residents see great value in partnering with younger students to foster mutual understanding and practical support.
- **Diversity and Awareness:** Some participants expressed a need to better acknowledge the diversity of the staff and to remain aware of global needs beyond their immediate environment.

Vocations and Institutional Needs

There is deep respect and gratitude for the clergy, alongside a palpable concern regarding the shortage of priests.

- **Support for Ministry:** Participants emphasized the importance of encouraging seminarians and priests through hospitality, prayer, and verbal affirmation.
- **Diocesan Unity:** Some noted a perceived divide between different regions of the diocese, such as South Bend and Fort Wayne, suggesting that more effort is needed to foster a unified identity.



College Consultation

Integrated Summary of Digital Responses

Sacramental Accessibility and Liturgical Diversity

A primary theme across the responses is the vital role of the Sacraments, though experiences vary significantly by campus.

- **Abundance at Notre Dame:** Students at the University of Notre Dame feel well-nourished by the high frequency of Mass, the availability of daily Confession at the Basilica, consistent Adoration opportunities, and the presence of chapels within dormitories.
- **Inconsistency at Saint Mary's:** By contrast, Saint Mary's students often report feeling spiritually underserved, noting that Mass and Confession times can be irregular or poorly communicated. This leads many to travel to Notre Dame to fulfill their spiritual needs. To that end they request a dedicated, full-time priest to ensure stable sacramental life and clear Catholic identity.
- **Traditional and Alternative Liturgies:** There is a notable interest in the Extraordinary Form (Latin Mass), with students reporting that existing TLM services are frequently overcrowded. Simultaneously, others express a desire for more charismatic "praise and worship" style events and traditional music that aids in participation.

The Power of Community and Presence

Students place a high value on relational ministry, particularly within the residential bubble of campus life.

- **Dorm Life:** The integration of priests, seminarians, and religious sisters into dorm life is cited as a major strength, providing a powerful ministry of presence that makes faith feel like a natural part of daily life. Dorm specific masses and retreats are central to many students' faith lives.
- **Peer Leadership, Small Groups and Clubs:** Organizations like Fiat, Evangelical Catholic, and various Bible studies provide essential peer fellowship and a sense of belonging.
- **Ecumenical and Inclusive Care:** At Saint Mary's, the presence of an ecumenical pastor and the Sisters of the Holy Cross provides supportive guidance and "motherly" care for students of various backgrounds.
- **The Burden on Student Leaders:** At institutions where formal pastoral care is perceived as lacking, students often carry the weight of organizing Adoration and communicating Mass times. There is a strong call for stable, full-time leadership to relieve students of these administrative burdens.
- **Local Integration:** Many students desire deeper connections with the broader Diocese and local parishes. They suggest programs such as "adopt-a-student" where local host families provide a home-cooked meal; and parishes becoming living spaces of accompaniment providing a sense of belonging outside the university setting.

Intellectual Hunger and Vocational Discernment

Students are not just seeking emotional support; they are looking for a faith that can withstand intellectual scrutiny and life's setbacks.

- **Theological Rigor:** There is a significant trend of students asking for more intellectually nourishing classes and talks that go beyond introductory levels to address complex moral and theological questions.
- **Navigating Failure:** Students expressed a need for the Church to provide guidance on unanswered prayers and academic disappointments, helping them find their worth in Christ rather than in admissions letters or professional success.
- **Vocational Discernment:** Guidance on future steps—both for religious life and lay careers—is a recurring request. Students want help discerning their callings in a high-pressure environment that often prioritizes worldly achievement.

Gaps in Inclusion and Transition

Student feedback highlighted specific demographics that feel less supported by current structures.

- **Commuter and Summer Gaps:** Commuter students report that late-night ministry events are often inaccessible to them. Additionally, many students struggle to maintain their faith habits during the summer when they lose the structured support of campus ministry. Finding community during the summer is a major point of hunger.
- **Ecumenical and Diverse Needs:** While some students call for a more unapologetic Catholic identity on campus, others feel the need for more ecumenical spaces that welcome non-Catholics or those who feel like a minority within the faith community.
- **Financial and Emotional Support:** A few students noted a lack of clear resources for those struggling with food insecurity, financial hardship, or past trauma, suggesting a need for more trauma-informed and practically supportive ministry.