

LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT: ENGAGING THE LAY FAITHFUL

Have you ever dreamt what you would do if you won the Power Ball jackpot? Of course, you have! It's all part of the fun, right? At the risk of appearing to entertain delusions of grandeur, sometimes we priests envision what we might do if we were "Pope for a day." Sure, they are largely diversionary conversations in which we opine about how we would address key issues in the universal Church. Still, these discussions have some tangible value, for when we consider "outside the box" thinking on certain issues, greater clarity sometimes emerges. I am quite willing to acknowledge that ideas are important, feedback is valuable. To this end, I would like to take this opportunity to **invite your feedback** as members of the lay faithful. The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has embarked upon two-year planning process that will culminate with an **Archdiocesan Synod** to be held in May 2021.

According to Archbishop Hebda, a Synod is a "formal representative assembly designed to help a bishop in his shepherding of the local Church." Enshrined in the Church's Canon Law, it will only be successful with **sufficient preparation**. Its purpose is "to discern and establish clear pastoral priorities in a way that will both promote greater unity and lead us to a more vigorous proclamation of Jesus' good news." The Synod organizers are currently engaged in an information gathering phase at a "macro" level. Soon, they will seek input at the **parish level**. This is where you come in. All Catholics within the Archdiocese have been invited to attend **listening sessions** held at various locations. Our weekly bulletins have listed where those sessions are being held. It is also valuable to provide people an opportunity to offer feedback from a more controlled environment, namely the privacy of their own home.

Through a partnership with the **Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI)**, a **15-minute survey** has been developed that could potentially yield a treasure trove of insightful feedback as part of this process. To date, this tool has been used in the following Archdioceses: Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver, Detroit, Galveston-Houston, Omaha, Philadelphia, Seattle, St. Louis, Toronto, not to mention countless smaller dioceses. Through a tool known as the **Discipleship Maker Index**, you are invited to offer feedback in a totally confidential way, alleviating any concern that your responses will become known by anyone in the parish. The CLI processes all responses and provides a summary report to the individual parishes. As the CLI leadership indicates: "We want them to provide honest feedback. No one in the diocese or on your parish staff— including the pastor— will have access to individual parishioner responses."

While anonymous surveys can be dicey, I think I understand the rationale here. The Cathedral is unique in key aspects, including a higher percentage of visitors than most other parishes. This makes it more challenging to paint an accurate **parish portrait**. Still, it is critical to learn what draws people here, as well as what we could do differently in **order to better serve** you. What is the end game here? We hope to highlight 2-3 unique aspects of the parish to celebrate as well to identify 2-3 opportunities for improvement. Many of you undergo **performance reviews** in your place of work. You may cringe a bit or become self-conscious. You may even dread it. However, an effective supervisor engages with you in order to help you **strengthen** your performance, as well as affirm you.

Our parish should be no different. I want to serve you better; I want to stretch myself and this parish to be more effective in reaching out to all the people who walk through these doors. And yes, we want to reach out also to those who have stopped coming through them for whatever reason(s). If this Archdiocesan Synod is truly to be effective, I believe that your voice and your participation is critical. I have greatly **benefitted from the wisdom** of so many good and zealous parishioners here, even as I have enjoyed meeting our many welcome guests. For all who desire for this parish to be so much more than a landmark on a hill— please participate in some way in the Synod process.

Before last April's massive blaze, Notre-Dame de Paris welcomed **30,000 visitors daily**, yet only counted a few thousand regular worshippers. Sadly, in some European cities, magnificent Cathedrals have become little more than museums, places in which tourists roam for but a few minutes, gazing upwards, perhaps taking a selfie

before moving on to the next item in their Guidebook. Some (though **not** Notre Dame) even charge admission (Yikes!), (except to those who enter a side entrance for Mass, typically held in a chapel) to visit the inside of the Church. I pray that our Archdiocese emerges as a more vibrant local Church and that the Cathedral parish will contribute valuable feedback. The confidential survey may be accessed via smartphone, tablet or computer at www.disciplemakerindex.com from February 1 – March 1 and will ask you to provide feedback on our parish's efforts to help you grow spiritually. Paper copies will also be available next weekend here at Church.

- Did you know that according to the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology, “more than 8 million” babies have been born via *in vitro* Fertilization since Louise Brown was the first in 1978? The frequency of IVF has now risen to 500,000 births per year.
- It's 1919 all over again (cf. “Black Sox” rigged World Series). Major League Baseball is reeling following revelations that **Houston Astros** were **stealing** opponents' **signs** with the aid of cameras. A more comprehensive treatment is warranted– I'll opine in more depth when Spring Training arrives. There are moral implications all around us and only when we deal with them forthrightly– including the root causes– will we make any headway.
- Do you remember when the internet was fun, novel and exciting? So wearied am I by the incessant pop-up ads that I must admit it has become much less appealing, practically a necessary evil. Refamiliarize yourself with a **good book**– it is far more satisfying.
- Speaking of books, I recently ordered some new Lenten reading. Penned by Cardinal Robert Sarah, “From the Depths of Our Hearts: Priesthood, Celibacy and the Crisis in the Catholic Church” includes a Chapter by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. It will be released on March 12. We need a vigorous defense of clerical celibacy in the church today and I think this one will hit the ball out of the park.
- Every seven years, the **Feast of the Presentation of the Lord** falls on a Sunday. At next Sunday's (February 2) **10:00 Mass**, we encourage you to participate in a brief procession through Church with candles at the beginning of Mass. Blessed candles (two per box) will be available (\$3 suggested donation) at that Mass. Please help us celebrate this ancient feast, marking forty days after Christmas.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector