

October 2025

Re-imagining Parish Life and Leadership Summary Detailed Listening Circle Report

Our Lady of Grace Church-School – El Cajon, California



Introduction

OLG's Re-imagining Parish Life and Leadership team -- Father Lauro Minimo, pastor, Volunteers Kelly Czajka, Ken and Mary Discenza, Paul Durr, Elizabeth Guerrero, Anna Marie and Chet Snyder -- conducted a series of 11 synodal Listening Circles from May 2024 through February 2025. These circles initially involved only invited parish ministry leaders and members, and school staff, but were ultimately expanded to include any parishioners and school parents from OLG's approximately 1,640 families who chose to take part. This detailed report is based on 243 participants.

Approach

Three questions were posed in the Listening Circles. Under each question below is a summary of everyone's responses.

What is your heart's desire for you and your family's faith life?

The participants commonly expressed a desire for all of Our Lady of Grace parish to embrace its mission to know Christ and apply our faith to daily life. Some Listening Circle members sought opportunities to share and offer service to others while others wish to live more deeply in the heart of Christ through worship and prayer. The three most commonly mentioned answers from all the Listening Circle Groups to Question No. 1 were:

OLG speaks honestly about hopes for our parish and school



1. A wish for children, grandchildren, and other family members to return to faithfully practicing their Catholic faith. There is a desire for the next generation to take leadership in the Church by including young people in the liturgies and adults to lead by example to pass on our own faith.
2. Address a continuing need for more education offered for all members of the parish through Bible study, seminars about the Mass and the Eucharist, discussion groups about what it means to be Catholic, and sharing our faith. Age-appropriate children's liturgies and faith education programs for families were for how to address these needs, along with specific support groups targeted at young mothers and fathers, as well as older people.
3. Teens at a Listening Circle event (which centered the discussion questions on the topic of prayer) expressed a desire to establish a tradition of family prayer and for the Church to make a greater effort to understand the needs and pressures of teenagers.

What is preventing you from living out your faith life in our parish?

The answers to this question varied greatly from person to person in the Listening Circle Groups. Some mentioned a lack of time to devote to Church activities due to long work hours or other family obligations. Some referred to health problems or anxiety issues when it comes to socializing in the parish. There were a few who simply acknowledged holding back due to inactivity or uncertainty. Many participants felt there was nothing preventing them from living their faith life; they regard OLG as “home” and are involved in many ministries and enjoy the activities. Nevertheless, some people expressed disappointment with the response (and lack of response) of clergy to suggestions for prayer or study groups, even when clergy need not be involved. Several perceived OLG as difficult to feel part of the Church community, get to know people and feel connected. In addition, some mentioned what could be perceived as “roadblocks” in the form of paperwork, security precautions and diocesan regulations preventing and discouraging participation in faith-building and outreach. Participants mentioned the desire for parish leadership to hear this feedback and act on it. Participants who voiced these concerns look to our priests, parish leadership and school and office staff to provide actions and solutions. For the most part, Listening Circle attendees appreciated the opportunity to be listened to, but several articulated a request to know how and when the information collected would be implemented. Generally, participants offered varied suggestions for how to fulfill these “heart’s desires” but feared a return to the status quo where nothing would be done.



Listening Circles were about the family faith journey.

What is your heart’s desire for the life and leadership of the parish family, including the school?

Many participants within the Listening Circles stated their satisfaction and appreciation for OLG parish school but sought ways to bring the school’s children and families closer to the parish as a whole through service: altar servers, lectors, greeters, etc. Many noted a perceived gap between the school and the parish and sought ways to bridge that gap and create unity through more youth involvement, perhaps involving students at OLG along with public school students.

The need for more volunteers in all service ministries (i.e. Extraordinary Ministers, Altar Servers, Lectors, etc.) was expressed by several with concerns for a way to better publicize that need. In general, there is a wish to get to know people as a community, especially through some sort of welcome committee.

There is a desire for more access to the Sacraments, daily evening Mass, 24-hour Eucharistic Adoration, etc. with liturgies that are joyful and inclusive. An oft repeated comment was that participants wanted to learn what actually happens at these Listening Circle sessions and be informed of ways these suggestions are being implemented. This is one way to affirm their contributions and validate their voluntary participation in this reimagining parish synod experience.



Addendum

The emergence of common themes served as a basis to encapsulate those areas which challenge our ability to fully live out our faith life as well as explore specific suggestions for how to meet the perceived needs of our parish life. Those most common “hearts’ desires” are recorded above. In the interest of thoroughness, the following detailed list ensures each of the Listening Circles’ suggestions offered is noted. These may serve as further reference points for inclusion in future discussion as we seek to re-imagine our parish and its leadership.

Suggestions:

- Mental health support.
- Environmental action groups.
- A conducted study to identify the most vibrant, active and faithful Catholic communities in the area to determine what is best for us.
- Place the tabernacle at the center of the altar, kneel while receiving Communion and receive only on the tongue.
- Less secrecy in parish decisions and more opportunity for parishioners’ input.
- A sign on the wall of the lower parking lot directing handicapped people to the upper parking lot to access the sanctuary.
- Make all the bathrooms in the church and parish center ADA accessible with changing tables in the parish center.
- A publicity effort to recruit talented “salespeople” to encourage lapsed Catholics back to Church.
- An anti-death penalty action committee.
- A homeless shelter at OLG.
- A bereavement ministry.
- A children’s liturgy.
- A ministry for special needs parishioners.
- Transportation offerings to and from Church for shut-ins and the disabled.
- A Spanish-speakers ministry.
- Priests (and other ministers) going door-to-door to invite neighbors to Church.
- The Lectio Divina study group.
- Votive candles for intentions.
- A dress code for altar servers and Eucharistic Ministers.
- Recitation of the St. Michael’s prayer after Mass and rosary devotions.
- Priests and deacons to cover at least two exits for greeting and comments.



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LEADERSHIP IN A SYNODAL CHURCH