

**DIOCESE OF SALE
DIOCESAN CONSULTATION
PHASE ONE REPORT**



**our stories,
our church,
our mission.**

Diocese of Sale

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What experiences during 2019 to 2024 have had a significant impact on our lived experience of faith, and in our faith communities?”

1. IMPACT OF COVID-19

FAITH STRENGTHENING

Despite the challenges, many parishioners reported a deepening of personal faith, with increased time for prayer and reflection. Family prayer life grew, and some found new ways to connect with their faith communities virtually.

DISRUPTION AND ADAPTATION

The pandemic caused widespread disruption, leading to church closures, the suspension of sacraments, and a shift to online Masses. This period of isolation challenged many parishioners, but it also led to adaptations such as virtual prayer groups and online religious education, which some found enriching.

COMMUNITY AND SACRAMENTAL LIFE

The loss of physical community gatherings was deeply felt. Many missed the Eucharist and other sacraments, which led to a sense of spiritual loss. However, the return to in-person gatherings was met with renewed appreciation for community and sacramental life.

1.2. CHANGING VIEWS AND CHALLENGES

SHIFTS IN PERCEPTIONS

The pandemic, along with societal changes and scandals within the Church, led to evolving perceptions. Some parishioners felt abandoned or disconnected from their faith, questioning traditional beliefs and the Church's role in contemporary issues.

COHESION AND LEADERSHIP

Changes in parish leadership and the rotation of priests affected the cohesion of faith communities. The lack of continuity in leadership during and after COVID led to feelings of instability and a sense of loss among some parishioners.

YOUTH & FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

There is a noted concern about the decline in youth participation in church activities. The disconnect between Catholic education and parish life is growing, with fewer young families attending Mass, raising concerns about the future of the Church.

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2. WHAT IMPORTANT PASTORAL INITIATIVES, ACTIVITIES, OR DEVELOPMENTS HAVE OCCURRED SINCE THE 2019 DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY?

Since the 2019 Diocesan Assembly, several significant pastoral initiatives, activities, and developments have occurred across various parishes. These can be summarized into key themes

2.1. ENHANCED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Regular social interactions, such as "cuppa" after Mass, community meals, and morning teas, have become more vibrant, encouraging a welcoming atmosphere and building closer relationships among parishioners.

FUNDRAISING AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Initiatives like fundraising for church repairs and renovations have brought people together, strengthening community bonds and creating a lasting sense of collaboration.

PARISH EVENTS

Various parishes have organized events such as Parish Feast Days, Blessing of the Animals (ecumenical), and Christmas volunteers' get-togethers. These events have fostered a stronger sense of community.

2.2. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENTS

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

A shift towards more collaborative leadership styles has been noted, leading to increased parishioner involvement in decision-making and a greater sense of ownership in parish activities.

NEW LEADERSHIP

The appointment of a new Bishop, priests, and school principals has injected fresh energy into the community. Leadership transitions have emphasized listening to parishioners and addressing their concerns, which has generally been well received.

DIOCESAN INITIATIVES

Despite some concerns about communication, initiatives like the Plenary Council have generated discussions about the future of the Church, although feedback and tangible outcomes have been limited.

2.3. SCHOOL AND PARISH CONNECTIONS

SCHOOL-PARISH COLLABORATION

There have been attempts to strengthen the relationship between schools and parishes. Initiatives such as combined Masses, Mini Vinnies, and other joint activities aim to bridge the gap between education and faith communities. However, this connection is still seen as tenuous and in need of further development.

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2.4. FAITH FORMATION AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Efforts to engage youth have expanded, including youth groups, retreats, and participation in events like World Youth Day. Programs like Alpha and catechism classes for children have also been initiated to foster faith development among the younger generation.

PRAYER AND STUDY GROUPS

There has been a notable increase in prayer groups, Bible study sessions, and spiritual retreats, such as the "Mothers Praying for Their Children" group, Divine Mercy celebrations, and the establishment of new choirs. These have contributed to deepening the spiritual life of parishioners.

DIGITAL AND ONLINE INITIATIVES

The use of technology, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been crucial in maintaining connections. Livestreaming Masses, online prayer groups, and virtual meetings have helped parishioners stay engaged with their faith communities.

2.5. RESPONSE TO SOCIETAL CHALLENGES AND SAFEGUARDING

CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULT SAFEGUARDING

The introduction of mandatory reporting, codes of conduct, and safeguarding guidelines has been a significant development in ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable adults within the diocese.

AWARENESS OF DOMESTIC & FAMILY-BASED VIOLENCE

There has been an improved awareness of domestic and family-based violence, with efforts to support victims and address these issues within the community.

SOCIAL OUTREACH

Initiatives like the Vinnies Soup Van and other outreach programs have continued to play a vital role in supporting those in need, reflecting the Church's commitment to social justice.

2.6 CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

While there are efforts to involve youth, there is a recognized need for more effective strategies to engage young people in the Church, particularly in regular worship and parish activities.

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

A recurring theme is the lack of communication and feedback, particularly regarding diocesan initiatives like the Plenary Council. Parishioners feel disconnected from the wider diocese and are seeking more transparency and involvement.

SUSTAINABILITY OF ACTIVITIES

Some parishes are struggling with the sustainability of activities due to declining volunteer numbers and financial pressures. There is a need for continued efforts to encourage participation and ensure the viability of parish programs.

In conclusion, since the 2019 Diocesan Assembly, parishes have seen a range of important initiatives and developments that have contributed to community building, spiritual growth, and addressing contemporary challenges. However, there are ongoing concerns about communication, youth engagement, and the sustainability of these efforts, highlighting areas for further focus and improvement.

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3. WHAT ARE OUR GREATEST STRENGTHS AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY / DIOCESE?

The data highlights several key strengths of the Catholic community and Diocese, which contribute to its resilience, unity, and continued spiritual growth. These strengths can be summarized as follows:

3.1. COMMUNITY AND WELCOMING ATMOSPHERE

WELCOMING COMMUNITY

A strong sense of being a welcoming and inclusive community is evident across various parishes. Parishioners feel that they are part of a supportive, caring environment where new members and diverse cultural backgrounds are embraced.

SMALL BUT STRONG COMMUNITIES

Smaller communities within the Diocese are particularly noted for their close-knit, supportive nature, where everyone knows and looks out for each other, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual care.

3.2 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The Diocese benefits from a rich diversity of cultures, which has strengthened the community by bringing various traditions, perspectives, and a broader understanding of faith. This diversity is seen as a key asset, especially in multicultural events and services.

INCLUSION OF DIFFERENT GROUPS

Efforts to include and support different groups, such as the elderly, the sick, and newcomers from various cultural backgrounds, are recognized as vital to the community's strength.

3.3 FAITH AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

STRONG FAITH AND PRAYER LIFE

The community's deep faith in God, as well as its commitment to prayer, is a central strength. Activities such as the Eucharist, adoration, prayer groups, and personal testimonies help sustain and deepen the faith of parishioners.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT AND EDUCATION

Engaged youth groups, active participation in church activities, and the presence of young, dynamic priests contribute to the vitality of the faith community. Catholic education and the involvement of young families are also seen as crucial in fostering the next generation's faith.

3.4 LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

The emergence of community leaders and collaborative leadership styles have helped foster a more engaged and active parish life. The supportive presence of bishops and priests is appreciated, particularly when they are approachable and involved in the community.

VOLUNTEERISM

A strong culture of volunteerism is noted across the Diocese, with many parishioners actively participating in various ministries and community support activities. This willingness to serve is a testament to the community's dedication and commitment to its mission.

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3.5 RESILIENCE AND HOPE

RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES

The community has shown resilience, particularly during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability to maintain faith, support one another, and adapt to changing circumstances is seen as a significant strength.

SENSE OF HOPE

There is a strong sense of hope within the community as it looks toward the future. This hope is grounded in the faith and unity of the community, as well as in the belief that the Diocese is moving towards a positive direction.

3.6 OUTREACH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

COMMITMENT TO OUTREACH

The Diocese is recognized for its efforts to reach out to those on the margins, providing support through initiatives like St. Vincent de Paul and other charitable works. This commitment to social justice is seen as a core strength.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Participation in ecumenical services and relationships with other Christian communities is another strength, highlighting the Diocese's openness to collaboration and mutual support.

3.7 EDUCATIONAL MISSION

CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The Diocese's educational mission is noted as a key strength, providing a strong Catholic presence in communities and supporting the faith formation of young people through schools and related activities.

In summary, the greatest strengths of the Catholic community and Diocese lie in its welcoming and inclusive nature, cultural diversity, strong faith life, collaborative leadership, resilience, and commitment to outreach and education. These elements collectively contribute to a vibrant, hopeful, and supportive faith community.

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4. AS PEOPLE OF FAITH AND MISSION, WHAT HAS GOD’S SPIRIT BEEN DOING IN AND THROUGH US DURING THESE PAST FIVE YEARS?”

The data reveals several key themes reflecting how God’s Spirit has been working within the Catholic community over the past five years. Here's a summary of the insights:

4.1 RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION DURING COVID-19

INCREASED CONNECTIVITY

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the community found new ways to connect, such as online Masses and virtual prayer groups. This period led to a stronger sense of togetherness and resilience among parishioners.

REFLECTION AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The slowing down during the pandemic allowed for deeper self-reflection and spiritual growth. People took the time to reassess their faith and values, leading to a renewed commitment to their spiritual journeys.

4.2 STRENGTHENING OF FAITH AND COMMUNITY

RENEWED FAITH

For many, their faith became stronger, while others faced challenges and struggled. However, the overall trend was toward a deeper connection with God and a renewed sense of purpose within the community.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit fostered a stronger sense of community, with parishioners becoming more involved in church activities, supporting each other, and forming new friendships. The community’s diversity was celebrated, and there was a strong emphasis on welcoming new members.

4.3. IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP

IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP

The presence and guidance of priests and bishops were crucial in maintaining the community’s spiritual health. Their leadership, along with the active participation of the laity, played a significant role in keeping the community engaged and hopeful.

EMPOWERMENT OF LAITY

The Spirit inspired greater involvement from the laity, leading to the emergence of new leaders and a more collaborative approach to parish activities. There was a growing sense of ownership and responsibility among parishioners to contribute to the community's spiritual life.



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4.7. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY

The community's multicultural makeup was seen as a strength, bringing a rich diversity of experiences and perspectives. There was a conscious effort to be more inclusive and to celebrate the different traditions and backgrounds that make up the parish.

ENGAGEMENT WITH BROADER CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

There was also a growing emphasis on ecumenical relationships, with a desire to work more closely with other Christian denominations to foster unity and mutual support.

4.8. PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND EVANGELIZATION

PERSONAL FAITH JOURNEYS

Many parishioners reported personal transformations, with a deeper awareness of their faith and a stronger commitment to living it out in their daily lives. The Spirit was seen as calling individuals to evangelize, to share their faith, and to be more active in their community.

MISSION AND OUTREACH

The Spirit inspired a focus on mission, both within the parish and in the broader community. There was a strong desire to reach out to those on the margins, to support those in need, and to live out the Gospel in practical ways.

In summary, the past five years have been a period of significant spiritual growth, resilience, and community building for the Catholic Diocese. Despite the challenges, particularly those brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Holy Spirit has been actively working to strengthen faith, foster community, and inspire new initiatives that will shape the future of the Church. The community is hopeful, with a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to living out their faith in meaningful and impactful ways.

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