



# Christ, Us, Our Communities, Our Neighbourhoods

**Report of the first phase of the synodal process**

*January 2019*



# Table of Contents

Opening words from Archbishop Durocher .....	5
Section I — State of the Question .....	7
One diocese, several realities .....	7
Demographic trends within the Church .....	8
Section II — Results of the consultations .....	11
Snapshot of the 5 pastoral zones .....	11
Results from the focus group discussions .....	14
Results of the on-line survey .....	17
Evaluation of the diocesan team .....	19
Section III — Strengths, Weaknesses and Concerns .....	21
Strengths .....	21
Weaknesses .....	21
Our concerns .....	22
Section IV — Synthesis of our diocesan reality and the way forward in the synodal process .....	25
Synthesis of our diocesan reality .....	25
Moving forward in the synodal process .....	29
Comments, reflections, personal insights .....	30
Prayer .....	32



# Opening words from Archbishop Durocher

Dear faithful of the archdiocese,

Last June, after consulting with key stakeholders, I decided to launch a diocesan synodal process. Its purpose is to establish common pastoral priorities and an overall plan of action for our diocesan Church for the years to come.

In order to achieve such an objective, we need to understand our current reality. This was the purpose of the first phase (October to December 2018) of the synodal process. Through an online questionnaire, parish discussions and focus group meetings, we tried to get a good snapshot of diocesan reality.

I thank all those who took part in this step: the parish delegates and pastors who facilitated the discussions in each parish; facilitators of focus groups with youth, families, seniors, new immigrants, representatives of communities of consecrated life, and church movements; as well as those who participated in the various consultations.

You have spoken. This report presents what the diocesan team heard. I think you will recognize yourself in it.

+ Paul-André Durocher



# Section I — State of the Question

## One diocese, several realities

The relatively small territory covered by the Archdiocese of Gatineau encompasses various realities. Although most of the territory of the Archdiocese is in rural and semi-rural areas, most of its residents live in the city of Gatineau. Statistics show that about 72% of the population in the territory of the diocese is Catholic.

However, this reality looks different based the city of Gatineau than it would in the rural territory that surrounds the city. Here are some highlights of the demographic profile in the territory covered by the Archdiocese:

The population in the Outaouais is growing, and it is expected to increase by 23.8% between 2011 and 2036.<sup>1</sup>

This growth will not be uniform. It will be more pronounced in the city of Gatineau and in the MRC des Collines-de-l'Outaouais, while a decrease is expected in the Vallée-de-la-Gatineau.

During the last ten years, the City of Gatineau has experienced a significant increase in the number of immigrants, marking a record in the last two years for which we have figures, 2015-2017. This phenomenon is less relevant to rural areas: 97% of immigrants from the last ten years on the diocesan territory settled in the city of Gatineau.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the new immigrants come from countries that have a significant Catholic population: Haiti, Cameroon, the

Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia are among the most important countries of origin for newcomers to our region.

The demographic weight of young people in the Outaouais remains above the Quebec average and the proportion of people of working age (20 to 64 years old) is the second highest in Quebec.

Paradoxically, population aging is a trend that covers the entire diocese, and will continue into the future. “In the Outaouais, the proportion of people aged 65 and over is expected to rise from 15.8% to 24.6% of the total population by 2036.”<sup>3</sup>

This phenomenon is most evident in rural communities of the diocese where a net loss of children, youth, and people of working age leads to the increased aging of

1. Lynda Gagnon et Madeleine Lefebvre, « L'Évolution de la dynamique démographique en Outaouais : les nouveaux arrivants, un apport essentiel » *L'Outaouais sous la loupe*, l'Observatoire du développement de l'Outaouais, septembre-octobre 2018.

2. Lynda Gagnon et Madeleine Lefebvre, « L'Évolution de la dynamique démographique en Outaouais : les nouveaux arrivants, un apport essentiel » *L'Outaouais sous la loupe*, l'Observatoire du développement de l'Outaouais, septembre-octobre 2018, p.4.

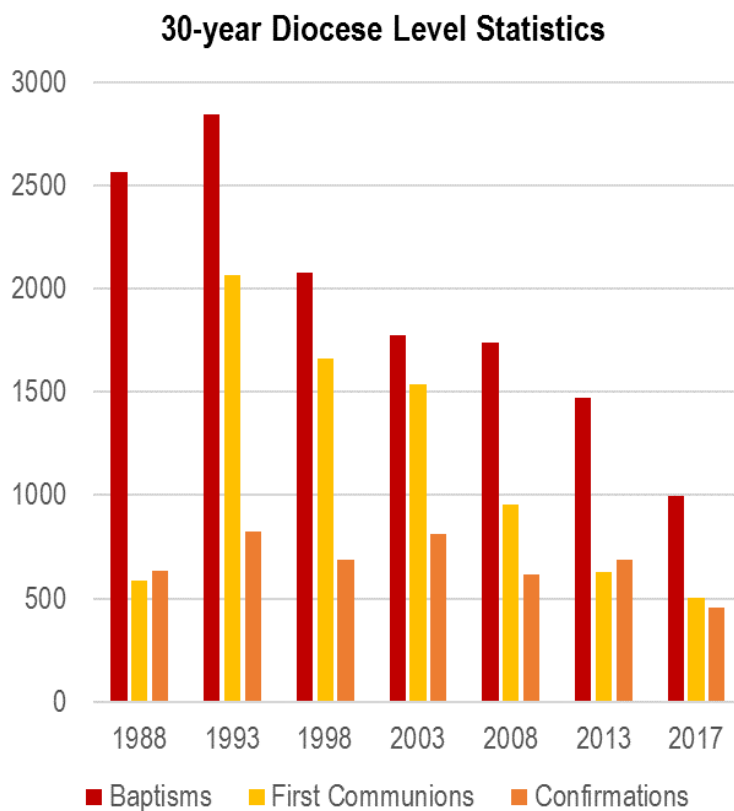
the population.<sup>4</sup>

The increased aging of the population in the communities of the Vallée de l’Outaouais has significant socio-economic impacts: “community devitalization, labour force shortages, increases in the demand for

health and social services, the need to adapt the housing supply, etc.”<sup>5</sup>

Since the diocese is located next to Ontario, some areas benefit from interprovincial migration, particularly in the County Regional Municipalities (MRCs) of Papineau

## Demographic trends within the Church



and Collines-de-l’Outaouais.

To help parishes get a better sense of their parish reality, the diocesan team has compiled a statistical profile for each parish with information on weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, and first communion. We also compiled these for the diocese as a whole. While statistics are only one part of the picture of what we are living, the trends are quite notable. Most notable is the dramatic drop in weddings over the past 30 years, from 746 in 1988 to only 114 in 2017. Over the same period, the number funerals have been

3. Lynda Gagnon, « Le vieillissement de la population : un enjeu démographique en Outaouais », *L’Outaouais sous la loupe*, l’Observatoire du développement de l’Outaouais, mai-juin 2018, p.5.

4. Lynda Gagnon, « Le vieillissement de la population : un enjeu démographique en Outaouais », *L’Outaouais sous la loupe*, l’Observatoire du développement de l’Outaouais, mai-juin 2018, p.3.

5. Lynda Gagnon, « Le vieillissement de la population : un enjeu démographique en Outaouais », *L’Outaouais sous la loupe*, l’Observatoire du développement de l’Outaouais, mai-juin 2018, p.6.



largely stable

A concerning trend is the dramatic drop in the sacraments of Christian initiation over the past twenty years. Between 1998 and 2017, the number of baptisms and confirmations dropped in half (from 2075 to 994 baptisms; and from 994 to 453 confirma-

tions), and first communions dropped even more dramatically (from 1660 to 686). These statistics are not intended to discourage us, but to name the reality before us. It is an essential step toward making good decisions for the future.



# Section II — Results of the consultations

## Snapshot of the 5 pastoral zones

Throughout the diocese, each parish has provided a description of the life of the parish (faith formation, liturgy, fellowship) and its relationship with the surrounding community (evangelization, solidarity with the poor, and relationship with the larger community). The diocesan team read these reports carefully and compiled a portrait for each of the five pastoral zones in the diocese. The team then convened parish delegates by pastoral zones, where the compiled portraits of the parishes were presented and discussed. Together, the parish delegates validated the overall strengths and weaknesses of the parishes and identified questions and concerns for further study. The following are brief overviews of the reports of each of each of the five pastoral zones.

### *Eastern pastoral zone*

The eastern pastoral zone of the east includes the parishes of the rural areas of the Petite Nation and the Lièvre (the MRC de Papineau). The parish is recognized as an important local actor in these small municipalities. The sense of belonging to the parish community is more complex than it is in the city – it includes those who regularly participate in Eucharistic celebrations, however there is also a more diffuse sense of belonging. For example, there is a sense of belonging among those in the wider community who contribute to the tithing campaign but do not regularly attend Mass at the parish. It also includes people who have moved out of the region for economic reasons, but come back to the parish to celebrate at Christmas or Easter; to par-

ticipate in special parish events; or to celebrate baptisms, weddings and funerals. Only three priests serve the dozen parishes in this area; the laity play an important role in local parish animation teams, in liturgy committees and in the preparation of the Sunday Liturgy of the Word when a priest is not available. Lay leaders and their pastors hold regular meetings as pastoral zone, which allows them to collaborate on projects such as preparation for the sacrament of confirmation. You can download the full report of the Eastern Pastoral Zone on the web site of the Archdiocese of Gatineau.

### *Western pastoral zone*

The western pastoral zone includes the francophone and Portuguese parishes in the Aylmer and Hull sectors of the City

of Gatineau. The parishes in this area have undergone significant renewal in the last ten years due to the arrival of immigrant communities who have settled in this area. The majority of young people from these parishes are from these immigrant families. While giving a new breath to the parishes, this phenomenon raises challenges of mutual acceptance of differences.

Collaboration is quite strong within parishes that have been brought together in pastoral units, and parishes that have been merged. Otherwise, collaboration within parishes is sporadic. Budget restrictions have resulted in the loss of most of the pastoral associate positions within this pastoral zone. As a result, catechetical formation and sacramental preparation courses now fall under the responsibility of lay people, who often feel that they do not have the necessary training to take on this responsibility.

In addition, this pastoral zone benefits from the presence of several religious communities that, although aging, contribute to the mission among the poor and young adults as well as through prayer. You can download the full report of the Western Pastoral Zone on the web site of the Archdiocese of Gatineau.

### ***Central pastoral zone***

The parishes of the central pastoral zone are located in the Gatineau, Masson-Angers and Buckingham sectors of the

city of Gatineau. This area shares the same demographic trends as those in the western area - the aging of the traditional community and the arrival of immigrant families. Pastoral teams that are responsible for more than one community serve most of these parishes: teams of two priests, teams comprising pastoral agents or teams with permanent deacons. Many parishes offer adult faith education activities - Bible sharing groups, conferences, retreats, and so on, however communication between the parishes on the services available could be improved. Several parishes offer pastoral services in the seniors' residences and CHSLDs. Many of these parishes set up services for the poor in the past and continue to support these services. The majority of parishes recognize that they are weak in evangelizing activities; however, this pastoral zone has a significant number of groups belonging to a diversity of ecclesial movements. You can download the full report of the Central Pastoral Zone on the web site of the Archdiocese of Gatineau.

### ***Northern pastoral zone***

The parishes of the northern pastoral zone are the francophone parishes that are found mainly in the municipalities of the Collines de l'Outaouais, the territory immediately adjacent to the city of Gatineau. Located in smaller municipalities, most parishes in this pastoral area claim to have a very good relationship with

their municipality and community organizations. Examples include collaborative relationships, information sharing, mutual aid in services, activities and projects. Sunday Mass remains the source and summit of the life of these parishes: it represents the most important moment of celebration and fraternization in all these parishes.

Despite the presence of a few new people in some parishes, most of the Christian communities in this area admit to decreasing numbers of parishioners and human resources to carry out the mission of the parish. Some parishes consider that their financial situation is stable, with reserve funds for their mission; however, the financial situation is a real concern for other parishes. Serious efforts are being made for funding, but the future in this regard seems uncertain, with some communities wondering whether they can continue to support the life and mission of the community in the future.

In general, the priest is the only pastoral worker mandated in these parishes and his services are shared between several communities. In some parishes, the lack of renewal people engaged in catechetical activities remains a challenge and a major concern. You can download the full report of the Northern Pastoral Zone on the web site of the Archdiocese of Gatineau.

### *English pastoral zone*

Unlike the other pastoral areas of the diocese, which are divided geographically, the English-speaking pastoral area includes Anglophone parishes throughout the diocese. As a result, there are diversities in this area - small rural parishes that share the services of a single priest; parishes where an Anglophone community shares the church with a francophone community; and large urban parishes. While urban parishes are growing, due in part to immigration, most parishes are concerned about the lack of renewal, both among parishioners and volunteers. The parishes see themselves as welcoming spaces where the faithful show a strong faith and a sense of caring for one another. The parishioners are proud of their church and attached to it. They support it generously, despite the dwindling number and resources. Rural parishes play a key role in the life of the municipality; its social events are of great importance to parishioners, friends and neighbors. In these villages, the wider community, in turn, supports the local parish. Although most parishes are in a reasonable financial situation, mainly because of their land holdings and reserves, some are starting to face troubling financial difficulties. Most parishes depend on fundraising activities to balance their budgets. You can download the full report of the English Pastoral Zone on the web site of the Archdiocese of Gatineau.

## Results from the focus group discussions

To get a good overview of the Archdiocese of Gatineau, consultations were held with some demographic groups whose voices might not otherwise be captured in the parish consultations. These focus groups included young adults, married couples with children, older adults in seniors' residences, immigrants, communities of consecrated life and ecclesial movements. Leaders were identified to lead these focus groups in a discussion of the following questions:

- Does my church help me grow in my personal relationship with Christ? When and how?
- What do you notice about the life of our parishes? What strengths or weaknesses do you notice? What encourages or worries you?
- What do you notice about the engagement of our parishes in the wider community (villages or neighborhoods)? What strengths or weaknesses do you notice? What encourages or worries you?

Here are the highlights of these consultations.

### *Young adults*

Two meetings were held with young people. Participants emphasized how important it was for them to have a personal relationship with Jesus and / or God. They note, however, that they are often alone in living out their faith. Young people around them have limited knowledge about God or Jesus. The young adults who were not born in Canada were surprised to see how "taboo" religion is in Canada, particularly in Quebec. Some young people have found a parish community, but others are still looking for a parish where they could journey with others in their age group. These young adults nonetheless have an

optimistic view of society. They recognize within it a search for truth and absolute love; they marvel that people are ready to mobilize for causes that are important to them. They see in their contemporaries a spirituality, even if it does not seem to be associated with the Christian religion. These young adults ask the Church to dare to think outside the box in its evangelization efforts.

### *Young married couples*

The focus group with young couples was quite small. The participants in this group are engaged in church movements, which is of great importance to them. They realize that the faith for-

mation of children is the responsibility of parents, but they find that this responsibility has become complicated in a world that does not share the same values. Some participants say they are looking for a parish for their families, and this does not necessarily need to be their neighborhood parish. They ask the following questions of the parishes in the diocese: are we open to the disturbances of children during Masses? Do we ask our teenagers to get involved in parish life? Do we support youth movements?

### *Seniors*

Several focus groups brought together seniors living in residence or in long-term care facilities. Participants testified to the importance of faith for them. They also expressed sadness that their children and grandchildren had taken their distance from the church. They continue to live their faith through the celebrations of the Word and Eucharistic celebrations in their residences, in personal prayer and in the community spirit of their community. Although many residents find it difficult to participate in parish life, they appreciate the parishioners who visit them. Parishioners come by to listen to them, to bring them communion, to pray with them and to help them participate in activities.

Participants expressed a concern about continuity in the church, and in the challenge of finding lay people and priests

who will keep things going in the future. Despite this, they remain hopeful in the emergence of a Church adapted to present and future times. We note with gratitude the contribution of seniors to the building up and maintenance of their parish communities, and give thanks for the gift that they continue to be to our church.

### *Immigrants*

The participants in the focus group of parishioners from abroad noted that their parish allows them to grow in their relationship with Christ. They enjoy celebrations, sharing the Word of God with others, welcoming and meeting others. They take note of the hostility against the Catholic Church in Quebec society, and the challenge that this poses to the Church.

They note that some parishes welcome and include immigrant parishioners, and that these immigrant parishioners become involved in the lives of their parishes. In parishes where they are less well received, they do not feel part of the life of the parish. Participants note with joy that the Church allows the encounter between immigrant Christians and native Christians: all can meet, pray together, help each other, build common projects, etc.

### *Communities of consecrated life*

Many communities of consecrated life

continue their mission in the Archdiocese of Gatineau. Members of these communities gathered with their associates to participate in the synodal process. They identified several strengths of parish life here: the faith of people, their solidarity and charity; well-prepared celebrations and homilies; cultural diversity; the involvement of volunteers in many parish committees; the presence of several prayer groups. They also named weaknesses the fear of going out to the world; language which does not resonate in today's culture; the absence of young people; a lack of succession; a pastoral practice which is too focused on the celebration of the sacraments; an unhealthy parochial spirit that prevents parishes from working together. They are encouraged by the openness of Pope Francis, the arrival of immigrants, the continuity that is being provided by people who are coming from other countries (priests, religious, and laity) and the generosity of people. On the other hand, they are worried about the lack of religious training offered to young people and adults. They find the structures of the Church too rigid, too pyramidal. They welcome the engagement of parishes during times of crisis in the larger community; refugee sponsorship; interreligious dialogue with Muslims; the support of groups such as St-Vincent-de-Paul; and visits to hospitals. At the same time, they regret that people are afraid to talk about religion and are embarrassed to testify to their

faith in Jesus. They note the importance of small faith-sharing groups, prayer groups, *lectio divina*, etc.

### ***Ecclesial movements***

Several Catholic lay organizations or ecclesial movements are active in the diocese. These are an important asset for the Church of Gatineau. Some of these movements participated in the synodal process by holding meetings. Participants noted the importance of living their faith in the sacraments, personal prayer, and in fellowship. They emphasized the importance of prayer groups. According to some, the future of the Church lies in these small groups, whose presence should be encouraged. The participants of these movements identified other challenges for the Church today: the need to find an appropriate language to present the Gospel message; the role of seniors in the mission of the Church and the need for accompaniment for seniors; and the importance of developing a pastoral practice for new immigrant communities which would welcome and integrate their values while inviting them to integrate into diocesan life.



## Results of the on-line survey

The participants at the June 2018 Diocesan Meet-up expressed what they would like to see in a synodal process, including the desire to hear from people outside of our parish communities. This is a challenge for the whole Church. An online questionnaire was prepared, and parishioners were encouraged to share it with people around them. The questionnaire remained online from October 11 to November 30, in French and English. Nearly a thousand people responded: 797 French and 144 English speakers. You can download a presentation of the survey findings in [French](#) and [English](#) on the website of the Archdiocese of Gatineau.

[www.diocesegatineau.org/sn\\_uploads/fck/English-on-line-questionnaire-results.pdf](http://www.diocesegatineau.org/sn_uploads/fck/English-on-line-questionnaire-results.pdf)

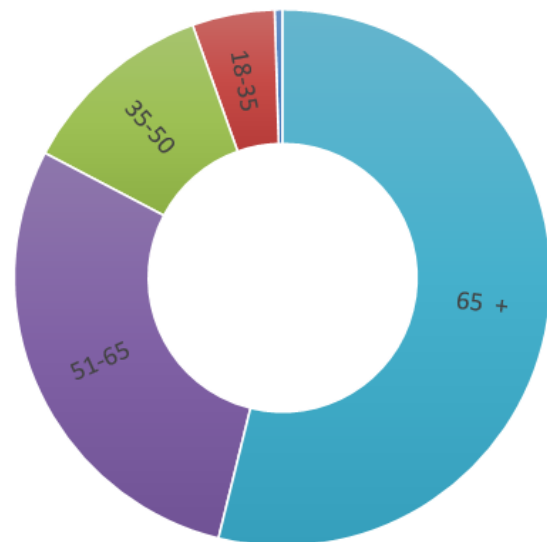
Here are some highlights from the survey.

### *Survey responses*

Among Francophones, the majority of respondents were over 65, however among the younger age groups, there were 180 respondents between 51-65 years old and 108 younger than 51. Among Anglophones, the distribution of respondents by age group almost equal among all three age categories (0-50, 51-65, and 65+).

The vast majority of respondents were born in Quebec (68%), but many were born in Ontario (25%) or in another country (7%). Although the initial goal of the questionnaire was to reach people who do not consider themselves churchgoers, this did not happen: the vast majority of respondents (57%) attend celebrations at least once a week. Nonetheless, 20% of participants never attend li-

### Age groups of respondents



turgical celebrations, or attend only a few times a year.

### ***Beliefs, Faith Life, and the Catholic Church***

For participants in the online questionnaire, being a Christian means believing in Jesus Christ (79%) and helping others (66%). Here are some highlights of what respondents indicated:

#### ***Love of God***

Many respondents note that parishes are friendly and welcoming, but neither modern nor dynamic. Respondents say they want livelier and more prayerful celebrations; homilies that help people connect their experiences with the Word of God; more opportunities to discuss issues of faith and to grow in the knowledge of the Word of God; more opportunities for prayer, recollection, reconciliation and worship.

We note here that 39% of respondents choose a parish according to the style or quality of the liturgy (Eg music, homilies, etc.) while 37% choose the parish closest to home.

### ***Love of Neighbour***

Respondents would like the Church to be more present and involved on the ground, a church that is outward focused, committed to justice. In the words of an individual who answered the questionnaire:

*“What would I like to see in the Church? Open more, get out of the building; go to others, help them; a servant and poor church with the poor; a church where all of our actions are motivated by listening and humility.”*

It should be noted that several respondents raised issues of a more universal nature such as greater openness on issues such as homosexuality, the place of women in the Church and the possibility of marriage for priests.

## Evaluation of the diocesan team

During the diocesan patronal feast on October 11th, priests, deacons and pastoral associates were invited to evaluate the functioning of the diocesan team by considering the four service blocks which compose it: the office of the bishop, pastoral services, administrative services and Chancery. The exercise was repeated with parish secretaries on December 15 at the diocesan center.

Both evaluations show that people are not familiar with the responsibilities of the diocesan team or the work they do. Despite this, the team's appreciation is generally positive: we note the great availability of the members, their desire to serve the parishes well and to provide the services necessary for their proper functioning. We find that the team accomplishes a lot despite its (too?) small size.

In addition, there are many gaps in communication: information is sometimes lacking or difficult to find; communications sometimes arrive "in a pile" and come from various sources, which makes it difficult to follow up; bureaucratization of approval processes, especially in administrative files; a gap in the training offered to wardens and secretaries; and a lack of prioritization in the many files.



# Section III — Strengths, Weaknesses and Concerns

In this third part, you will find in summary of the strengths, weaknesses and concerns of the Christian communities, as identified in the parish reports, focus groups, and the online questionnaire.

## Strengths

### *Our communities are welcoming and our volunteers committed*

For many, the parish community is like a big family. They get together every week around Christ, in the Word and in the Eucharist. The parishioners have a strong faith and a sense of responsibility towards the people around them.

*“My community is welcoming and open, inclusive and warm. There continues to be an important sense of belonging.”*

### *Several movements allow people to grow in faith*

There are bible groups, prayer groups, and several lay ecclesial movements throughout the diocese. Active sharing of the Gospel in these small groups allows people to share their faith with other believers.

*“The testimony of people whose lives have been transformed by a personal encounter with Christ gives me strength and hope.”*

### *The parish plays a central role in the life of small towns*

In the smaller towns, there is great cohesion between parish life and civil life.

### *Immigration renews many of our urban parishes*

Some parishes are witnessing a transformation of their communities with the influx of new parishioners from abroad, especially in the City of Gatineau. The presence, participation and commitment of newcomers is an important asset for these parishes.

## Weaknesses

### *The new generation is slow to arrive*

In most parishes, we see few young families. Active parishioners have a difficult time finding replacements: they get older and run the risk of burnout. The number of priests and pastoral workers continues to decline.

*“The tasks of each volunteer multiply. Volunteers are aging and becoming less numerous. Very generous, they accept many tasks, but they risk burnout. People are willing to lend a helping hand,*

*but do not want to commit themselves to accepting responsibilities.”*

### ***Our places of worship are aging and expensive***

In financial terms, the future is uncertain. Fundraising campaigns are multiplying in the hope of ensuring survival. Sometimes funding for pastoral services competes with maintenance needs.

*“We are concerned about the future of the parish once the current group of parishioners will no longer be able to maintain it.”*

### ***Our vocabulary and ecclesial practices do not reach our contemporaries, especially young people***

In particular, the face of the family has changed and we are having trouble adjusting to that reality. We hardly reach young people their families.

*“People point out that the needs of parishioners are different nowadays. Yes, we must protect our assets. But we must also open ourselves to new resources, ways to offer new services and new activities for parishioners (for young people, families, young people adults, newcomers, seniors, etc.)”*

### ***We have a difficult time accompanying the faithful in their Christian journey***

In most parishes, lay people are engaged in formation for Christian life (catechesis, sacramental initiation, and continuing faith formation for adults).

Some of these volunteers feel inadequately trained and accompanied for this task. There is a shortage of spiritual development activities outside of sacramental preparation.

## **Our concerns**

### ***How do we announce the Word in a society that has radically changed?***

The parishes are wondering how to interest people in Jesus Christ. They are looking for ways to adapt to the new realities of the world, to provide services that take into account the individualism and activism that mark our society. We focus too much on the survival of our church buildings and not enough on the mission of the Church at the heart of the world.

*“We are too focused on the life or future of our parishes instead of reflecting on what the Church is today, what it is called to be.”*

### ***How can we equip the faithful for the mission?***

The faithful are embarrassed to talk about religion in today’s world. They hardly understand their role in evangelization, in the mission of the Church.

*“What I hear around me is “I don’t want to be a missionary!” The Word “missionary” makes us feel incompetent.”*

### ***How can we ensure and prepare for continuity?***

Many are wondering how to recruit and

accompany the faithful in parish life. They would like to learn how to train those who wish to assume various roles within the parish and to renew the leadership of the Christian community.

### ***How do we live with precariousness and decline?***

Precariousness forces some parishes to make difficult choices. We ask ourselves questions like: Should we regroup our parishes? Are we focused on the right priorities, given the decline in our volunteers and finances? How do we prioritize (make choices considering the lack of people to ensure continuity)?

*“In 15 years, will we be an active parish or a museum? That depends on the choices that we make in the next few years.”*

### ***How can we improve collaboration?***

Several parishes have noted a lack of communication between the various groups of the parish and between the parishes themselves. Others would like clear diocesan guidelines in pastoral care and for the sacraments. There is a duplication of services in some areas, and gaps in services in others.

*“We must learn to collaborate in this time: between the parishes, with the diocesan team, and with the other Christian denominations on the territory.”*

### ***How to ensure that our communities are truly welcoming?***

Even though parishes consider themselves as welcoming, charitable, open, engaged, and active, this is not always the experience of people in the church. Several respondents to the online questionnaire are looking for greater openness and a more genuine welcome from their parish. There are sometimes mutual prejudices between parishioners from here and those from elsewhere.

*“There are mutual prejudices: in some places, Christians with an immigrant background tend to judge the faith (too lukewarm!) Of Christians from here. Conversely, in some circles, Christians from here tend to make judgments about the faith (too fervent, too conservative, and too charismatic!) of those with an immigrant background, and also about their relationship at the time.”*

### ***How to live more lively and prayerful liturgical celebrations?***

In response to the question “what would you like to see change in the Church?” many people emphasized the importance of living more vibrant celebrations. People said that our liturgical celebrations do not speak to young families. People want homilies that are related to life. They want to experience a spiritual experience when they come together.

***What legacy of faith are we going to leave?***

The shrinking of our parish communities cause many to worry about how the Gospel will continue to be proclaimed and lived in our region. Will our children and our grandchildren believe? Will there still be Christian communities to help people grow in faith?



# Section IV — Synthesis of our diocesan reality and the way forward in the synodal process

## **Synthesis of our diocesan reality**

How can we do justice in a few paragraphs to the multitude of comments and the diversity of voices that enriched the discussions during this first phase of the synodal process? Any synthesis must necessarily betray this richness by reducing personal convictions and questions to more abstract and notional categories. Yet such a synthesis is necessary to move forward together in this synodal process. The following paragraphs are intended to provide an overview that will allow us to lay the groundwork for the next steps in this process.

The parish still plays a major role in the faith life of the Christians who attend it. This is the first observation that can be drawn from Phase I of this synodal process. Indeed, participants in the consultation sessions and the online survey make it very clear that their personal relationship to Christ is at the heart of their Christian faith and that the Christian community nurtures this relationship to Christ. The parish makes their commitments and mission fruitful through prayer, listening and service to the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments (especially the Eucharist). For the most part, being a Christian influences their decision to commit to building a more fraternal church, and to serving others, especially the poor. The parish thus helps nurture their Christian commitment in the Christian community and in the world.

Parishes are shaped by their geographic location, according to their rural or urban setting.

On the one hand, the rural parish, concerned about the aging of the Christian population, has nonetheless been able to develop an astonishing presence in its community and a beneficial collaboration with local organizations and municipalities. It integrates two important dimensions of life: space and time. Space, because the rural parish is linked to a municipal territory. It is also a faithful witness of time, because it is the place where important stages of the Christian life (especially through the sacraments) are lived: baptism, communion, confirmation, marriage, birthdays, and funerals.

On the other hand, there is the urban parish. Historically, it is richer in human and financial resources than the rural parish. However, these parishes are also experiencing a decrease in the number of pastoral associates and in initiatives and projects that have been in place until recently. There are fewer opportunities to journey in faith. The urban parish is less marked by a deep sense of belonging; this results, among other things, from its more or less porous territorial limits and the still recent reorganization of many parishes. Urban parishes are also concerned about the decline in human resources. In addition, they often benefit from the contribution of new immigrants, who often rejuvenate the face of the parish. Incorporating Christians of immigrant background in the parish life remains a challenge.

Note that these two models also exist in the English zone, made up of a dozen parishes in our diocese. In addition, these English parishes face the challenges of their cultural minority status on this side of the Outaouais. The two Portuguese communities are shaped by a dynamic specific to them. Finally, for many older faithful, their common residence (CHSLD or seniors' residence) replaced the parish. They celebrate the Eucharist, pray with others, live with them, and bear witness to their faith.

Let us go back to the parishes. All, rural as well as urban, are concerned to varying degrees by the frailty of the parishes. For example, there is the worrying lack of priests and their aging, as well as the more or less successful integration of priests from elsewhere. The number of sacramental celebrations marking important life transitions has diminished in a stunning manner, in spite of the important demographic growth of our region: in twenty years, baptisms, first

communions and confirmations have decreased by more than 50%; in thirty years, the number of marriages has fallen by 85%. The decrease in the number of pastoral workers in urban areas is strongly felt. Everywhere, the numbers of faithful who are very engaged in parish life are decreasing, and those who are active are aging - one wonders where we will find people to take their place. The result is an impoverishment in faith formation, especially for adults. The mission of the Church, expressed through evangelization or commitment to social justice, is also undermined. All parishes are burdened by the significant increase in financial burdens while the number of parishioners who are there to contribute financially continues to decline. Many are left wondering about the dropping off in numbers of faithful who had once been actively involved in Christian movements and communities. Some are dismayed by our inability to form new disciples, despite liturgical and sacramental preparations that have been in place for several decades. It seems that we will have to learn to do things differently if we want to have different results.

***A first line of questioning: How to maintain what is currently in place?***

Faced with such changes and the challenges they entail, a first series of questions arises, related to the desire to maintain the current way of doing things. This reaction, more typical of the older faithful, is not limited to this group. It should be noted that some immigrants have a similar reaction when they seek to maintain the parish lifestyle they experienced in their country of origin. The options vary according to experiences and beliefs. Thus, some believe that the key lies in the catechesis of children that should be ensured at all costs, even fighting to reintroduce religious education in schools. Others want to invest in pastoral care for adolescents. Many ask how we can "bring people back to the Church". Should we "modernize" our liturgies, adapt them to the taste of the day? Should we review certain moral teachings of the Church that discourage the general population? In the long run, it will be necessary to find new volunteers to maintain or set up pastoral services: how do we recruit these new volunteers? Faced with the shortage of priests, some suggest a project of vocational awakening while others believe in the ordination of married men or women. In any case, it would be necessary to be able

to afford this personnel, these services and these programs, giving rise to a nagging concern: how can we find new sources of financing? This first series of questions, centered on the inner life of the parish, reflects a fundamental concern: will our parish community survive?

***A second line of questioning: How to transform what exists?***

On the other hand, reading the reports of the first phase also reveals a second series of questions more centered on the world in which we live. These questions seem more and more engraved on the hearts and minds of many faithful, especially the younger ones. They are formulated as follows: how can we live the Christian faith today in a secularized society? How do we understand the role of the Church in a context where its place in society has been reduced? How do we bear testimony of Jesus in an ever-changing society where indifference and even mistrust of the Church — and of religion in general — seem to have a lasting impact on our contemporaries? How do we transmit the faith when it can no longer rest on the former foundations of family, school and society in general? How can we open to the questions and hopes of the new generations? How can we better integrate the wealth and traditions of newly arrived cultural communities in our territory? How can immigrants themselves better adapt to the cultural and religious reality of their host country? These questions invite us to question our old ways of doing things and invite us to open new paths to the Gospel in a deeply transformed society.

***A fundamental conviction***

Note that these two series of questions are based on the conviction named at the beginning of this chapter: the Christian community plays an important role in the development of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the heart of the Christian life. Why do we seek to ensure the vitality of the parish and to understand its place in today's world? Because we continue to believe that the person of Christ has not lost its importance for humanity, and that the Christian community is necessary to maintain a relationship with Him.

## **Moving forward in the synodal process**

The second phase (winter-spring 2019) is an opportunity for the faithful of the diocese to analyze our reality by reflecting on the fundamental conviction and the two series of questions above. It will identify key areas of action to guide the future of our communities. It will lead to the preparation of a working document for the third phase (autumn 2019) which will aim to develop a diocesan action plan for the years to come.

In this second phase, we will deepen our fundamental belief by asking ourselves how the person of Christ is important to today's humanity and why the parish is so important to nurturing this relationship. We will take the time to contemplate the world around us. We will seek to understand the deep wounds and desires in our society, and how the gospel invites us to respond to these. We will identify the characteristics of our culture that would allow it to open up to the Gospel message as Good News. We will also reflect on our parish life. We will identify its essential dimensions, we will see how to take advantage of its current strengths to open avenues for the future and we will propose ways to overcome its weaknesses.

By entering this second phase, the team invites you to remember your personal role in the life of the Church. In deepening these questions, let each of us deepen our understanding of how we are called to live our faith today, to testify to Jesus in our families and people around us...essentially, to learn how to become “missionary-disciples”. May this second phase be a time of renewal for all of us.

Let us continue to invoke the help of the Lord who always accompanies us in our collective discernment. Let us take up again the prayer of the synodal process found on the back cover of this report.

# Comments, reflections, personal insights

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God our Father,

As Roman Catholics of the Outaouais region,  
we want to continue together the pilgrimage of faith  
undertaken in this diocese more than half a century ago.

Following Jesus both as individuals and as a community,  
we want to create Covenant spaces between ourselves and for the world.

Sustain our desire to undertake together a true missionary shift.

Though the road markers be unclear and the path unmapped,  
still the mysterious Walker of the road to Emmaus accompanies us always.

Guided by his Spirit, turned toward the future,  
we can dream our communities of tomorrow.

Hear our prayer:

Our personal and communal journeys have led us this far;  
may the synodal process allow us to take up the road together once again,  
with renewed confidence, a new assurance and a new ardour,  
for your glory, Father, and the salvation of the world.

Amen.