



**The University of the West Indies**  
**St. Augustine Campus**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Education**  
**Caribbean Studies Project**  
**HUMN 3099**

Student name: Maurice Michael White  
Student ID no.: 05021636  
Degree Program: B.A. in Theology  
Supervisor: Fr. Dr Dexter Brereton

Title of Thesis:

Synodality and Youth: Assessing the role of the St. John's Parish in its journey with the youth 13-18 years, in light of the Synod's call to communion, participation and mission.

Word count: 8,000 words

**Declaration**

1. I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.
2. I authorise The University of the West Indies to make a physical or digital copy of my thesis/research paper/project report for its preservation, for public reference, and for the purpose of inter-library loan.

Signature of Student: Maurice White

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> April 2023

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES  
The Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies

**INDIVIDUAL PLAGIARISM DECLARATION**

This declaration is being made in accordance with the University Regulations on Plagiarism (First Degrees, Diplomas and Certificate) and should be attached to all work submitted by a student to be assessed as part of or/the entire requirement of the course, other than work submitted in an invigilated examination.

**Statement**

1. I have read the Plagiarism Regulations as set out in the Faculty Handbook and University websites related to the submission of coursework for assessment.
2. I declare that I understand that plagiarism is the use of another's work pretending that it is one's own and that it is a serious academic offence for which the University may impose severe penalties.
3. I declare that the submitted work indicated below is my own work, except where duly acknowledged and referenced.
4. I also declare that this paper has not been previously submitted for credit either in its entirety or in part within the UWI or elsewhere.
5. I understand that I may be required to submit the work in electronic form and accept that the University may check the originality of the work using a computer-based plagiarism detection service.

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT – Synodality and Youth: Assessing the role of the St. John's Parish in its journey with the youth 13-18 years, in light of the Synod's call to communion, participation and mission.

COURSE CODE – HUMN 3099

COURSE TITLE - CARIBBEAN STUDIES PROJECT

STUDENT ID – 05021636

By signing this declaration, you are confirming that the work you are submitting is original and does not contain any plagiarised material.

I confirm that this assignment is my own work, and that the work of other persons has been fully acknowledged.

SIGNATURE - Maurice White

DATE - 14<sup>th</sup> April 2023

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Words cannot express my gratitude to God for His grace and blessing that sustained me and this project over the past year. Additionally, I am eternally grateful to my supervisor Fr. Dexter Brereton, for his wealth of wisdom on the subject matter, guidance, invaluable patience and timely feedback. I would also like to thank Fr. Dr. Arnold Francis, (parish priest of St John's) Johnathan Hinds, Rica Charles, the Pastoral Council, and Synod Team, who all accommodated me during countless interviews over the many months of research. Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank the youth of this parish, without whom the project would not have been possible and to whom I dedicate this piece of work. It is my wish that the recommendations offered may increase your positive experiences of Synodality, Youth ministry and the Church.

## ABSTRACT

The thesis assesses the role of St John's parish in its journey with the youth 13-18 years, in light of the Synod's call to participation, communion and mission. In keeping with Catholic literature and praxis, and after devoting a considerable amount of study to determine the various criteria and benchmarks that constitute both youth ministry and synodality, the thesis constructs a theological, anthropological and pastoral profile of youth ministry and synodality in order to explore the three most salient areas by which the youth's experience can be assessed. The first area of investigation is the daily life of the teenager (both personal and spiritual) within the domestic and parish church, which is plagued by a serious level of violence that hijacks the secular and ecclesial spaces, hindering synodality. The second area under investigation, is the relationship dynamic between the youth and the increasing number of absent mentors who are called to spiritually accompany them. The third area of interest, reflects on the three arms of governance that lead and manage the parish, to ascertain how the lack of collaboration and co-responsibility among themselves negatively impacts the experience of synodality. The study establishes that the youth experience of synodality is an impoverished one, due to various socio-ecclesial challenges, particularly in the three areas mentioned above and the lack of a synodal understanding and will to adequately address the problems. The study concludes its assessment by providing recommendations which aim to improve both youth ministry and the synodal experience.

Keywords: synodality, communion, participation, mission, youth ministry, spirituality of accompaniment.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
List of Figures.....	5
List of Appendices.....	6
Introduction .....	7
Rationale.....	7
Thesis Statement.....	7&8
Parameters.....	8
Objectives.....	9
Methodology.....	10
Chapter Outline.....	10
Literature Review.....	12
Chapter 1 – The Pastoral Situation.....	19
Chapter 2 – The Missing Mentor.....	28
Chapter 3 –A Critical Look at Ecclesial Governance.....	33
Conclusion.....	38
Works Cited.....	42
APPENDIX A.....	43
APPENDIX B.....	44
APPENDIX C.....	45
APPENDIX D.....	48

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Fig 1. Map showing the community and parish of St John R.C. with significant landmarks.....19

Fig 2. Pie chart showing household composition of the cohort studied.....20

Fig 3. Bar graph showing results of primary survey on the cohort’s experience of synodality....21

**LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Youth survey (demography/standard scale).....43

Appendix B – Youth questionnaire (Likert scale) .....44

Appendix C – Interview (focus group) questions for youth.....45

Appendix D – Interview (focus group) questions for adults.....48

## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

Primary investigations revealed that 461 persons between the ages of 13 and 18 were born and baptised in the parish of St John's between the years 2004 and 2010. However, this statistic does not match or explain the current confirmation enrollment of 17 persons or the involvement of only a handful of teenagers in various parish ministries. The disparity is alarming and even more worrisome, as the new synodal way of Church presupposes the presence of this cohort that is very much absent. Upon further investigation, it was ascertained that of this group of 461 persons, more than half came from other regions within the archdiocese. Church administration (pastoral council) has settled on 150 young persons, as the actual number for this cohort. However, the disparity still needs to be explained, as this indicates that there are at least more than 100 missing teenagers.

This may be the experience of other parishes within the archdiocese and dioceses of the region. Therefore, this work is important and beneficial because while there have been studies conducted on various aspects of youth and youth ministry, there are limited investigations into their full experience of Church, and not any type of Church but the synodal model currently being proffered.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the Synod's call to communion, participation and mission, this thesis argues that the youth 13-18 years of St John's have an impoverished experience of synodality due to a number of socio-ecclesial challenges. They are the dominance of violence within the ecclesial and

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that in the past, there have been misconceptions about young people and their absence from the ecclesial space. Many persons provide dated and superficial hypotheses such as "church is boring for them" and "young people have no interest in Church anymore". However, this study seeks to gain deeper insight, through an assessment of the current pastoral situation and the practice of youth ministry, viewed through the lens of Synodality, to determine if the fullest experience of communion, participation and mission for youth is being facilitated.

secular space, a problematic and poorly executed programme of personal and spiritual formation, the lack of mentors and authentic accompaniment and ecclesial structures of governance that operate in dysfunctionality.<sup>2</sup>

### **Parameters**

The data was gathered over a three-month period (October, November and December 2022) which was enough time to conduct surveys, interviews and focus groups with the many stakeholders involved in both youth ministry and the synod endeavour. A research project of this type did not have the time nor the resources to collect data from over 100 young people, many of whom are missing as previously stated. Therefore, the impracticality of this situation forced the study to be restricted to the assessment of the synodal experience of the 17 teenagers who belong to the current confirmation class and a brief reflection upon the 8 persons who defected. Here it is argued that the case study of this distinct group acts as an adequate representation of the 150 young persons that belong to St John's parish.<sup>3</sup> It can also provide a window that gives a glimpse into the wider archdiocese and society, of which many regions share similar socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-ecclesial strengths and challenges. While the author of this study acknowledges the very limited sample size, it is suggested that it still has value as a qualitative study and it is the hope that the case study can offer suggestions about further research that needs to be conducted due to the limitations of this study.

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that these themes were ascertained through an understanding of the theological, pastoral and anthropological requirements for youth and youth ministry based on Catholic literature post Vatican II. The themes were chosen out of the author's personal and pastoral experience of youth and youth ministry throughout the archdiocese, especially within the parish of St John's over the last two years and how the experience failed to meet the requirements.

<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy to indicate that this adequate representation is a good sample size of well over 10% of 150 persons.

## Objectives

As outlined in the Church's ecclesiological and pastoral documents of the last seven decades, this research project will identify various factors that make the synodal experience of communion, participation and mission present among the youth 13-18 years of St John's parish. This work will pave the way for a more detailed analysis of the current situation in the parish Church and will utilize surveys, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, both with the youth cohort being investigated and other invested stakeholders. An examination of the pastoral situation aims to give some insight into the level of "personal and spiritual growth"<sup>4</sup> of the young person or lack thereof, and as their development is intrinsically linked to their experience, it will also make a determination as to how much of the situation directly influences their experience of synodality.

This study will fundamentally interrogate the role and practice of the stakeholders<sup>5</sup> in youth ministry, to determine the extent to which they facilitate the experience of synodality as they accompany the youth. Ultimately, the research will be able to provide an adequate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of not only youth ministry but the ecclesial structures in the parish that have either been helpful or a hindrance to the young person's experience of communion, participation and mission.

---

<sup>4</sup> The concept of "integral human development" and more so "personal and spiritual growth" have been mentioned and expounded by several Bishops and Pontiffs throughout the decades. This concept of growth will be defined and described in the Literature Review and thus give adequate insight into the "yardstick" that will be used to determine if the youth and youth ministry of St John's meet the various benchmarks.

<sup>5</sup> These are all the persons directly and indirectly involved in youth ministry. This includes the parish priest, pastoral council, catechists, youth coordinator, pastoral council, mentors and many others whether they consciously know it or not. In the true spirit of synodality, stakeholders would be every member of the parish.

## **Methodology**

An analysis of the Church's ecclesiological and pastoral documents on synodality and youth ministry was conducted. Chief among them were *Lumen Gentium*, which laid the foundation for the understanding of synodality and *Christus Vivit*; the most current synodal document on youth and youth ministry. At least a dozen secondary documentary sources were utilized to supplement these, so that a vault of Catholic literature was curated, which in turn constructed a pellucid definition and description of synodality and youth ministry. The baptismal records of the Church which can be considered a primary archeological source was consulted to determine the potential number of teenagers the study could refer to. There was a quantitative dimension to the methodology, as surveys (both standard and Likert scale) were utilized to gain basic data concerning the youth including demography. Additionally, primary oral sources such as interviews and focus groups were utilized to gain qualitative insight into whether or not the various aspects of synodality were being experienced by the youth and facilitated by the ecclesial structures of governance that are led and managed by the adults who accompany them. This research was qualitative, consisting of an analysis and commentary of the data collected. It was also guided by a thesis which aimed to prove that the experience of synodality, although visibly present and tangibly felt, was impoverished due to the various socio-ecclesial challenges that plagued the parish and impaired the accompaniment process of young persons.

## **Chapter Outline**

This study consists of three chapters. The first and most extensive chapter titled: *The Pastoral Situation*, provides an adequate description of the domestic and parish life of the teenagers within the ecclesial space and how their daily struggles within the secular space affects their personal and spiritual growth and ultimately, the enterprise of synodality. Chapter two titled:

*The Missing Mentor*, begins to explore the dwindling number of adult leaders in the parish and the absent spirituality of accompaniment and how this inhibits all the dimensions of synodality. The third chapter is named *A Critical look at Ecclesial Governance*. This interrogates the various ecclesial arms of governance and the realities of clericalism and authoritarianism that hinders the synodal project of collaboration and co-responsibility. After delineating the various privations, the conclusion, which is titled *Recommendations for the Synodal Path Ahead*, will succinctly summarize what has been discovered through the study, what remains to be uncovered and what are the implications for this parish and the possible implications for the wider archdiocese. Thereby bringing together a comprehensive list of all the attitudes and practices that should be stopped and offer proposals for those that should be immediately initiated or strengthened.

## Literature Review

Lumen Gentium is one of the seminal works of the *Second Vatican Council* which was fundamentally responsible for a new theological and pastoral understanding of the Church.<sup>6</sup> Synodality, as rooted in the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* and guided by the *Vademecum* involves the full involvement and participation of the whole people of God<sup>7</sup> in the life and mission of the Church; “a call to serve one another through the gifts we have received from the Holy Spirit” (p. 13). Communion is defined as the outward expression or the visible unity that we manifest as diverse peoples of one faith and the missionary dimension is defined by the fact that “we can never be centered on ourselves” but are called to reach out to those on the periphery because “the Church exists to evangelize” (p. 13). Moreover, it is an “*ecclesio genesis*”,<sup>8</sup> as all the members of the Church regardless of rank or role, fully participate in a collaborative and co-responsible manner as they continually listen, discern, review and reform the mentalities, structures and praxis that are holding us back from the fullness of communion and mission.

Rafael Luciani’s work, *Synodality a New Way of Proceeding in the Church*, is a pellucid understanding of the current task of synodality, as perceived through the lens of *Lumen Gentium*’s

---

<sup>6</sup> With its chapters on *The Mystery of the Church* and *The People of God*, the Council was able to bring about a seismic shift in ecclesiological thinking, attitudes and behaviour especially with regard to the laity. It asserted that a *Universal Call to Holiness* truly existed, and was no longer the exclusive domain of priests and religious, and that all those incorporated into the Church through baptism are qualified for worship (LG 11). The document explained and distinguished between the common priesthood of the faithful which all the members of the Church possess and participate in, and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood that only “a baptised male can validly receive” (Canon 1024). The Council also defined the role of *The Laity* in chapter 4, in the hope of empowering them in their secular vocation in the world. Essentially, the Council activated a perspective that attempted to hold several realities together - a Pilgrim Church that is on a *synodal journey*; completely one in communion, human and divine, universal and particular, ordered and diverse, clergy and lay.

<sup>7</sup> This includes lay, consecrated and ordained.

<sup>8</sup> A term that denotes that the Church is continually being renewed through synodality because according to Rafael Luciani “reform is understood as a permanent process”.

definition and description of Church. Luciani first acknowledges in his introductory statements that the Church is not merely a sociological reality. Therefore, he insists that synodality is not “an administrative reorganization of the Church” but a “new ecclesial way of proceeding to bring about an ecclesiological change” (1). With this in mind, this theologian devotes his first chapter to critiquing the institutional failure of dated hierarchical, authoritarian and clerical models of Church, that have managed to survive post Vatican II and which pose a threat to the process and experience of synodality in the contemporary age. It must be noted that these dated ecclesial models are the antithesis of the theology of the “*sensus fidei*” and “*sensus fidelium*”<sup>9</sup> and can never facilitate communion, participation or mission in any community. Luciani’s writing demonstrates that he adequately grasps the proper ecclesiological understanding of both Church and synodality. Therefore, it must be noted that his insights can be utilized in understanding a specific cohort of the lay faithful - the youth. Young people are equally called to experience Church and synodality but have been often overlooked and misunderstood, particularly because of some of the “ecclesial mentalities and structures” of the past (8). These ecclesial structures have not served to foster communion, participation and mission but have stifled the proper “communicative dynamics”<sup>10</sup> needed in the Church, between the young people and their mentors who accompany them on their journey (2). Luciani has observed that synodality requires the constant reassessment and reconfiguration of these structures.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Lumen Gentium* reflected upon this salient theological concept. The “*sensus fidei*” and “*sensus fidelium*” is the belief that Christ empowered the laity to participate in his prophetic office, “by making them his witnesses and giving them an understanding and attractiveness of speech” so that the Gospel may shine forth in their daily lives (LG 35). With this being so, “the entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief” and they show unity when they are in “universal agreement in matters of faith and morals” (LG 12).

<sup>10</sup> This term used by Rafael Luciani expresses how the community should “walk together”, involving the dynamic of “praying, meeting, working together, discerning, making and taking decisions, taking advice and building consensus” (pp. 2-3).

As the United Nations prepared to celebrate *The International Year of the Youth in 1985*, Pope John Paul II, exhorted the young people through his letter *Dilecti Amici*. One of the most significant themes in his letter was “Growth”, which the Pope labelled the “evangelical definition of youth” (DA 14) and which would be revisited by Pope Francis in his post synodal apostolic exhortation titled *Christus Vivit*. Always a friend of the youth, Pope John Paul II was concerned for the “personal and spiritual development” of the young person through their contact with others and contact with God. This letter defined and described “personal and spiritual growth” as the understanding that youth are called not only to develop in “stature”, (that is psychophysically) but also spiritually in “wisdom and grace”. The document mentions the facilitation of a youth’s psychophysical growth through the educational disciplines of sport, art, music, nature and ethics. Whereas, the spiritual growth, is fostered through an active prayer life and a deep commitment to reading and meditating on the Scriptures.<sup>11</sup>

As the decades rolled on, the vision for youth and youth ministry, was not only defined further, it was distilled and clearly articulated through pastoral documents like the U.S.A. bishops’ *Renewing the Vision* put forward in 1997 and the 2003 A.E.C.’s *Vision of Youth Ministry for Youth and Young Adults* that borrowed their goals and principles wholesale. Both documents put forward the same three goals: to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today, to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the

---

<sup>11</sup> In his concluding remarks, the Pontiff indicated that he was only writing about the main aspects of personal and spiritual growth and that it was his hope that “these could be discussed at much greater length” and that he “hoped that it was happening in youth circles, groups, movements and organizations” (DA 14). It is a fact that this hope has become a reality for youth and youth ministry within the Church for subsequent decades. This thesis is indeed an attempt to discuss the “personal and spiritual growth” of a specific “circle or group” – that of the confirmation youth of St John’s and to assess whether or not this growth is “happening” and its connections to the experiences of synodality.

Catholic faith community and to foster the personal and spiritual growth of each young person. Immediately, significant links can be made between these three goals and the Church's desire for synodality. Therefore, youth ministry should be geared towards the personal and spiritual development of every young person, so that they are not only empowered for mission in the world but can also fully participate in the life of their Church, both parish and domestic<sup>12</sup>, where they can experience communion.

Another document that highlights the connections between synodality and youth ministry, is the working document from the Synod on Youth held in 2018 and its Apostolic Letter *Christus Vivit* promulgated in 2019. In these documents, various themes were discussed, most of which were visited before but were now deepened in their reflection and made relevant for this present decade. *Christus Vivit* offers two important areas of youth ministry for consideration: outreach and growth. In exploring the growth of young people, the document reflects upon youth participation in sport, culture, education and music,<sup>13</sup> illustrating how collaborative efforts among all stakeholders in these areas, can contribute to the personal development of the young person. On the other hand, participation in the liturgical life of the domestic and parish church caters for the spiritual development of youth. A particular focus of concern which emphasizes the link to the synodal journey, is the accompaniment and mentorship of the young person, of which the

---

<sup>12</sup> Domestic church is defined in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* as an ancient expression reintroduced by the *Second Vatican Council* to describe the Christian family unit. The Catechism continues to state that these families “in a world often alien and even hostile to faith are.... centers of living, radiant faith”. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* paragraph #1656.

<sup>13</sup>This study is prepared to conduct a brief investigation of the various pedagogical methods and styles found within these departments of human endeavour, and thus provide where necessary and appropriate, laconic and intermittent commentaries on whether this is happening in St John's and how this affects the facilitation of the project of synodality among the youth.

document delineated its criteria. The Church strongly desires that such mentors are not limited to priests but are lay persons.<sup>14</sup>

*The Catholic News TT* has a plethora of articles that engage the discussion of youth and synodality. One noteworthy article comes from Kaelanne Jordan who reports on a talk given by the Catholic Commission for Social Justice’s Acting Chair and Programme Manager, Darion Narine. The talk was delivered at Liturgy School 2022 and was titled *Youth participation in the life of the Church: lights and shadows today; dreaming of a new synodal way*. Narine believes that young people must “be involved in the process of planning, identifying needs, finding solutions to problems and implementing decision making within organizations and communities” (Jordan). Interestingly enough, Narine’s thoughts are also parallel to Luciani’s reflection, when Luciani mentions the call made by the Latin American Church for all the faithful “to participate in discernment, decision-taking, planning and implementation” (33). Narine also believes that the new synodal way must incorporate a “more collaborative model” where young people are co-responsible for youth ministry. These thoughts are in keeping with the theological reflections that have emerged from the International Theological Commission’s document on synodality.

The Commission, through its document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* has defined synodality. They make several noteworthy statements. Synodality is “lived out in the

---

<sup>14</sup> Accompaniment is one of the visible signs of communion and it encourages participation in the life of the domestic and parish church. The qualities of a mentor listed will be one of the “yardsticks” that measures the extent to which accompaniment and therefore synodality is being experienced. Mentors are “faithful Christians engaging with the world and the Church and constantly seeking holiness”. A mentor must be “a confidant without judging, an active listener, deeply loving and self-aware, recognizing their own limits and as such can acknowledge their own humanity”. The document also shared that the mentor must “believe wholeheartedly in the young person’s ability to participate in the life of the Church” and that they must “nurture the seeds of faith without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit”. Lastly and most importantly, the Church believes all mentors should “benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation” (CV 246).

Church in the service of mission as she exists in order to evangelise” (53). “Every baptised person is called to be a missionary disciple”(53) and that everyone in the Church as “a free and different subject, is a companion on the journey and is called to play an active role”(55).The document also expounds upon synodality in the life of the parish, as it makes the point that the parish is “where we learn to live as disciples of the Lord...and experience communion in the variety of vocations and generations, charisms, ministries and competencies, forming a genuine community where everyone jointly lives out his or her mission and service” (83).The parish council within the parish, is a structure that has a synodal character and Pope Francis, in his address for the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, has reminded the faithful to cherish this “organ of communion” which must “keep connected to the base and start from people and their daily problems”. The *A.E.C. Vision of Youth Ministry* document, specifically mentions that youth ministry must be “collaborative” and that the parish council team along with the parish priest, youth coordinator and other stakeholders, must participate in regular dialogue (8).<sup>15</sup>

In 2013, Pope Francis’ programmatic encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* provided a succinct summary and an interpretive key into how synodality must be experienced and lived out in the community. In the encyclical he shares his dream for a Church that is more involved, inclusive, supportive and open, particularly in the lives of those who are outcast. The Pope has asked the Church to “go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries” and also to “boldly take initiative, go out to others and seek those who have fallen away” (EG 24). The encyclical asserts that the evangelizing community gets “involved by word and deed in people’s

---

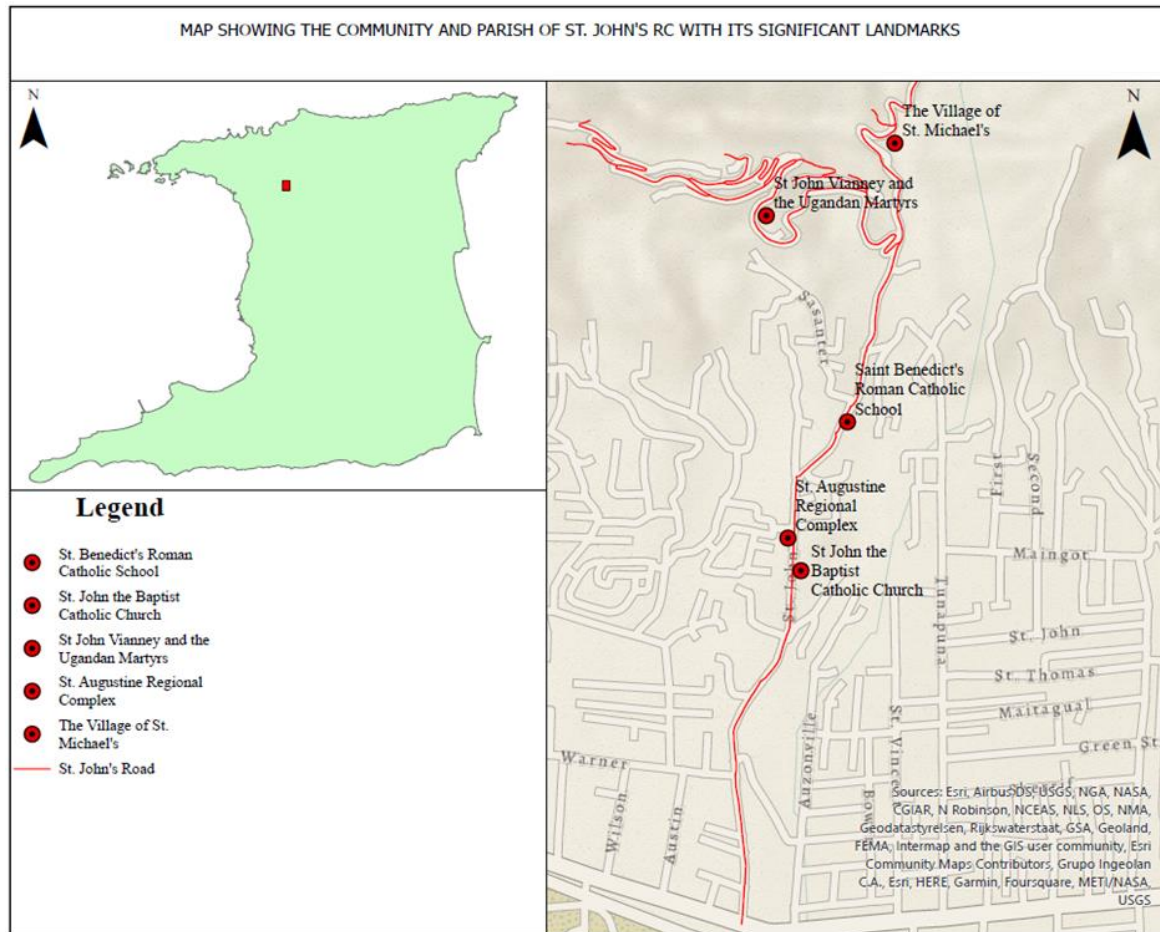
<sup>15</sup> This is worth interrogating as it will reveal whether or not the youth of St John’s parish are experiencing synodality within the new ecclesiological model that Pope Francis described in the anniversary address as an “inverted pyramid”, one where, not only is the base empowered to actually live the realities of synodality but clericalism and all the other structures that hamper the synodal enterprise are reduced or rooted out.

daily lives” and is “supportive standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy” (EG 24). In the encyclical, Pope Francis even commented on the institutional structure of the parish Church which he claimed is not outdated but one that must be constantly open to renewal as it rejects the temptation to be a “self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few” (EG27).

This literature review has traced the development of the rich theological understanding of Church – a fruit of Vatican II that began to revisit and open up the whole notion of synodality once more. It also traced the Church’s understanding and proclamation of youth and youth ministry, as it operates within this rich theological understanding of Church. After considering at great length the intersections of youth, youth ministry and synodality, and the corresponding anthropological, theological and pastoral profiles that emerge, it cannot be denied that the profiles constructed, are quite fitting to be used as the ideal by which the experience of synodality will be assessed.

## CHAPTER 1 - THE PASTORAL SITUATION

The parish of St John is nestled in the foothills of the northern range<sup>16</sup> as illustrated by the map below (Fig #1).

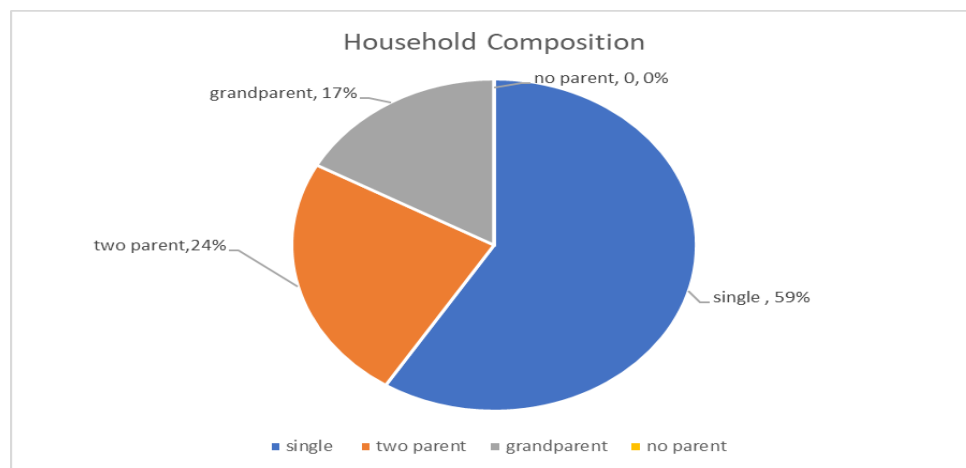


**Fig #1 showing a map of St John's Parish and surrounding community.**  
**Source: Map of St John's and surrounding community, December 2022, LaReine Williams, Arc GIS.**

The baptismal records indicated that there were 461 teenagers baptised at the parish between 2004 and 2010. Of this number, it is presumed that 150 belong to this parish community.

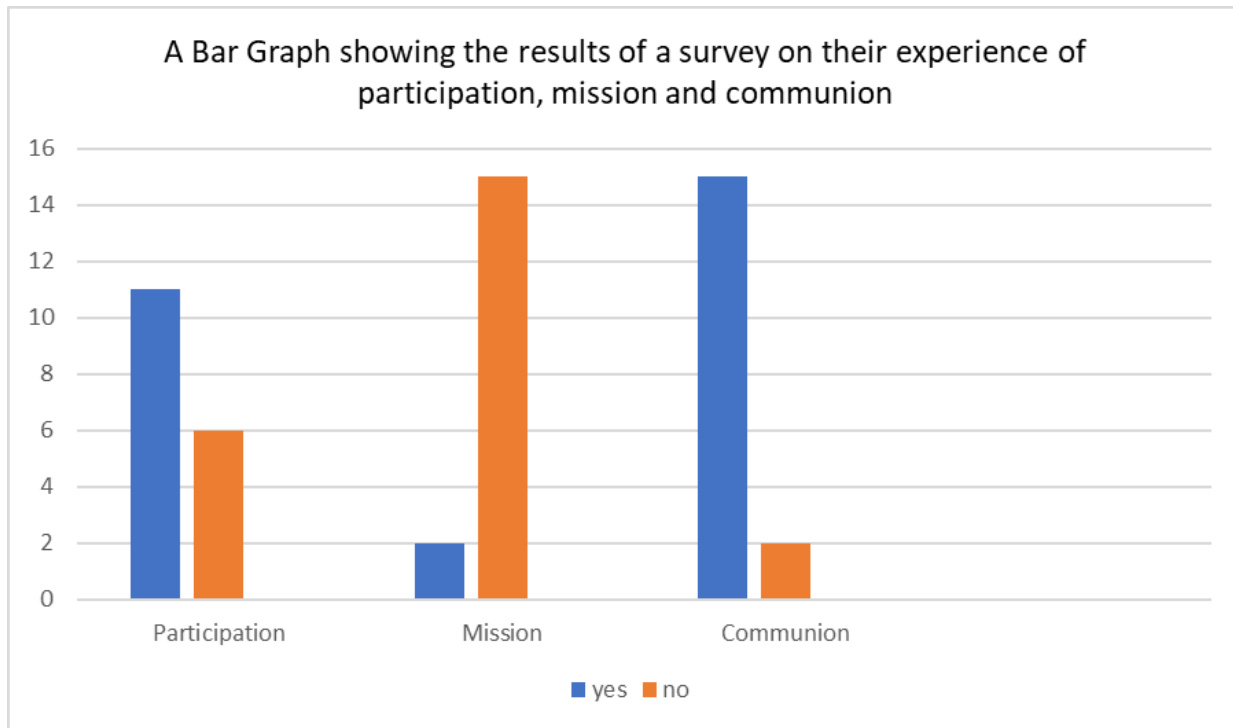
<sup>16</sup> The parish of St John's borders the parishes of St Joseph to the west, Tunapuna to the east, Curepe to the South and the Benedictine Monastery to the north. The parish is notably small, consisting of the Catholic households that live along St John's main road and its tributary road networks beginning from the Eastern Main Road and ending in St Michael's village where there is a chapel that is not currently utilized for worship.

As discussed in the Parameters, the research restricted itself to the confirmation class of 25 members of which 8 defected.<sup>17</sup> Of the 17 teenagers who are present, 11 are female and 6 are male. The majority come from a single parent household as illustrated in Fig#2 below and all attend mass regularly. The cohort's initial responses recorded in the 1st survey (see Appendix A) regarding their experience of communion, participation and mission revealed that they are of the belief that they have no experience of mission, some experience of participation and an overwhelmingly positive experience of communion at St John's parish (see Fig #3 on the following page).



**Fig #2 showing the household composition of the cohort.**

<sup>17</sup> This chapter's analysis of the pastoral situation would not be complete without any mention of the "missing teenagers". An interview with both Mr. Hinds (youth coordinator) and a teen who defected, disclosed that the psychological challenges of the pandemic and the irregular class schedule and structure resulted in eight teenagers deciding not to return to class. When questioned about their reasons for leaving, the answer provided was that "their parents never force them and they just never came back!" The fact that the catechists and the wider parish church did nothing to seek them out or to bring them back, did not reflect synodality. The catechist stated that their own "burn out" during Covid was responsible for that "slip up" and that the priest's "laissez faire attitude"<sup>17</sup> left things like the "missing teens" unchecked. In this close-knit community, the same "missing teen" would be seen playing on the basketball court during confirmation sessions, alluding to the fact that they were just not engaged. One teen expressed the desire to return to class but was told he would have to consult the parish priest before reentering. Considering the teenager's approachability rating of the priest mentioned in chapter three, the teenager never returned to communion with his class or to participate in parish life.



**Fig #3 showing a bar graph that reveals the initial responses of the cohort.**

The 2<sup>ND</sup> survey (See Appendix B) which utilized a Likert scale, was able to thoroughly unpack the initial responses and thus, adequately describe the pastoral situation. The survey revealed that 100% strongly disagreed that the Church was irrelevant to their lives and that they wished to be left alone. A male candidate stated that “church relevant for me cause is where I does try to come and pray for blessing and protection....and God hearing me cause thank God so far my family safe”. The survey also revealed that 100% admitted that the Church was not helping them in their daily #3 struggles. One female candidate stated that “allyuh don’t know the kind of troubles I does go through and even if I tell yuh, I don’t think you could help me or that yuh even care”. There were five types of personal struggles identified from the various interviews: violence, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, and incest. The research project primarily reflected upon the plague of violence because not only was it deemed to be the most visible, threatening and pressing of problems, it was also having the most impact on the ecclesial space and experience.

“No one will come today because of what happened yesterday!” This was the response of one teenager when asked about the poor attendance at mass (4 teenagers attended) on the weekend of 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> November 2022. The teenager stated that the murders of two relatives of some of the confirmation candidates that occurred the day before was the reason for the lack of participation at mass that weekend.<sup>18</sup> The following Sunday (4<sup>th</sup> December 2022) another shooting and murder took place outside the community bar as some candidates were walking home from confirmation class. Earlier during the class, candidates wore tee-shirts commemorating their dead relatives and the candidates’ mood was quite grim which affected their level of engagement, and which to some extent, hindered the collection of data for the study on this particular occasion. However, this in itself was qualitative data and strong evidence of how their personal struggles directly and negatively affected synodality. It is the simple truth that it is quite difficult to participate in missionary activities or experience communion in unsafe environments.<sup>19</sup>

Another incident which was equally threatening and distressing, occurred earlier in the month of November. According to the youth coordinator Mr. Johnathan Hinds, a young lady<sup>20</sup> who

---

<sup>18</sup> Only one year ago, 8 residents were murdered in the community and an article written by the *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* newspaper dated 25th August 2021 echoes much of what the candidates and the youth coordinator voiced. The article stated that while “St John’s is known for its churches”, positive spaces like the Community Centre less than 60 metres away (see Fig#1) was now “taken over by the army and air guard” (Samaroo). All persons who were interviewed lamented the fact that murder and the criminal element, which has become a common feature of the community, often casts a “dark shadow” hampering any positive activity including those that are conducted in the ecclesial space.

<sup>19</sup> This sheds light on the reality that synodality also carries a strong sense of social justice and social engagement, and that unless a secure environment is intentionally created and managed, youth will always be hesitant to physically gather. Youth ministry should also consider that when the youth gather, if their mental and emotional states do not function optimally, this can also affect levels of participation and communion. Therefore, catechesis, liturgy and any and all other forms of youth activity must cater for this reality.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that this young lady was known to the candidates and was even a relative of some of them. Therefore, it should be stressed that she is part of this tight knit community (secular and ecclesial) and as such, it is not any foreign element of violence that has entered into the

appeared to be struggling with mental illness came into the Church and into the class, verbally and physically assaulting specific candidates and the catechist. The class was disrupted and yet again engagement, participation and even communion was interrupted as an all-out brawl was brewing. The police and ambulance were called and the lady, for fear of being arrested, left the Church premises. However, what this confirms and reiterates, is that the teenagers' safe spaces are perpetually being violated<sup>21</sup> and this negatively affects the synodal project. The youth coordinator has described these teenagers as "talented, intelligent, committed and loyal". However, he says that they are also "hurting, grieving, scared, frustrated, angry and disillusioned". The psychological effect due to the violation of their spaces, whether secular or ecclesial, must be addressed if the teenagers are to experience the fullness of communion, participation, and mission in their parish community.

Having looked at the personal struggles of the youth and how this hampers their growth and development and therefore their experience of synodality, the pastoral situation concerning their spiritual growth must be addressed. Using the survey (Appendix A), it was found that only 24% of the class had no parent or guardian accompanying them to church on a regular basis. It would be safe to assume that in those households the spirituality of a domestic church may be lacking. On the other hand, a significant proportion of the class (76%) worshipped as a family and as such, may experience the graces<sup>22</sup> that flow from a domestic church which can greatly influence

---

ecclesial space but one from within which has interrupted and/or disrupted participation and communion.

<sup>21</sup> This must be addressed, as it has huge implications for youth ministry and the synodal experience. A comment will be reserved for this in the final sector of the study where recommendations are offered.

<sup>22</sup> The graces I think of may be a commitment to prayer, a basic knowledge and love of the Mass, the Gospel and the lives of the saints, most of all a loving devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the rosary, which is an important traditional marker of Catholic identity.

their experience of synodality.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, through the survey in Appendix A it was discovered that 65% of the cohort actively participate in the parish's liturgical life. The survey in Appendix B repeated the question with a nuanced approach, revealing an overwhelming 82% strongly agreeing that they are encouraged to participate fully in the liturgical life of the parish. But this begs the question: what does full and active participation look like for the youth of St John's?

The interview with Mr. Hinds touched on the subject of active participation and their spiritual growth, which for him meant being a member of a ministry, participation at Holy Mass and participation in the spiritual exercises done during the confirmation programme. Hinds revealed that each candidate is given the opportunity to join a ministry for a couple of months<sup>24</sup> where they would most likely have an adult mentor to accompany them for the duration of that time. One female candidate confirmed this stating that "I enjoy reading at Mass and I really like the WhatsApp group where everything for that ministry is coordinated there, plus any other announcements about church that you need to know, you could find it there". Mr. Hinds, who is also the head confirmation catechist and the adult mentor paired with the altar servers, stated that they often do Lectio Divina<sup>25</sup> before confirmation class and for those students who are illiterate<sup>26</sup> (6 males), synodality was experienced through an audio recording sent via their phones so that

---

<sup>23</sup> It has been observed that most of the youth live in single-parent households yet have described themselves as worshipping together with their families. This seems to imply that the spirituality of the domestic church is not at all lacking here in some regard. In fact, it can be said that the youth do not experience any significant degree of turmoil in their family situations, to the extent that it causes them to be seriously cut off from experiencing various aspects of synodality.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that after a few months they would change ministries so that each candidate got an experience of different ministries in the Church.

<sup>25</sup> Another spiritual exercise to foster spiritual growth in the hopes of engendering experiences of synodality.

<sup>26</sup> This was yet another personal struggle and hinderance to the youth's growth and development. The study could not unpack this further due to limitations of time and word count. However, it is evident that even though much more can be done, the adult mentors are aware of the problems and have implemented strategies to attain participation and communion with these six young men.

they can come prepared and journey together as a class with the Gospel reading. There is also the regular practice of eucharistic adoration on some Sunday afternoons during classes and the seasonal Lenten and Advent retreats where the catechists outsource retreat assistance from ecclesial communities of Couples For Christ (CFC) or Catholic Student's Movement (CSM). Hinds admits that while there is little effort to inculcate a devotion to the lives of the saints, there is even less devotion to Mary.

Having provided a situational analysis of the various spiritual exercises that are meant to facilitate spiritual growth, a comment must be reserved for the content heavy catechesis of doctrine and dogma. Interviews with the candidates and the catechists revealed that a large majority of the time and syllabus is devoted towards the teaching of moral issues. For instance, one entire term (3+ months) out of six terms<sup>27</sup> is set aside for the teaching of the Theology of the Body which is heavy on sexual ethics and tailored by style and content, for a North American youth audience.<sup>28</sup> The interviews also revealed that several candidates lamented that while they were “learning all these rules the church have!”, they were “not experiencing any deep passion and knowledge for God, the Church or the bigger questions in life”. They explained that they wanted to know the answers to questions like – “who is God and why there was so much suffering on earth if he was so caring?” They also shared that whenever they were moved, it was because of a passionate testimony given by their teacher or the guest retreat master.

---

<sup>27</sup> The confirmation programme takes roughly two years to complete, which equals 6 academic terms. They usually take breaks for holiday periods like the secular education system.

<sup>28</sup> There must be an acknowledgement that an imported pedagogical approach, will only attend to the problems of the North American experience, without little or any consideration for the complexities of our own social and ecclesial challenges, value systems and history. Further comment will be reserved for this when recommendations are considered.

The interviews also uncovered that the catechetical programme did not cater for the reflection of these existential questions, while the Synod Report acknowledged that teenagers hold the opinion that when they leave the confirmation class “many of their questions remained unanswered”. This begs the question: to what extent have those who accompany the youth made any significant effort to listen to the existential concerns of the young people and adequately respond? This is where their truest interests lie, and it is where the fullest and most genuine experience of participation will be recorded and from what framework the pastoral and catechetical approach must take. Instead, the catechists have imposed their own pedagogical agenda and in utilizing imported syllabi<sup>29</sup> and teaching styles which do not resonate with the youth, they have continued to promote a disconnect which does not generate nor sustain the experience of communion between catechist and student or even among students themselves.

To understand in a wider and more fundamental sense the full personal and spiritual growth of the youth in this cohort, one must understand their engagement with mission which the group admitted themselves was nonexistent. It cannot be denied that spiritual maturity facilitates outreach. However, the youth shared that while they were passionate about going out into the world to engage in various works of charity and social justice projects, they were not given adequate opportunities to do so. The survey (Appendix A) reflected these findings as only 12% of the cohort admitted to engaging in some form of mission<sup>30</sup>, while 93% strongly agreed that missionary activity (Appendix B) would most likely enhance their spiritual experience and

---

<sup>29</sup> It should be reiterated that the AEC document was imported wholesale from the USA Bishops document which was explored in the Literature Review. It is my belief that imported agendas, styles and methodology are often partly responsible for the disconnect experienced which directly and negatively affects levels of participation and communion.

<sup>30</sup> For those few who answered in the affirmative, they described missionary activities such as preparing and distributing a hamper for poor families and also cutting the hair of the elderly.

growth. It is of utmost importance to note that during the interview phase a few of the teenagers did not even understand the concept of mission and some asked questions about it saying – “what’s that about?” However, when it was explained they communicated that they desired this type of activity and that it would only enrich their experience of Church and synodality.

“Sometimes church is really boring and I have a hard life to live and plenty things to do!” This quote from one candidate succinctly expresses the experience of the youth as described in this chapter. It is a fact that the youth feel overwhelmed in the secular space by their personal problems and in an attempt to find refuge in the ecclesial space, which can be negatively influenced or even hijacked by these very problems, the Church has not adequately engaged or equipped them with the requisite tools to navigate the socio-ecclesial challenges in this stage of their growth and development.<sup>31</sup> Two of the reasons being put forward is the missing mentor and the privation of an adequate spirituality of accompaniment, both of which are explored in chapter two.

---

<sup>31</sup> Even at this point in the study, a case must be made for a better approach towards pastoral imagination and planning that is not imported or obsolete but radically different in essence and execution, and caters specifically to the challenges and needs of this community which are very unique. I am of the opinion that the priest and mentors, do not fully appreciate this, and this is reflected in their approach (or lack thereof) towards many of the socio-ecclesial challenges described in all three chapters.

## CHAPTER 2 – THE MISSING MENTOR

“We need the help!” This was the sentiment of the youth coordinator and catechist Mr. Hinds as he lamented the fact that there are many missing mentors<sup>32</sup> and that hardly any of the adults make themselves available to participate in this ministry. Ironically, he commented that “if the adults don’t participate, how yuh expect the youths to participate?” This is noteworthy as one can speculate that if there was a greater witness to “participation” by those called to be mentors, then there may have been a higher percentage of the cohort stating that they are experiencing this dimension of synodality. The findings of the survey (see Appendix A) disclosed that the “mission” dimension was lacking with 88% of the cohort stating that they had no experience of mission, while only 12 % responded in the affirmative. “There are no social justice projects and no practical application for the stuff they learn in confirmation class, all because there is no assistance, no volunteers and no participation from the adults!”<sup>33</sup> These were the words of Mr. Hinds as he provided insight into the reason why the mission dimension of synodality was not being experienced. Hinds also highlighted the important link between the “missing mentor” and the impoverished experience of participation and mission.

The most obvious privation was the lack of a youth ministry team. The parish priest Fr Arnold Francis admitted that since the Covid 19 pandemic there was no functioning team and

---

<sup>32</sup> A mentor is an adult member of the parish whose fundamental role is to accompany a young person through the personal and spiritual journey of growth and development. This “ministry” was mentioned in the Literature Review and a full description of the criteria of a mentor and the spirituality of accompaniment was provided.

<sup>33</sup> This was quite alarming as not even a youth arm of the Saint Vincent de Paul mission exists in the parish. There was no explanation as to why the youth arm did not exist. However, there was some expression of interest in examining the possibility of initiating the programme or one similar to it.

that those willing to serve have coalesced into an informal group<sup>34</sup> that operates in a “haphazard way”, a reality that must be further explored when critiquing the ecclesial structures in the following chapter.

Given the pastoral situation described in the first chapter, it would be expected that this spirituality of accompaniment would not only help the teenagers cope with the personal struggles they face but would also foster a true spirit of communion between mentor and mentee, that would extend beyond their relationship into the wider parish. This was notably absent in St John’s because while mentoring was observed at the ministry level (as indicated in the first chapter, with the example of the lector and her protégé) there was no accompaniment of teenagers through the difficult moments of life, like the multiple murders occurring in the space of a month or the other incidences of violence and verbal assault. There was no grief support group or trauma counselling made available and no indication of the knowledge of its importance or of a desire to implement these services.<sup>35</sup> However, special mention must be made of an activity of the past which bore the closest resemblance to synodality. This was the practice of “backup prayer”,<sup>36</sup> where adult mentors were paired with a mentee that they prayed with and for, which in its very nature is an activity that expresses solidarity and communion. Mr. Hinds regretted that this activity was discontinued and in contemplating synodality, articulated that its

---

<sup>34</sup> This group consists of Mr. Hinds, his wife Rica Charles and about two other adults. Additional members to this group, especially those that belong to the youth cohort being investigated, would prove beneficial to the synodal project. However, this idea has not been seriously entertained.

<sup>35</sup> Implementation of these types of services would require a radically different pastoral plan. One that requires a creativity and flexibility that speaks specifically to the challenges and needs of this community.

<sup>36</sup> Backup prayer is essentially intercessory prayer, where a group of adults will gather in communion to pray for an entire cohort of youth on retreat or a specific teenager who needs prayer for a particular situation in his or her life.

return, along with grief support and trauma counselling, should be the highest priority for the parish because of the great need.

The Literature Review adumbrated the “qualities”<sup>37</sup> of a mentor and what was required for this spirituality of accompaniment. It was stated that the mentor ought to be a “*confidant and an active listener*”. The interviews conducted in the focus group consisting of members from the pastoral council and synod team, indicated that this was happening in pockets albeit at the level of the liturgical ministries. The focus group provided many examples. However, one example of particular significance was given by an adult lector who told the story of a teenager who reads at mass and who was suffering from stress and depression during the exam period. This adult mentor demonstrated “*self-awareness*” when she realized that the teenager’s mood swings and lack of engagement and almost disappearance, had nothing to do with her but everything to do with the personal problem the teenager faced. In this case, the mentor practiced patience and was able to reach the mentee in due time, counselling and supporting him through the challenging period. The mentor’s capacity to “*wholeheartedly believe in the young person’s ability to participate in the life of the Church*” even in the midst of his trials and to continue to “*nurture the seeds of faith without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit*” was most impressive. The focus group reported that the young mentee never left the ministry and continued to experience the synodal reality of participation and communion with the mentor and the entire parish.

---

<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that these qualities were listed in the Literature Review but from this point will be highlighted in italics and inverted commas for emphasis and to facilitate an ease of read.

It must be admitted that participation and communion was observed at the level of the liturgical ministries. However, the fact that the teenagers were restricted to involvement solely at the ministry level and nowhere else, did not reflect full participation. Moreover, the fact that these mentors were unwilling to move out of their comfort zones, to insert themselves into the confirmation classes or any other areas of need to assist Mr. Hinds, illustrated that they were resistant to any collaborative and co-responsible approach that synodality demands. In a synodal church, even those adults that do not belong to ministries must see themselves as co-responsible for the youth and therefore willing to collaborate by offering their assistance. The stereotypical parish experience was observed where the adults seemed willing to engage the youth only if they came to them, were involved in their “own” ministry and on their own terms. This did not seem to categorically block communion or participation, but it was not in keeping with the synodal mindset being put forward. As *Evangelii Gadium* described, it only ensured that the same “self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few” (EG 27) continued to “meet and do stuff”. This was not the fullest reality of communion, for communion rejects that kind of insularity and promotes the diversity of persons, gifts, competencies, and generations.

One of the final aspects of mentorship and accompaniment that must be assessed is the mentor’s desire “to be well formed” and to “engage in ongoing formation”. The interviews revealed that this was the case in St John’s as one of the head catechists is a student of theology at the archdiocese’s seminary. This demonstrated the catechist’s willingness to engage in ongoing intellectual formation. The interviews also revealed that the mentors, particularly those in direct contact with the confirmation students, take their spiritual life seriously and that they go to spiritual direction regularly, also demonstrating the willingness to engage in ongoing spiritual formation. The focus group also discovered that the head catechists try to foster a relationship

with the archdiocese's Office of Youth Ministry which would offer support in their ongoing human and pastoral formation.

This chapter has captured the portrait of mentorship and spiritual accompaniment within the parish, particularly as it relates to communion and participation. However, the main findings must be reiterated, and a succinct survey provided to continue facilitating an adequate assessment of the synodal climate of St John's. The findings corroborated that there were only a handful of mentors, which meant that there was not enough "manpower" for the missiological aspect of synodality. Of the few mentor/mentee relationships that were reflected upon in this study, all were deemed to possess some degree of meaning and benefit (personally and spiritually) both for the confirmation candidate and mentor. Moreover, all relationships reflected some aspect of communion and participation. However, a major criticism was that it was observed to solely occur in pockets of ministry and/or liturgy where people were comfortable in their own zones which did not reflect the fullness of synodality.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> This begs the question whether other areas of church life, are being deprived of this spirituality of accompaniment and how is this impacting on synodality.

### CHAPTER 3 – A CRITICAL LOOK AT ECCLESIAL GOVERNANCE

The leadership and management style of any institution is directly responsible for the experience of those in their charge. Hence, an assessment of three traditional pillars<sup>39</sup> of the ecclesial structure of governance must be conducted to ascertain the experience of synodality among the youth. The synod team which is not a perennial pillar of parish governance but functions during times of synod and yields significant influence in parish affairs, warrants some attention albeit appropriately placed as a footnote.<sup>40</sup>

The head of the parish is the parish priest, and the survey uncovered that 52% of the youth interviewed found their parish priest to be approachable while 48% found him unapproachable. On the other hand, an overwhelming 82 % of the youth found that the other adult mentors, like the youth coordinator, was approachable, while 18% found them unapproachable. A few of the

---

<sup>39</sup> The three pillars under consideration are the parish priest, the pastoral council and the youth coordinator.

<sup>40</sup> Another arm of ecclesial governance that was interviewed was the synod team. This team conducted their own investigation concerning the youth for the requirements of the synod process. In the Synod Report they produced, they established the fact that youth engagement and involvement was at an all-time low stating that “there was a common thread of youths being absent from Church and attempts must be made to encourage and welcome them back”. As this team was only recently formed (2<sup>nd</sup> January 2022), there is not much to comment on and they can only be judged by the initiatives they have carried out towards this cohort during the synod process. One such initiative was the Post Synodal Assembly and Day of Reflection held on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022, where the youth were specifically targeted as a special group of interest. The team’s aim was to facilitate participation and communion, through the youth’s involvement at the Assembly Day and to encourage them to communicate their wishes, concerns and complaints. The team was semi successful as they received full attendance from this cohort at the Assembly as it was probably mandatory that the confirmation class attend. However, as the youth were not fully comfortable with communicating in that space and with those who belong to the various governing arms, due to all the reasons listed in this project, true engagement was not forthcoming. This latest approach from the synod team may have been perceived by some of the youth as inconsistent, inauthentic and a little too late. The Assembly Day acted as a gauge, measuring the true extent of the problem and confirming the fact that there must be a reimaging, rethinking and reworking of all the old attitudes and practices, to bring about the experience of synodality for the youth.

youth commented that - “of course the priest go be unapproachable, he is more like a top boss than a brother eh!” and “remember he not on our level eh, daz d priest, he cah be my everyday normal friend!”

The adults of the pastoral council, synod team and the youth coordinators, were all asked the same question regarding the parish priest’s approachability. They commented that he was quite approachable. However, when probed some more, a few described that the relationship was one of “working for him, rather than working with him”. They all acknowledged that they felt like he empowered them to participate and to be involved in parish life, both within the Church and in missionary activities beyond the Church<sup>41</sup>. This clearly indicated that the synodal style of the parish priest facilitated some participation and to an extent communion as well. However, this communion has not achieved its fullest reality as collaboration and co-responsibility were absent traits between and among the parish priest and members of his various teams. One of the members of the pastoral council that was interviewed, stated that “in this parish many, many people love to make executive decisions....is not a team affair”<sup>42</sup> and “because is a tight knit community and everybody know everybody, people love to boycott meetings and even mass if they don’t get their way”. It should be noted that the parish priest was not considered overly authoritarian or clerical and was even known for allowing a certain latitude among these various groups to take significant initiative with projects. However, while this style of governance encouraged people to take up leadership roles, it also opened up a space for others to display

---

<sup>41</sup> The most recent example would be a community walkathon and health fair event that was put on for the wider community on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

<sup>42</sup> This is the type of culture and praxis that the synodal style of church is meant to displace.

dictatorial traits.<sup>43</sup> In commenting on this, the parish priest lamented that “in St John’s, people just love to be in charge”. During his interview, he elaborated on this fact, even listing the family names and their positions within the ecclesial structure where this was taking place, hindering participation and communion.

The youth coordinator Mr. Hinds identified the pastoral council, of which he is a member, as a central location where “persons love to be in charge”. He stated that the youth are overlooked, as they are not integrated into parish management on any level and that the council did not see the benefit, nor the need for having a youth representative 13 – 18 years on the council. Furthermore, he disclosed that his role on the council was one where he basically “reports on the activity of the youth”. He further complained that his reporting would “often turn into gossip about them and mostly about what they were doing wrong”.<sup>44</sup> It is reasonable to admit that “gossip” acts as a poison which particularly infects closed knit communities causing paralysis of some kind that will inevitably affect communion and participation. Mr. Hinds revealed that the council misunderstood the youth and either “spoke down to them or spoke poorly of them” and that his role was primarily to “shield them from verbal abuse”. Mr. Hinds did so by being “a translator and a mediator, who filtered many of the negative comments, rephrasing it to foster better communication between adults and teenagers”. This type of “advocacy” Mr. Hinds was forced into, was both unhealthy and unsynodal. Besides this, the youth coordinator reported that

---

<sup>43</sup> One must admit that the virus of “clericalism” has mutated over the decades since *Vatican II*. It now infects and affects the laity. This may be attributed to the inherited legacy of our post-colonial condition where everyone desires to exercise power and control.

<sup>44</sup> It is worth stating that this goes against the criteria for mentor as put forward in *Christus Vivit* and discussed in chapter two.

the youth were paralyzed<sup>45</sup> because with all the negative comments about them and to them, they were afraid to make mistakes.

This information exposed a few harsh realities that stem from the insensitivity of the pastoral council's governing style. Firstly, most of the participation that existed among the youth could be deemed superficial to an extent, as it was partly due to their positive relationship with Mr. Hinds. It was observed that the youth were not genuinely empowered but engaged in activities because of him and for him. Secondly, communion and communication between the youth and the pastoral council was limited or almost nonexistent. The two groups (the youth and the council) did not know each other and more so, were unaware of each other's gifts, talents, concerns, and dreams. It also seemed that they were unprepared to recognize, appreciate and participate in each other's lives for the building up of the parish church. Thirdly, all of this hampered the collaboration and co-responsibility between the youth coordinator and pastoral council which is necessary for the synodal project.

Having surveyed three arms of ecclesial governance – the parish priest, the youth coordinator and the parish council, with an importance reference to the synod team as a footnote, a succinct summary assessment of their competencies in collaborating and being co-responsible, is necessary and appropriate at this juncture. The pastoral council team, which is the chief and central organ of communion in the parish, responsible for the bringing together and working together of all these different teams, did not have such a positive outlook, which exposes the true

---

<sup>45</sup> A comment was made previously concerning the Parish Council's refusal to integrate the youth into parish management and leadership. As expressed by the youth coordinator, they also refuse through their praxis, to appreciate the synodal understanding that the youth themselves are empowered Christians that can take initiative and provide solutions to their own problems and the problems found within youth ministry. This is only evidence of the lack of synodality in the parish and that the *paralysis* runs far deeper than originally imagined, having far-reaching consequences.

nature of the problem. They commented that when they came together to discern, discuss, plan and execute parish activities, “people would berate people, especially when they are not there to defend themselves when being criticized on the council”. It is against this backdrop, that it can be understood in a fundamental sense, that these teams struggle to not only collaborate but to communicate effectively with each other and with the youth. As stated previously, when examining the various teams and how they hold up the synodal project, at best there is a superficial and conditional participation from team members and youth, and at worst there is a total breakdown in communication and communion.

## CONCLUSION

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SYNODAL PATH AHEAD

This project has examined the personal lives of the teenagers that are plagued by many socio-ecclesial challenges, the serious lack of mentors and the spirituality of accompaniment they ought to imbibe and the three major arms of governance within the parish church that operate to some extent in disunity. From the findings, the conclusion reveals that the teenager's experience of synodality is therefore impoverished because of all the reasons listed above. However, to complete this succinct assessment, a list of recommendations are appropriate and necessary.

Due to the high levels of violence, there is need for grief and trauma intervention by trained professionals, as the teenagers are psychologically and emotionally affected. In light of the missing mentor, it is also suggested that peer counselling is introduced, as this will demonstrate the type of synodal experience that is needed. An experience that encourages the youth to listen to each other and to feel empowered to be part of their own discernment, decision-making and problem-solving process. Although the illiteracy issue was explored superficially, it still needs to be uncovered, as feelings of inadequacy, embarrassment, low self-esteem and even bullying often accompany illiteracy, and this can hinder a teenager's experience of participation mission, and communion. It is recommended that an adult literacy programme like ALTA<sup>46</sup> be implemented for the six teenagers in need, this is yet another programme that will empower the youth. Another important issue that needed to be uncovered was incest, which was briefly mentioned at the focus group level of the pastoral council. In fact, the two issues of incest and

---

<sup>46</sup> This stands for The Adult Literacy Tutors Association.

illiteracy warrant further research<sup>47</sup>, as this has serious implications for the teenager's physical, mental, and emotional health, which would also hinder any experience of synodality.

It is a fact that the teenagers felt like their safe spaces (secular and ecclesial) were hijacked by the criminal element, about which Mr. Hinds believes there should be some significant investment into creating a youth friendly space within the parish which could be outfitted with internet.<sup>48</sup>

It was discovered that the youth also expressed a level of frustration towards the content heavy doctrinal and moral classes which should be immediately reduced. Having subjected the youth to an imported and imposed pedagogical method like Theology of the Body, it is time to exercise the pastoral fortitude needed to abandon portions of these catechetical programmes that are clearly not working or fostering aspects of synodality, especially participation and mission. These should be replaced by an educational paradigm that incorporates an indigenous approach that utilizes sport, culture, education and music within the indigenous spaces. This study has uncovered and confirmed the fact that our own pedagogical framework must be constructed, especially for sex and sexuality. This will ensure greater participation and communion in our programmes.

Confirmation classes can incorporate a rosary walk/hike to the nature trails of Mount St Benedict during a confirmation class in the month of May or October, as it merges a safe and fun

---

<sup>47</sup> It may even require initiating a campaign that encourages greater literacy in all communities.

<sup>48</sup> This youth friendly space is one example of the “radically different” pastoral approach spoken of previously, that speaks specially to the challenge and needs of this community. The synodal project would seek to ensure that safe spaces are created despite the architectural challenges. Youth rooms that are not easily accessible to the public from the crime ridden streets, coloured décor and effective use of lighting, can all be implemented, as it may stimulate the senses of the youth which can lead to greater participation and communion during youth activities.

outdoor activity with developing a Marian devotion and a teaching on the lives of the saints like St Francis of Assisi or St Benedict. Another fitting example could be a clean-up exercise at Caura River that combines the folklore stories of Papa Bois and the forest, while highlighting the lessons of ecological justice, a theological and pastoral theme which resonates most with young people. Exercises like these, which incorporate sport, culture, education and music, will attract the same confirmation students<sup>49</sup> who preferred the basketball court over the heavy moral and doctrinal classes that did not cater for them.

With regards to the drastic decline in the number of volunteers and adult mentors, it is recommended that a recruitment drive be undertaken and formation (spiritual and human) be implemented immediately. This recruitment drive must not only be for the missing mentor but the missing mentee, which accounts for over 100 youth. Any mission activity of reaching out to find the missing and the lost, is in fact synodal and must include the youth. They must take initiative and be empowered to find their own peers. Additionally, the Office of Youth Ministry frequently conducts programmes that will provide the ongoing spiritual and human formation training. This recruitment drive and formation training will build up the youth team that currently operates in “a haphazard way”<sup>50</sup> and will remove the strain Mr. and Mrs. Hinds experience. They currently make up the full complement of the youth team, fulfilling this role and multiple other roles such as confirmation catechist, pastoral council member, altar server mentor and parish secretary. It is an obvious recommendation that not only more volunteers are recruited to assist but also the roles and responsibilities of existing volunteers be clearly defined,<sup>51</sup> as this would

---

<sup>49</sup> I refer to the 8 confirmation students who defected.

<sup>50</sup> This was a comment from the priest mentioned previously in Chapter two.

<sup>51</sup> It should be made clear that the author is not advocating for a mere administrative reorganization as synodality demands much more. It requires an honest reassessment and reconfiguration of all

aid in the facilitation of co-responsibility and collaboration within and among the various departments of governance in the parish. Additionally, even though the community of St John's is starved of volunteers, it is resource rich with so many talented members within and outside the church. The parish must possess the pastoral openness to think outside the box and search outside the church, for the help it needs in addressing the socio-ecclesial challenges adumbrated in chapter one, from institutions and organizations such as the pan yard youth club<sup>52</sup> or several of UWI's outreach initiatives.

One of the final recommendations is to develop a human formation programme for all the adults who are involved in the governing of this parish. This programme should focus on communication skills, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. The top-down style of governance that has led to the "berating and boycotting" within and among the various governing bodies, has not helped the synodal project and there must be an immediate intervention besides the human formation seminars and counselling suggested. There needs to be a spiritual approach consisting of collective repentance, to heal all the negative history of "church hurt" that exists in this small community. This will help solve the disconnect between the adults and teenagers in the parish and improve the level of "communicative dynamics"<sup>53</sup> Luciani spoke of, ultimately allowing for the fullest expression and reality of participation, communion, and mission.

---

these amorphous roles which leads to a lack of clarity and thus distorts collaboration and co-responsibility.

<sup>52</sup> This youth club is located besides the primary school and is called Flamingoes Steel Orchestra.

<sup>53</sup> This term was explained in the Literature Review. It is a term used by Rafael Luciani to express how the community should walk together, involving the dynamic of "praying, meeting, working together, discerning, making and taking decisions, taking advice and building consensus" (pp.2-3).

## Works Cited

- Francis. “Evangelii Gaudium.” The Holy See, 24 Nov. 2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)
- Francis. “Christus Vivit: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to Young People and to the Entire People of God.” The Holy See, 25 March. 2019, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20190325\\_christus-vivit.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html)
- General Secretariat of the Synod. “The Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality.” *Www.synod.va*, 7 Sept. 2021, [www.synod.va/en/news/the-vademecum-for-the-synod-on-synodality.html](http://www.synod.va/en/news/the-vademecum-for-the-synod-on-synodality.html).
- John Paul II. “Dilecti Amici: Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the International Youth Year.” The Holy See, 31 March. 1985, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1985/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_31031985\\_dilecti-amici.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1985/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_31031985_dilecti-amici.html)
- Jordan, Kaelanne. “Youth Participation in the Life of the Church.” *The Catholic News*, 10 Aug. 2022. <https://catholicct.org/2022/08/10/youth-participation-in-the-life-of-the-church/>
- Luciani, Rafael. *Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding in the Church*. Paulist Press, 2022.
- Paul VI. “Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.” The Holy See, 21 Nov. 1964, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)
- Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry, U.S.A Bishops, June. 1997, <https://www.usccb.org/topics/youth-and-young-adult-ministries/renewing-vision#:~:text=Renewing%20the%20Vision%3A%20A%20Framework,A%20Vision%20of%20Youth%20Ministry.>
- Samaroo, Akash. “Carapo, St John’s Left Shaken by Mass Murders.” *Www.guardian.co.tt*, 25 Aug. 2021, [www.guardian.co.tt/news/carapo-st-johns-left-shaken-by-mass-murders-6.2.1376687.23fef24a13](http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/carapo-st-johns-left-shaken-by-mass-murders-6.2.1376687.23fef24a13). Accessed 12 Nov. 2022.
- Synodality in the Life and the Mission of the Church, The International Theological Commission, 2 March. 2018, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_synodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_synodalita_en.html)
- The Code of Canon Law, English Translation. Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983.
- Vision of Youth Ministry for Youth and Young Adults of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, A.E.C Bishops, July. 2003.

# APPENDIX A

## ST JOHN'S RC YOUTH SURVEY

1) Sex – Male  Female

2) Age \_\_\_\_\_ years

3) What is your home arrangement?

Single parent  Two parent  grandparent  none

4) How often do you come to Church?

Every weekend  once a month  on special occasion

never

5) Who accompanies you to Church? \_\_\_\_\_

6) Do you **participate** in any ministry within the Church Parish life? YES  NO

7) Which one? \_\_\_\_\_

8) Are you involved in any **missionary** activity? YES  NO

9) If yes, which one? \_\_\_\_\_

10) Do you experience **communion** in this community – as in do you feel **welcomed**, your gifts/talents celebrated and do you experience a sense of unity? YES  NO

## APPENDIX B

1) I feel like I have a voice in this parish.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

2) I feel like the people of this parish listen to me and that I can express my ideas openly.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

3) I feel that I am not only empowered in this parish to take initiative for many various events and activities but I am also co- responsible for what takes place.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

4) My parish priest and adult mentors are very approachable. They are more like companions than authority figures.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

5) Many people speak ill of the young people in this parish. They talk down to the youth and constantly judge them.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

6) It is very difficult to be a young Catholic in this area.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

7) The Church is helping me in my daily life with my personal struggles

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

8) The Church is irrelevant to my life. I wish she left me alone.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

9) The parish is an all-inclusive community where everyone's gifts are recognized, shared and appreciated.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

10) I am encouraged to participate fully in the liturgical life of the parish especially at Mass.

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

11) The adult mentors are great witnesses (examples) and companions. They inspire me as they journey with me to proudly live as a disciple of Christ

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

12) I believe that missionary activity will enhance and deepen my spiritual experience?

Strongly disagree =1   disagree = 2   undecided = 3   agree = 4   strongly agree = 5

## APPENDIX C

### QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH 13 - 18 years

#### Personal and Spiritual Growth

- 1) Do you think the Church is irrelevant for your life and do you wish the Church left you alone? Is the Church helping you in your daily life? Are the youth leaders aware of your personal daily struggles and help you to (personally and spiritually) navigate these in the world. If you needed anything from the Church, what would it be?
- 2) What would your dream Church be like?
- 3) What do you dislike most about the Church?
- 4) What kind of Sport is provided in St John's?
- 5) Is sport important to you and to youth ministry here in St John's?
- 6) What kind of ecological education and practice is encouraged here in St John's?
- 7) Do you find yourself obsessed, trapped and isolated because of social media?
- 8) Do you find yourself connected because of social media?
- 9) What does participation look like among the youth? Do you participate in the Church? How? liturgy, teaching, media, mission and evangelization? Do you feel responsible for your participation and involvement? What basic responsibility do you have in your participation?
- 10) What Church bacchanal prevents communion among you? Is there any? Do you see gossip and division among yourselves? Or among the elders? Does this turn you off? Do you recognize forgiveness and the sacrament of forgiveness as the way forward?
- 11) Do you find yourself making new friendships in this youth space as you come into contact with others? If not, what is hindering this?
- 12) Are you interested in knowing more about the Word of God, studying it and contemplating it or about prayer/ and other devotions? If you had your wish, how would you go about studying the word of God? Do your parents discuss with you the topic of your vocation? How does this conversation look? Does it make you feel uncomfortable?
- 13) Do you think the liturgy is fresh, joyful, and authentic? If you could do anything to or for the liturgy, what would it be? What changes would you like to see?
- 14) What do you appreciate about the liturgy at St John's? What do you like and do not like?
- 15) What can we do to the liturgy, so that you can participate more and take the message that was received at the mass out into the world?

### **Ecclesial structures**

16) Do you lend support to the parish priest? Do you see this as your role? Do you see the priest as your brother and friend or authoritarian? Does the priest ask for your prudent advice? Do you take initiative with projects or events?

17) Does this Church practice and promote participation and leadership of the co-responsibility type?

18) Do you feel responsible for the ministry or group you are involved in?

19) Do you express your opinions to the parish council? Would this be your wish? If this is your wish – what would you ask for and what would you tell them?

20) Are the youth consulted? Do you have a voice concerning the programmes and proposals brought forward for your involvement? Are you on the pastoral council?

21) Do you feel listened to by the adults in your Church life – (parish and domestic)? Do they speak to you, at you or with you? How do you think they speak about you? Is it with a language of love?

22) Do you notice excessive authoritarianism in the Church and in youth ministry?

23) Do you feel judged in Church and youth ministry?

### **Mentorship**

1) Everyone on the journey is free and different. Therefore, do you feel diversity is appreciated? Do you feel as if you are a companion on a journey with other people? And that they appreciate you for being you? Do you consider the persons (adults) that accompany you as companions or authority figures? Do you feel your youth leader is a companion? If not, what word would you use to describe him or her?

2) Do you think that the members in your family (domestic) accompany you adequately? Do the members in Church especially those involved in youth ministry adequately accompany you and advocate on your behalf?

3) Do you think that your mentors are persons that are confidants without judging? Do they listen to your needs and respond in kind? Are they deeply loving and self-aware? Do they recognize their own limits and acknowledge their own humanity?

**Mission**

- 4) What is your missionary work?
- 5) Do you believe you are making the world holier through your missionary work?
- 6) What are your ideas to spread the good news of Jesus Christ?
- 7) If you had your own wish and unlimited influence – how would you reach the 461 young persons' missing? Would you want to see them in Church among you, journeying with you?
- 8) Do you feel like the Church space is all inclusive? Who is missing? And how does this affect you positively or negatively?
- 9) Do you see virtual spaces as a place to carry out mission?
- 10) Does the youth ministry help you to be in service of one another?
- 11) Are you fearful of moving outwards to interact with non-Catholics, non-Christians and those who do not come to Church or believe in God?

## APPENDIX D

### QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEWS WITH ADULTS

#### **Ecclesial Structures – (this includes the Priest, Pastoral Council, Synod Team, Youth Coordinator and Team, Office of Youth Ministry).**

- 1) Does the parish priest, youth leadership team and pastoral council recognize the gifts/talents of the youth and can identify them?
- 2) Does the parish priest, youth leadership team and pastoral council ask for the prudent advice of the youth?
- 3) Does the priest, youth leadership team and pastoral council think of the youth as being prudent and having the ability (being empowered) to give advice and to lead?
- 4) Are the youth allowed to take initiative?
- 5) Do you make room for the voices of the young to be heard on the parish council? Is there a youth representative on the pastoral council?
- 6) Does clericalism exist in the parish and does it hinder communion, participation and mission?
- 7) Is authoritarianism found in these ecclesial structures?
- 8) Does the pastoral council as an “organ of communion” stay connected to the “base” as in youth, or do you stand aloof and disconnected? Do you know the daily problems and the dreams/desires of these teenagers?
- 9) The school and domestic Church prepare the youth for parish life and real life. What is the working relationship with the school, if any? Is the youth ministry collaborative – are the youth ministers, youth coordinator, parish council, priest and parents, all working together for the youth?
- 10) Is the youth coordinator in sync with the Office of Youth Ministry? Is the youth coordinator in sync with the parish council? Does the priest facilitate this collaboration?
- 11) Is there a parish youth planning team? If no, why isn't there one? If yes, who are its members?
- 12) What are the findings of the Synod Team on youth and youth ministry?
- 13) There are 461 registered for baptism in this cohort. My survey records 17 thus far. Therefore, 444 are presumably missing – Do you know this? What do you intend to do about it? How can we get the youth to take initiative on this?

## **Mentorship and Accompaniment**

- 14) Can you describe the youth in your charge? What does mentorship and accompaniment look like in St John's, if it does exist? Is there a personalized approach?
- 15) Do you have solid mentors in this community? Persons who do not judge, who listen and know their limits and frailties etc?
- 16) Do you strive to be mentors who are constantly seeking holiness, a confidant without judgement, actively listens, deeply loving and self-aware, acknowledges our limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey?
- 17) Do mentors have ongoing spiritual formation themselves?
- 18) What does participation and accompaniment look like in the parish? And is the partnership one that allows the young person to be co-responsible and involved?
- 19) In this accompaniment journey, are the youth consulted? Do they have a voice concerning the programmes and proposals brought forward for their involvement in this accompaniment process? Do the programmes and proposals come from them?
- 20) In the journeying and accompaniment there will always be disagreements and hurts. Therefore, what Church "bacchanal" or any kind of drama/trauma prevents communion and participation among the youth? If there is, do they see gossip and division among the adults who accompany them? Are the adults good witnesses? Are the youth turned off by bad witnesses?
- 21) In journeying, how do you talk with them and about them? Or do you talk to them and at them? Do you have a grammar of love toward youth?

## **Personal and Spiritual Growth**

- 22) Do the youth get to appreciate nature and the environment in their ministries and are they allowed to see the connection between this and their personal and spiritual development?
- 23) Do you allow the youth to grow by providing adequate space to have contact with others and for them to form new friendships?
- 24) What are the daily obstacles and problems, in the lives of the youth that hinders personal development and growth? Do you know? What is the socio-cultural context - poverty, violence and/or sport? What else?
- 25) The internet is such a huge part of the daily life of the youth. Do you view the internet/technology as an instrument for personal and spiritual growth?
- 26) Do you use the arts, culture and the movies to inspire personal and spiritual development, growth and eventually mission and to show the dynamic unity between the truth of the Gospel and one's own life experience?

27) How do you prepare the youth for the word? Are they invited to the Lectio Divina that takes place within the parish? Have you courted them for this group? Is this group open to the young or is it an old people group? Have you encouraged the youth to become lectors within the parish?

28) Do the youth have retreats that foster their ongoing searching and self-reflection?

29) How are you developing a liturgy that is alive, proximate and leading to the experience of communion for them?

30) Do you talk about vocations? How do you talk about it? Is it predominantly about priesthood and religious life?

31) Is ministry predominantly doctrine and morals? Or is it about an encounter with Christ – the personal experience of the love of God – through songs, testimonies, spiritual reflections?

32) How is the parish activating and developing the charisms (gifts) of the youth so that they can engage in mission – a proclaiming of the Gospel?