



Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria Permanent Pastoral Synod

Summary Report: Spring Plenary June 13, 2025

The Diocese of Victoria's Permanent Pastoral Synod (DPPS) is fundamentally rooted in fostering synodal hope, a vision centred on encountering the Lord by encountering each other and journeying “on the way together.” This foundational approach prioritizes attentive listening, even across differences.

Listening Circles are the primary tool for realizing this vision, promoting deep community engagement, spiritual growth within the Diocese, and a closer communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These circles are small group gatherings where participants can share their stories and listen attentively to one another, creating a safe space for honest dialogue, reflection, and community building.

Implementation and Process

Announced at Pentecost 2023, the DPPS was established to continue the journey of Communion, Participation, and Mission, building upon foundations laid by the Synod 2021–2024. Bishop Gary assembled the Synod leadership team, and pastors selected Listening Circle facilitators from each parish and school to lead Listening Circles after receiving in-person and online training. Subsequent Listening Circles invited participants to share “My Story of Life and Faith.”

On November 30, 2024, a Question Formation Meeting was held, where Listening Circle facilitators, the Council of Priests, and the Bishop’s Advisory Council discussed reports on the synodal process so far and brainstormed questions based on a scriptural reflection from the first line in the Gospel of Luke 4:16-21: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me.”*

The final questions, discerned by Bishop Gary and the Synod leadership team, were shared in January 2025. The questions were sent to the Listening Circle facilitators to use with their groups:

1. (Optional): “What is one story from your own faith and life that you would like to share?”
2. “What is your experience or connection with Christ, the Anointed One, in your faith journey?”
3. “How have you experienced blessings and hope in your life, in your parish, in your school, in your church, or in your family?”

Following the Fall Question Formation Meeting, facilitators worked with parishes and schools to hold Listening Circles. Listening Circle facilitators engaged their communities through bulletin announcements, newsletters, meeting presentations, personal invitations via email or in person, and integrating circles into staff retreats or existing ministry groups like the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Women’s League.

The Spring Plenary—a full assembly for collaborative discussion and discernment—was held at St. Joseph the Worker Parish on June 13, 2025. Sixty diocesan representatives attended, including: one facilitator from each parish or school; clergy and other parish leadership; school principals; members of the Bishop's Advisory Council; the Island Catholic School Board; Diocesan Finance Committee, members of the Diocesan Health Care Committee; Diocesan Liturgical Commission; the Hospital, Campus, and Prison Chaplains; and the Diocesan Ecumenical Officers.

Twenty-six listening circle reports were received ahead of the June 13th plenary, representing 20 parishes/chaplaincies, three schools, and three other organizations. These reports, and the submitted themes from the Listening Circles held during the past year, were used to prepare the 2024–2025 Listening Circle report for the Spring Plenary.

At the Spring Plenary, this summary report was shared with all participants. It was followed by three Listening Circle rounds, inviting reflection on the report itself, the action it calls the Diocese to take, and the priorities for the next phase of the DPPS cycle.

Priorities for the Diocese

The participants at the Spring Plenary discussed the results from the summary report that was produced by the DPPS team. The participants indicated that the summary of the Listening Circle report was well-reflected and mirrored what transpired in their parishes and schools. Five key themes emerged consistently across reports:

1. Trust
2. Community
3. Creating safe spaces
4. Authentic listening
5. The Listening Circles are a valuable tool for proactive community building.

The following priorities and recommendations arose from the plenary discussions and Listening Circle reports (recommendations are listed below in no particular order of importance):

A. Continuity:

There is a strong consensus that Listening Circles "need to become part of our parish culture" and must continue because "a lot of good is happening." Those who have participated in Listening Circles are asking for this process to continue.

B. Communication & Support:

Participants of the Spring Plenary highlighted the need for strong communication at all levels and expressed a desire to enhance the support available to Listening Circle facilitators. Suggestions included forming peer groups to foster fellowship and mutual support, as well as providing ongoing formation through the Bishop's Synod leadership team.

To support facilitators and parish teams, it was recommended that additional resources be developed, such as videos, handouts/brochures (including a one-page handout with parish contact space), slide decks, consistent talking prompts for parishes, and providing a Facilitator Toolkit with sample announcements, FAQs, and invitation templates.

Bishop Gary's pastoral letters continue to be a valuable tool for explaining the DPPS and encouraging participation. These regular messages help the wider community deepen their understanding of synodality, while also affirming that the voices shared through the Listening Circles are being heard and valued.

To broaden engagement, it would be worthwhile to diversify communication methods. Suggested platforms and tools include:

- Social media (Facebook and Instagram)
- Zoom gatherings
- Newsletters
- Regular updates to the Diocesan DPPS webpage to feature goals, history, results, upcoming events, key themes, and resources

There are five concepts, which arose from the five 2024–2025 themes, that can guide content for future communication: gratitude, faith, family, prayer, and belonging.

C. Deeper Spiritual Awareness:

The Diocese will continue to encourage a culture of prayerful listening and comfort with silent prayer, fostering moments of quiet reflection during liturgies, meetings, and board gatherings. This intentional silence creates space to hear the voice of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit, offering guidance and nurturing deeper spiritual growth in all aspects of our shared work.

D. Community Building:

In a world burdened by war, displacement, and economic hardship, there is a strong desire for community and solidarity. This longing for community is just as present within the Church as it is in society at large. A truly "welcoming Church" fosters a deep sense of belonging by breaking down barriers and actively reaching out to all. Since the end of the COVID pandemic, community building has emerged as one of the most pressing needs within our Christian communities.

The synodal process, through Listening Circles, plays a vital role in this effort. By creating spaces of respectful dialogue, attentive listening, and shared reflection, Listening Circles help strengthen relationships, renew trust, and draw people into deeper communion with one another and with the Church.

E. Baptismal Gifts in Action:

The People of God, clergy and lay people alike, share a co-responsibility to collaborate in the mission of the Church in their local communities. This process seeks to recognize the gifts of the Holy Spirit in all the baptized and to call those at the parish level and at the diocesan level to use those baptismal gifts and charisms in service of bringing the Good News to the world.

F. Relationships:

The importance of relationships and trust was repeatedly affirmed as essential for the DPPS process and for building community. Listening is more than just a method of engagement, it's a practice that fosters trust and deepens our spiritual communion in the Church. There is a call to deepen trust between Listening Circle facilitators, Synod leaders, and community participants. This cultivation of trust is one of the great gifts of the Listening Circles, drawing us closer to one another and to the goodness of our Lord, the Good Shepherd.

G. Engagement:

Facilitators should be involved in developing the 2025–2026 Listening Circle questions and be encouraged to tailor them to fit the participants of their local Listening Circle community.

Next Steps

The next phase of the DPPS will focus on:

- Implementing the above recommendations
- Continuing the synodal cycle in each parish, school, and ministry community
- Strengthening communication and spiritual formation
- Engaging in strategic planning to clarify diocesan-wide priorities

All actions will continue to be guided by prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, the Listening Circles embody synodality in action by “encountering the Lord as we encounter each other.” They create space for genuine attentiveness and heartfelt listening to one another’s truths, fears, and hopes.

Together, as we continue this synodal journey, we invite every member of our Diocese to actively participate in building a more connected, prayerful, and hopeful Church—walking on the way together, united in faith and love.

“SYNODALITY IS A STYLE, AN
ATTITUDE THAT HELPS US TO BE
CHURCH, FOSTERING AUTHENTIC
EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPATION
AND COMMUNION.”

POPE LEO - XVI ORDINARY COUNCIL

JUNE 26, 2025