

Analysis of Additional
Cast the Net Focus Groups

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Summary

There are groups within the Anglican Diocese of Toronto that have experiences that allow them to address themes present in the clergy and lay listening groups in distinct and important ways.

Focus groups with clergy coaches and chaplains reinforce many of the themes present in the clergy listening groups, especially the exhaustion, loneliness, and lack of support experienced by clergy in parishes and clergy serving as chaplains. At the same time, both coaches and chaplains offer crucial insights into how to draw on expertise from the nonprofit and business sectors for Christian ministry and how to be the church in the wider community.

Chaplains and youth leaders offer an important counter-narrative to the dominant message regarding young people in the lay listening groups by directly challenging a transactional approach that emphasizes changing programming, liturgy, or technology to attract younger people in order to sustain institutional church structures. As leaders directly involved in ministry with youth, chaplains and youth leaders strongly emphasize relationships and resist frameworks that instrumentalize younger people. They advocate for intergenerational relationships that involve the entire faith community and that are anchored in mutual respect and mutual faith development. Chaplains and youth leaders are also a resource for reflecting on how to be the church in everyday life and to name the presence of God in times of vulnerability.

The six young adults at St. Paul's Bloor reinforce the focus on relationships. Each of them indicates that a warm personal welcome and support in forming social connections at the church, including intergenerational connections, are what attracted them to this specific church and what keeps them involved, as well as thoughtful and relevant preaching and liturgy.

The Anglican Church Women echo the themes present in the lay listening groups.

Context

This report considers how insights from each of these five focus groups relate to themes present in the clergy and lay listening groups: Anglican Church Women, Clergy Coaches, Chaplains, Youth Leaders, and participants in the young adult ministry at St. Paul's Bloor. Because they represent distinct communities, each of the focus groups is considered in turn. In most cases, the focus groups were structured around different questions than the clergy and lay listening groups, although they pursue related underlying themes. The notes from the focus groups were coded using the codes developed based on the clergy and lay data.

It is important to recognize that these groups include a small number of participants and should not be interpreted as speaking for all people associated with each organization or in each category. For example, these thirteen women should not be seen as speaking for all Anglican Church Women and these six young adults should not be interpreted as representative of all young adults.

Group	Number of Participants
Anglican Church Women	13
Clergy Coaches	7
Chaplains	10
Youth Leaders	15
Young Adults at St. Paul's Bloor	6

The clergy and lay reports are linked here for reference.

- Analysis of *Cast the Net* Clergy Day Notes: <https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Analysis-of-Cast-the-Net-Clergy-Day-Notes-Sarah-Johnson-16-December-2022.pdf>
- Analysis of *Cast the Net* Lay Listening Groups: <https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Analysis-of-Cast-the-Net-Lay-Listening-Groups-Complete-Report.pdf>

Clergy Coaches

7 participants

The clergy coaches were invited to reflect on the clergy listening group material. Compared to other groups, the coaches place a stronger emphasis on the role of diocesan staff, especially critically assessing current realities. They name the multidimensional nature of pastoral ministry in a changing context and the uncertainty of clergy in the face of these various and shifting demands. They identify a lack of pastoral care and leadership development for clergy. They raise questions about the entire process for calling, forming, supporting, and releasing clergy. *Note: The clergy coaches identify many problems in this conversation. A next step could be inviting the coaches to propose solutions to these problems.*

Top Codes

Code	Number of Codings
Role of Diocese	11
Exhaustion / Burn Out / Mental Health	7
Role of Clergy (Including Deacons)	7
Collaboration	4
Leadership	4
Needed Action	4

Notable Quotes

- Anglican clergy are by nature independent and competitive. Diocese is trying to promote collaboration, but it runs counter to a lot of our culture. Hard for clergy to be honest about their inability to do it all on their own. There is something of a shift in attitude and willingness (philosophical, theoretical) but it hasn't yet achieved practical traction. Not enough support from 135. How can I add this to everything else?
- Do we coach the potential "winners," or the ones in trouble? Former was our original mandate: high performers, stars. Assumption: coaching is not remedial. However, there are a lot of people out there who would simply benefit from having a listening ear. And who need help with basic needs, like leading a Bible study, pastoral care.
- Smart clergy in mid-career who have experience outside church can see that this model is simply not sustainable.

Chaplains

10 participants

Although the chaplains reflect on the John 21 passage discussed by the clergy listening groups, the codes developed for the clergy groups are not a tight fit for the notes on the focus group with chaplains. As the chaplains describe, chaplaincy is different from parish ministry, especially in its flexible and responsive character that has little patience for the resistance to change found in many parishes. At the same time, the chaplains address key needs identified in the clergy listening groups, especially: (1) the importance of being the church beyond the parish and specific experiences of what it looks like to do ministry with more diverse communities, (2) substantial insight into relational ministry with younger people that are anchored in concrete experience rather than a conceptual category of "younger people," (3) the power and grace of naming God and Jesus in the face of vulnerability, especially isolation and trauma. Despite the unique position and important perspectives that chaplains offer on key themes emerging from the clergy and lay listening groups, chaplains feel ignored and unsupported by the diocese and their own parishes. *Note: How can insights from*

chaplains inform ministry in parishes? Can chaplains be seen as leaders and one model for how to be the church in the wider community?

Top Codes

Code	Number of Codings
Loneliness / Isolation	6
Stability / Continuity / Resistance to Change	5
Naming God	5
Pastoral Care	4
Relationships among leaders	4
Younger People	4

Notable Quotes

- In hospital and school settings we regularly interact with interfaith neighbours and identify moments of grace where we perceive God at work.
- Chaplains have no ‘rubrics.’ We make it up as we go along. God is with us in the boat, and we are naked, vulnerable. Parish issues seem picayune and irrelevant when you’re daily facing life and death issues.
- Grade 12s in 2023 were in grade 9 when the pandemic began. Now that people are gathering again, young people are coming back to chapel. Young people are very open to God’s love for them. For young men especially there has been a pandemic of loneliness. Students are learning from stories other living faith traditions and finding them inspiring.
- Easter 2 gospel: the Risen Christ appears to Thomas with his wounds: chaplains are very aware of the wounds we have and the wounds of those we minister to. In beholding the woundedness we behold Christ.

Youth Leaders

15 participants

Although the youth leaders reflect on the John 21 passage, and younger people is the dominant theme, how they speak about ministry with younger people is in stark contrast to the lay listening groups. Most lay participants take a transactional approach, while youth leaders push back strongly against youth being instrumentalized. Most lay participants focus on programming to attract youth, while youth leaders emphasize intergenerational relationships and integration into the community. Most lay participants link youth to technology and worship style, while youth leaders barely mention technology or liturgy—their focus is mutual relationship. Youth leaders emphasize the importance of connecting with youth where they are, on their own terms, and listening with respect that is oriented toward mutual faith development. According to leaders who work directly with youth, the dominant attitudes and approaches to youth ministry expressed in the lay listening groups are inappropriate and potentially harmful. They call for stronger investment in relationships with youth at all levels including equipping entire congregations for intergenerational relationships and training and valuing dedicated youth ministry staff.

Top Codes

Code	Number of Codings
Younger People	28
Listening	8
Childrens Ministry / Youth Ministry	7
Relationships within parish communities	4

Notable Quotes

- We instrumentalize kids—make the process transactional.
- Since 2008 have not experienced the diocese casting the net AT ALL for youth. We say we want youth but the work, support, and the resources to get there is not available.
- We need to include youth in these conversations. They have NO voice. Adults misrepresent them.
- I work with kids and am involved in youth ministry. I agree you have to go into the community. It's difficult because youth will not come to you.... youth have great ideas but people in the parish say "Oh—young people can do this or that" rather than hearing what young people want to do! Create your own track. Youth need to be self-determining.
- Youth have a lot to say: they have deep perceptions in their exploration of scripture and ask good questions.
- We are obsessed with numbers; we are stuck on counting; but it's not about numbers—it's about relationships. Quantification needs to stop. It all comes down to relationship.
- The job of tending to youth tends to be delegated to one person, rather than being seen as a responsibility of the whole parish. Everyone needs to hear and respond to that call.
- Parishioners want to recruit young people to do specific tasks and projects and events, but aren't as willing to just have conversations with them, hang out with them. Build intergenerational bridges across the whole community.
- Young people have a lot of spiritual insights that can benefit others; it's a two-way street, not just one-way of bringing religion to young people.

Young Adults from St. Paul's Bloor

6 participants

Unlike the other focus groups, some personal background is shared by each of the six participants in this conversation which reveals that most of them are single, young professionals, who live near the church, and have been involved in the parish for a couple of years. All were raised in the Christian tradition and most have evangelical or Pentecostal backgrounds. Some are new Canadians. Given the demographic similarities among these six participants, it is important to recognize that this group does not represent young adults broadly.

Relationships are absolutely central to the church experience of all six participants. Personal invitations and a sense of personal welcome brought them into the parish. Support in forming relationships with other participants, especially across generations and in small groups, is what keeps them involved. Personal invitations into volunteer roles further strengthened these relationships. Participation in small groups and community building events both intergenerationally and with other young adults is central. This contrasts with the lay listening groups that emphasize youth programs, technology, and liturgical change, especially contemporary music.

When the participants speak about what matters to them liturgically, they name the following: preaching that is relevant to their lives, intercessions that name specific and immediate personal and global needs, attention to facilitating the participation of those new to the Anglican tradition, and music that connects theologically with preaching. Some appreciate the blend of hymns and contemporary music, and one notes that some young adults prefer the liturgy with classical music. This contrasts with the lay listening groups' emphasis on contemporary music as appealing to younger people. However, it reinforces the importance of liturgy that is emotionally engaging, immediately relevant, and connected to everyday compassion and social justice.

Participants also appreciate the professionalism of the parish. The presence of women in leadership is significant.

Top Codes

Code	Number of Codings
Relationships within parish communities	14
Small Groups	9
Community / Relationships	6
Volunteering	5
Younger People	5
Music	5

Notable Quotes

- Jenny and the team instantly get you to volunteer, get you involved. Party at her house. Jenny knows everyone by name. People are told to talk to new people. Get to know others. Not just YAs, but others, like families, etc., e.g. when you usher. Connect you to a small group.
- The fact that there are others like me keeps me there. Benefit to seeing the same people multiple times. Proximity matters. Location matters. Shared core values, e.g. Alpha posters. Church cares about relationships with everyone around them, and with following Christ. Importance of initial personal invitation.
- Generational diversity. Intergenerational contacts. And in a spiritual setting. Want to rub shoulders with people who are older and wiser in spirituality. E.g. lady who leads my small group. Informal communal mentorships.
- The human side of things, how easy it is to make new friends, people remember your name. Getting involved and serving right away. Belonging/behaving/believing in that order, rather than the other way around.
- Technical things that help, e.g. clear wayfinding, coffee hot, cookies fresh. Makes a good impression. Pay attention to details. Everything works. I'm not an Anglican, but could follow the service easily, with no friction. Good "user experience."
- Intercessions for the world; e.g. praying for Sudan. In the moment, down to earth. Come on Sunday with a heavy heart, they are praying for the same things that are weighing me down.
- Church should pay more attention to quality of preaching – address concerns of our time. Everything around the service should be complementary to that.
- Worship experience – sermons are practical and down to earth, not theoretical or abstract. Music is right blend: contemporary, relevant to service themes. Obvious care with putting the service together, good blend, good show. Liturgy doesn't feel boring or stuffy or alienating.
- Good to see what we can do in the social justice sphere, e.g. immigration, homelessness. Partnerships. Inspires trust in clergy.
- One thing – how church treats women – I've experienced oppression of women in other churches; not here, they respect women like Jesus did. Seeing women in leadership roles is important.
- Second thing – how does church fit in for first generation people from other cultures? I went to an Indian church for ten years. Cultural churches cause division rather than integration.

Anglican Church Women

13 participants

The discussion among the Anglican Church Women is aligned with broader themes in lay listening groups: the starting point is getting people to come back to church, especially younger people, and the presumption is that changes, such as offering the correct "activities" or "more lively, fresh music and worship style" will achieve this. Both a nostalgia for full pews and an openness to change are present. Interestingly, there is more of a focus on ecumenical connections than in most groups.

Top Codes

Code	Number of Codings
Younger People	8
Evangelism / Outreach	4
Relationships across Christian Traditions – Ecumenism/Learning	4
Growth / Decline / Size	3
Online / Virtual / Technology	3
Community Building Social Activities	3
Covid / Pandemic	3
Older People	3

Notable Quotes

- Ecumenical events are a good thing. Examples cited tend to be grassroots organized, co-operative among parishes, and ecumenically, and with people from the broader community.
- People have missed three years of nurturing in the faith; they are hungry for it. [*Note: It is concerning that this participant presumes that faith was not nurtured during the pandemic.*]
- We all remember when the pews were full and the Sunday School was full. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be back there again? Is it even possible?