



Netminders Synod Breakout Sessions Final Observations

At Synod 2025, Synod members were invited to chat in breakout sessions about their engagement with our 20 Calls from Cast the Net. The Netminders grouped the calls to allow for 10 breakout sessions and encouraged members to participate in a session that aligned with the calls adopted by their parish.

Each breakout session had facilitators to help lead and encourage discussion, along with a notetaker to help capture what was shared and asked in the session. The Netminders reviewed these notes, looking for emerging themes, opportunities and barriers or challenges to living out the calls. What follows is an outline of our observations.

EMERGING THEMES

We strengthen each other. There is a recognition that shared learning, collaboration, storytelling and leadership development strengthen “the net” for everyone. This is true across the Diocese, especially in rural areas.

The Spirit is calling us deeper. There is a sense that the Holy Spirit is calling us into deeper relationship with God and with one another. This is being lived out through intentional discipleship, welcome and exploring new forms of leadership.

We have a deep desire to move across boundaries. Crossing boundaries – generational, cultural, geographic and congregational – was widely named as a sign of vitality; we are all part of one Body of Christ.

There is movement. Many existing ministries across the Diocese are already aligned with the calls, and adopting a new lens and a shared vocabulary through which to view this work came naturally. There is yearning and hope to continue with these ministries and engage more deeply even amid fatigue and uncertainty.

We are rethinking church identity and success. There is an emerging vision of the parish as porous, relational and mission-focused, extending beyond Sunday worship, rooting success in these dynamics as opposed to defining success by measuring numeric growth alone.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Deepening discipleship and formation: There is a clear desire for formation, change, more intentional discipleship and renewed faith practices. This includes a strong hunger for leadership development among both lay and ordained leaders and a growing openness to redefining what congregational health and effectiveness looks like.

Imagination and innovation: Imaginations are being sparked by new ideas and approaches, and innovation is happening everywhere, in parishes, deaneries and regions. *Faith-in-action* ministries continue to be a source of renewed imagination and innovation, as does intergenerational ministry as a way to strengthen congregational life. Encouraging and supporting these efforts will help continue to cultivate new growth.

Collaboration: Participants from nearly every group pointed toward collaboration as the most promising way forward. This reinforces a *net-*worked model of church life and is a sign of deep hope – sharing ongoing support for collaboration is important.

Interconnectedness of the calls: Many of the calls are interconnected and are rarely experienced in isolation; they naturally overlap and reinforce one another. This is a strength of the calls, highlighting the dynamic nature of ministry. We can highlight this as we continue to encourage parishes to live out the calls.

BARRIERS OR CHALLENGES

Leadership capacity & sustainability: Clergy and lay leaders alike are tired, overworked and experiencing burnout. With an aging volunteer pool, capacity for recruitment seems limited, leading to competing demands for time, energy and resources. Alongside this, there is a need for clearer pathways and training for lay leadership, including liturgical and pastoral roles, given the ongoing difficulty of retaining clergy, particularly in rural contexts.

Moving from imagination to implementation: There's no lack of imagination or vision, but there is a struggle with execution and implementation. Uncertainty about what is permitted under diocesan policy creates hesitation and adds to this challenge. There is a desire for diocesan structures that provide financial, educational and resource support while allowing for flexibility and experimentation in responding to where the Spirit is calling us.

Structural and policy barriers: There is a sense that a further shift in diocesan structure and policy is needed to allow for parishes to be more nimble in responding to the calls. Of note were insurance constraints limiting outreach innovation; a parish "franchise model" reinforcing silos rather than collaboration; and the need for new measurement tools supported by diocesan governance.

Cultural and congregational tensions: The struggle of conflicting views within the parish remains a challenge when leaning into change and renewal. This is sometimes articulated as a capacity issue. There continues to be some anxiety and/or scarcity mindset following Covid-era disruptions.

Ministry Gaps: There was a noted lack of clear focus on intentional young adult ministry in the calls and a desire for stronger coordination and information sharing from the Synod Office.

PHRASES THAT STOOD OUT

- ❖ A way to approach ministry that captures the imagination of the congregation.
- ❖ Looking for ways to do more with what we have by working together is strengthening our deanery.
- ❖ Reimagining and reclaiming “parish” as cure of all souls.
- ❖ Being a porous church.
- ❖ We need to listen for the place for change.
- ❖ Allow for the risk of success.
- ❖ Leaps of faith are sometimes required; we need to be willing to take strategic risks.
- ❖ We need to be surprising – that element of surprise can lead to deeper investigation.
- ❖ We strengthen each other.
- ❖ There is movement and hope even amid fatigue.
- ❖ Christianity gives us a virtue called hope – it is not wishful thinking.