

# FORWARD TOGETHER IN CHRIST



# INTRODUCTION

Constantly called to renewal, the Church of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seeks always to respond to the needs of her people in every age. Desiring to support the work of the Holy Spirit in the Diocese of Hamilton, ***Forward Together in Christ*** was initiated to help the Bishop of Hamilton discern the best way to move the diocese forward after the struggles and limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Once a committee was established, consisting of representatives from the clergy, chancery staff and lay pastoral ministry, it was decided to gather the priests, the permanent deacons, and the paid lay pastoral ministers of the diocese to consult them on three questions.

- 1 What needs to be “rebooted” in the Diocese?**
- 2 Where would you like to see the Diocese of Hamilton in 3–5 years?**
- 3 How can you help us move *Forward Together in Christ*, to get from where we are to where we would like to be?**

*There is a need for greater clarity on relationships and roles among the various members of the Church.*



# GENERAL COMMENTS

For the most part, all three groups were happy to have been asked to participate in this process. Some wondered the reason for beginning this process at this time, citing the fact that our bishop's retirement is imminent, but most understood the need for a vision to help us all move **Forward Together in Christ** as we rise from the pandemic restrictions. By the results, it was obvious that all groups actively engaged in the process and openly shared their thoughts and concerns about the diocese. Some found it difficult to move beyond a parochial view to a diocesan view, yet it was clear that the concern of those who participated was for the diocese and not just their own parish.

The main overall concern that arose was **communication: communication between the chancery and parishes, bishops and priests, priests and deacons, clergy and laity, pastors and principals, and parishioners within their local parish settings**. There seemed to be a growing sense of "us and them". The idea of being together, on the same side, seemed to be far from the perceived reality. This struggle of communication showed itself in all areas of discussion. There is a need for greater clarity on relationships and roles among the various members of the Church. From the discussions with the priests, deacons and lay pastoral ministers, seven main areas requiring attention emerged. In no particular order they are:

1 Laity

5 Hospitality/Outreach

2 Communication/Relationships

6 Liturgy

3 Catechesis

7 Clergy Care

4 Schools

# DEANERY MEETINGS

The major desire of synodality is to hear the voice of all the people of God. Desiring to discern the will of the Holy Spirit, the **Forward Together in Christ** committee organized a series of discussion days throughout the diocese, one in each deanery, except the Hamilton Deanery which had two due to the number of parishes in that deanery. Each pastor was asked to invite six members of his parish to join him for these discussions. The response from the priests and the people of God who attended, was amazing. Close to one thousand people from across the Diocese of Hamilton participated in these opportunities to speak together and offer to the bishop their wisdom and experience.

During these deanery sessions, the participants were placed in groups of six to eight people and had the opportunity to discuss each of our seven areas of growth identified for the Diocese of Hamilton. Each group had a scribe and the notes from the discussions have been saved. The **Forward Together in Christ** organizing team has read all of the notes and summarized them. These summaries can be viewed online below.



*Close to 1,000 people from across the Diocese of Hamilton participated in these opportunities to speak together and offer to the bishop their wisdom and experience.*

# LAITY



**This topic is incredibly important and covers a broad spectrum of ideas. There is a strong desire for discussions focusing on engaging the laity more fully in new and meaningful ways.**

There needs to be further development and openness to engaging the laity in the ministry, mission and maintenance of the parish. Discussions will be needed to discern how to fully engage the laity in new ways, inviting them to share fully in the mission of the Church. The relationship between clergy, lay pastoral ministers and parish staff needs strengthening with defined roles established. There is a sense among the pastoral ministers that they are not invited to share their gifts and talents as co-workers with their pastors, and that their dedication and service are not always recognized or appreciated. The development of Parish and Diocesan Councils, according to the mind of the Church, needs revisiting.

**The People of God want to know and be known by their priest(s).**

---

**There is a perceived sense from many of the laity that they feel disconnected from the bishop and priest on both diocesan and parish levels.**

---

**There is a call for parishes to have a Parish Council, Youth Ministry, Family Ministry, and Children's Liturgy.**

---

**The personal ask by the pastor continues to be the best way to engage people.**

---

**We need to find ways to engage the new families / individuals who come to our parish.**

---

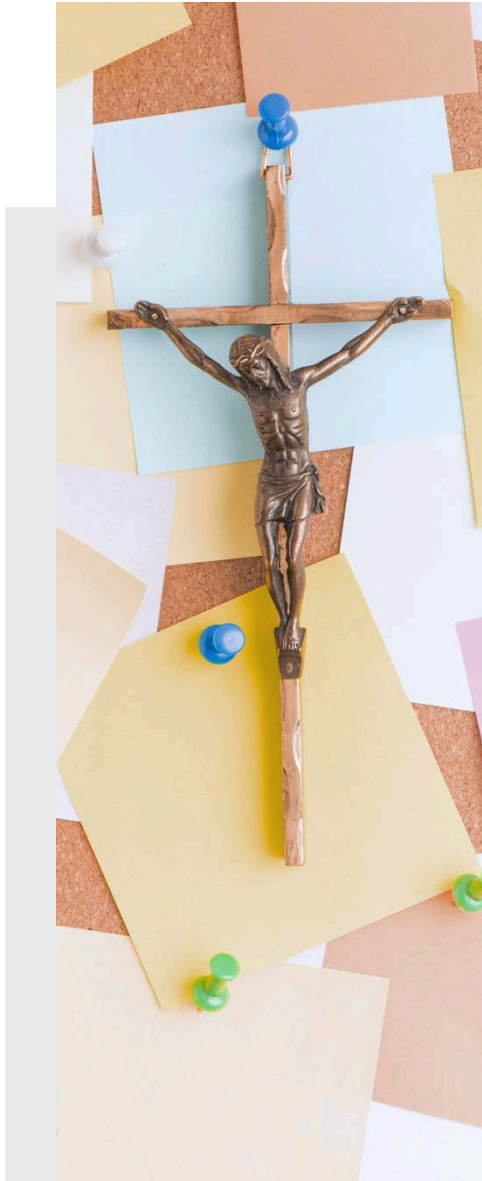
**There is a real openness for there to be some engagement at the deanery level. Not every parish needs to offer everything. There can be a sharing of volunteers, talents, and resources.**

---

**We need to engage better the youth in our parishes.**



# COMMUNICATION / RELATIONSHIPS



**The development of better communication, as stated earlier, is needed in all areas of the Church’s life and ministry. We all need to become better at helping each other understand the “why” behind decisions.**

The sending out of memos from the chancery only stating policy and rules have made priests feel as if they are simply employees and not co-workers with the bishop in the vineyard of the Lord. Memos sent on Friday afternoons are not helpful. Deacons feel the priests do not share with them or invite them into the strategic planning for the parish and that priests do not allow them their proper role in the liturgy. In regards to communication with our Catholic schools, some feel that Catholic school principals do not talk to pastors and pastors do not talk to Catholic school principals. The bishop needs to be more visible and accessible to parishioners. We need to find a way past the “us and them” mentality. Better communication, leading to forgiveness and a healing of relationships, will hopefully lead to deeper trust and a sense of being together in guiding and leading our diocese.

Therefore, it will be important to discern carefully how communication will grow and support the people and ministries in our diocese.

**We need to find a better and more effective way to communicate to parishes and the people of our diocese the various services and ministries already available to support them. There is a lack of awareness about programs and initiatives due to poor communication. We need better advertising and promotion about what the diocese is doing, what we as Catholics believe, and whom the Church supports.**

---

**There needs to be a “multi-pronged” approach in communication, i.e. bulletins and electronic media.**

---

**The diocese needs to lead this initiative by developing a strong Communication Department that can help the diocese and parishes showcase all that is offered to build the faith.**

---

**Priests and deacons must be present and available before and after the celebration of liturgy.**

---

**There should be clear means for the laity to contact the priest and the bishop, as well as an effective process to share ideas between the people and the clergy.**

---

**Messages, from the chancery to parishes and from pastors to parishioners, need to be clear and transparent.**

---

**More opportunities for gatherings between the people and the priest/bishop should be developed.**



# CATECHESIS



**It was clear that we need a way of catechising and evangelizing that is effective in our time and place.**

A clear sense emerged that there is more to be done to increase knowledge and understanding of the Roman Catholic Faith. New ways of preparing for the sacraments and evangelizing people as disciples need to be developed at both the parish and diocesan level.

---

**Parishioners are looking to their parishes as a place of catechesis to grow in their relationship with Jesus and his Church.**

---

**The number one priority was the need for catechesis to support families as the domestic church and to support parents as the primary catechists of their children.**

---

**People want parishes to provide space for these initiatives to occur.**

---

**Help find ways to reach out to Catholics who no longer practice the faith.**

**There is a desire for the active involvement of the parish in the formation of children for the Sacraments of Initiation, rather than leaving Sacramental Preparation completely to the schools.**

---

**Adults are looking for more effective and engaging catechesis on the “tough issues”, Sacred Scripture, and Catholic Social Teaching.**

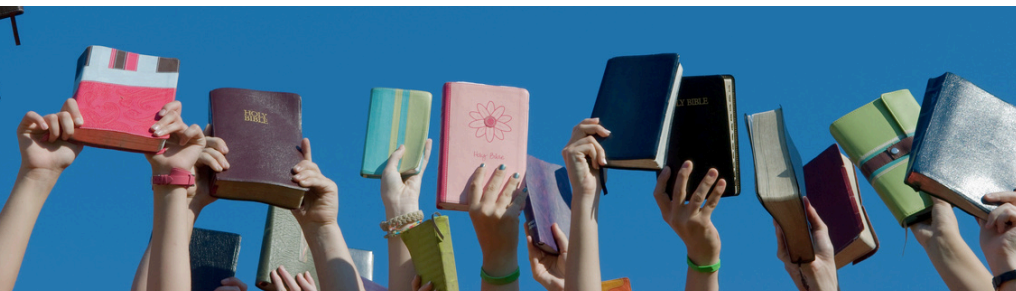
---

**Young people want a faith in action, not just a rule but also a faith that is in service to others.**

---

**People are seeking:**

- **Ways to use catechesis to share the “joy of the Faith”.**
- **Ways to reach out to those Catholics who no longer practice the faith.**
- **How to discern and implement catechesis that attracts young adults.**
- **How to be creative in proclaiming the truths of the faith without seeming inflexible.**
- **Creative ways to accompany Catholics who do not regularly practice their faith or attend Mass.**
- **To find ways to connect our youth with their pastors, and other adult mentors in the faith.**



# RESULTS OF THE DEANERY MEETINGS

# SCHOOLS



**Our relationship with Catholic schools presents us with many challenges. Though schools are an important part of parish/diocesan life, the Church does not have direct oversight of the schools.**

The relationship between schools and parishes appears to lack balance and this creates tensions. Some of this tension comes from misunderstandings and a lack of willingness to try again to move **Forward Together in Christ**. Most desire our Catholic schools to be great opportunities to evangelize our children and through our children to help bring their parents to faith as well. This will require a fresh openness to dialogue.

We must start by acknowledging the reality of where we are in order to move **Forward Together in Christ** to a place where the diocese and schools together proclaim God and his Kingdom.

**This topic was unique, since most of the comments were about the challenges more than possible solutions. With humble cooperation on the part of the diocese/parishes and the schools, we know solutions are possible.**

---

**There is a perception among many that the relationship between the school administration and clergy is poor, the catechesis taught is weak, and some teachers are not qualified to teach religion.**

---

**There is an expectation that the clergy should be making the effort to contribute to correcting this situation.**

---

**The diocese/parish is seen as not taking responsibility to hold education partners accountable to the authenticity of the religious education in the classroom.**

---

**There is a lack of understanding that the Religion and Family Life curriculums used in the classrooms, recently updated, are approved by the Bishops of Ontario.**

---

**Parents are seen to be over-reliant on religious education taking place in the schools. They do not seem to be confident in their role as the primary teachers of their children in the ways of faith.**

---

**Although the tone of this conversation was discouraging, there was a desire to develop effective communication and transparency between the clergy and Catholic educators**

# HOSPITALITY / OUTREACH



**Many of the topics in this report deal with being “more intentional.” Intentionality was recognized to be of great importance.**

How do we intentionally welcome back our parishioners after the pandemic shutdowns? How do we reach out to those who have left the Church? How do we invite and welcome people of diverse cultures and experiences to our parishes? How do we serve those on the margins or those who feel rejected by the Church? How do we create welcoming parish communities? How do our leaders, clergy and lay, present themselves as welcoming and inviting? How do we find the balance between being open, pastoral and faithful to our Catholic tradition?



Community does not happen by accident. We need to develop methods of consciously reaching out, welcoming back and drawing in. We need to help our people claim “ownership” for their parishes by greater involvement and stewardship.



This intentional effort will go a long way in healing those who feel hurt and excluded. Some of the many people needing support are seniors, families, youth and the vulnerable.

**The extension of hospitality is accomplished by:**

- **the clergy being present before and after Mass**
- **having trained Ministers of Hospitality, and**
- **follow-up with families after special celebrations, e.g. baptisms or funerals.**

---

**The celebration of sacraments is always a good time to engage, especially, those who do not regularly attend Sunday Mass.**

---

**The use of food is always a good draw to hospitality.**

---

**More volunteers are needed to help the parish to be alive, active and welcoming.**

---

**There is a call to be welcoming and non-judgmental while remaining faithful to our Catholic tradition.**



# LITURGY



**“The Eucharist ‘is the source and summit of the Christian Life’” (CCC 1324 quoting *Lumen Gentium 11*). It is during the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments that Catholics have their most profound and fulfilling experience of God’s activity in their lives.**

Liturgy must be celebrated well, in such a way that it is helpful to the community of worshippers and faithful to our Catholic tradition. The clergy and the laity desire a renewed love and understanding of the liturgy. Some standard and consistent catechesis on liturgy would be helpful. Further discussions will be required around what is needed to help us reach “full, conscious and active participation” in the liturgy. We will also need to discuss the use of technology in the liturgy.

**Our people desire to understand better the “why and what” of liturgy, since the liturgy does not seem to speak to some of our people today. There needs to be more in-depth explanations of the signs, symbols, gestures and purpose of the liturgy. “Teaching Masses” were strongly requested as were explanations during the celebration of other sacraments.**

---

**People desire brief and well-prepared homilies, taken from the Scripture Readings of the day, and relatable to daily life. The preacher should be conscious of his audience (e.g. predominantly children or predominantly unchurched) and tailor the message and the way he preaches accordingly.**

---

**Musicians need to know the liturgy better and ensure the music properly fits the liturgy being celebrated. Some priests are unwilling to challenge musicians due to their lack of knowledge or fear of musicians quitting. There needs to be an improvement in the quality and suitability of liturgical music.**

---

**It is strongly encouraged that every parish would have a proper Children’s Liturgy of the Word program as opposed to “Sunday School”, which is primarily arts and crafts.**

---

**There is a desire for a variety of devotions to be available in parish churches.**

---

**There was some discussion as to the use of technology in liturgy. Whatever forms of technology are used, it must enhance participation and not distract.**



# CLERGY CARE



**We have not yet fully understood the effects that COVID-19 has had on everyone. This is also true of our clergy.**

We know that the shutdowns, lockdowns, the isolation, the rules, the limitations and the lack of socializing have all had an effect on our clergy. The lack of vocations requiring priests to take on more work with higher expectations has created a demand on our priests that is draining their energy and their resilience. Many priests are experiencing burnout. Conversations are needed to determine what our clergy need to help them on their healing journey, to help them remain healthy, and to determine what they need to be shepherds after the Heart of Jesus in the Church today.

*"I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." (Jeremiah 3:15)*

**The people of God truly love and care for their priests.**

**When laity have ideas for the betterment of the parish, they also need to have a plan to implement their ideas and not just put more on the pastor's desk.**

**There needs to be a clearer distinction between pastoral ministry and administration.**

---

**Priests should learn to seek help from the laity in areas of administration.**

---

**The role of deacons needs examining and possibly more responsibility given to them.**

---

**Clergy are also human with weaknesses and limitations. Their days off and downtime need to be respected.**

---

**Helping with basic human needs, such as food and socialization .**

---

**When there is a conflict with the clergy, first, approach him in charity. Going to the bishop should be done only when all direct courses of communication have failed.**

---

**The diocese should be more attentive to priests by providing ongoing training, support, regular check-ins, ensure holiday time is taken or not taken advantage of, encourage priest support groups, and greater care for retired priests.**

---

**Priests should not be moved as often.**

---

**There should be consideration to closing or consolidating smaller parishes.**

---

**There needs to be a greater effort to foster vocations.**

---

**Intentional prayer for the clergy needs to be encouraged and increased.**

---

# MAIN THEMES

---

As the **Forward Together in Christ** team read the recorded notes and produced the summaries, some themes became clear. These themes come through the collected wisdom of the clergy and people of the Diocese of Hamilton and give us clear direction for moving **Forward Together in Christ**.

- 1 The People of God love their Church and they want the Church to be better at being the presence of God in the world today.
- 2 Our Catholic people love the Church and desire to understand more fully the liturgy, and teachings of the Church. Support of lay formation will be essential to the future growth of the Church.
- 3 The laity must be helped to realize that the Church and her ministers are not able to do everything that people may desire.
- 4 The laity have to be assisted to understand their responsibility to help build and maintain the Church. The laity must step up to their proper role and the clergy must assist and allow them to take on these roles.
- 5 People love their bishops and priests and are grateful for their ministry, but find it difficult when they do not seem available or responsive to their needs and struggles. Some clergy can appear aloof, as though they do not understand the people they serve.
- 6 The clergy need to know their community and their unique attributes, to assist the faithful as the baptized people of God, called to cooperate in the mission of the Church.
- 7 There is a very high expectation for the clergy to engage with their people. Many people feel a lack of connection with their shepherds.
- 8 There is also a clear sense among many that the laity do not understand the life and ministry of bishops, priests and deacons.

- 9 The clergy need to seek the wisdom of the laity in making decisions and give clear explanations for decisions.
- 10 Ongoing dialogue between the diocese and our Catholic school boards is needed to support Catholic schools and parishes in building good relationships.
- 11 There is a need to heal wounds in the relationships between the diocese/parishes and Catholic schools caused by misconceptions and lack of charity.
- 12 Catechesis around the Eucharist and other sacraments needs to be improved. Many Catholics do not understand the liturgy, but there is a great desire to understand.
- 13 Children's Liturgy is greatly desired. Helping our children to understand the Word of God and the liturgy is essential to the continuation of the Church.
- 14 We need to provide the necessary supports and resources for parents in their role as the first teachers of the faith to their children and youth.
- 15 We need to teach our Catholic faith in ways that are both faithful to what we believe and respectful of those whose reality does not match the ideal of the Christian message.
- 16 Youth need support from and connection to the Church: parish, diocese and universal.
- 17 We need to be better at communication at all levels of the diocese, improving our advertising and promoting diocesan resources, tools and events.
- 18 In today's technological world, we must learn to make better use of technology to communicate more effectively and widely.
- 19 Further discussion around the use of technology in the liturgy is required.

# FORWARD TOGETHER IN CHRIST

---

Now the great work of moving **Forward Together in Christ** begins. We have heard from our clergy and laity. They have shared their wisdom for the best way forward for the Church in the Diocese of Hamilton. Now we must find the ways to use this wisdom in order to heal and re-balance the relationships between bishop and clergy, clergy and laity, school and parish, faith life and secular life. All of these relationships will need further discussion and discernment. This seems like a daunting task. However, called to go **Forward Together in Christ**, we do not do this alone. Christ is our Shepherd, our King, our Healer. Where he leads, we follow. We know he will lead us into good pastures: pastures of healing, unity, forgiveness and abundance of new life. Each of us: bishops, priests, deacons, religious, consecrated, pastoral ministers, educators, and all the laity, must be open to allowing the healing and forgiveness of Christ to wash over us. We must be willing to offer this same healing and forgiveness to all we meet, especially those we feel have hurt or wronged us. If we go **Forward Together in Christ**, we know that we will go in the right direction and we will truly be living as disciples of Jesus, builders of His Kingdom!

In order to move **Forward Together in Christ**, effort and changes will be needed at all levels of the diocese. The Bishop's Office, the Chancery Office, and the Parishes will all need to step up and step out in faith. All the faithful, each in his or her own way and place will need to hear the call of the Holy Spirit and His Church to work together to build the Kingdom of God.

*The People of God love their Church and they want the Church to be better at being the presence of God in the world today.*



# A) DIOCESAN LEVEL



**1. That the bishop(s) seek ways to hear the voice of the clergy and the people of God and to have a greater presence and availability.**

**2. That the bishop(s) communicate with greater transparency and, whenever possible, to be able to explain the reasons behind his decisions.**

**3. That the role of Deans, the College of Consultors, and the Presbyteral Council be re-examined and better utilized in order to be more active in knowing the needs and concerns of those in their deanery, and feel freer to bring them to the bishop.**

**4. That the diocese consider the formation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council, which would include clergy and laity from across the diocese.**

**5. That the chancery office, produce updated guidelines for Finance and Parish Councils.**

**6. That the Diocesan Pastoral Offices provide resources to support the current needs of the parishes and parishioners.**

---

**7. That the diocese organize an annual synodal gathering, with the bishop(s) and parish representatives to discern and discuss the needs and direction of the diocese.**

---

**8. That the chancery office develop an effective communications strategy for the diocese.**

---

**9. That a new section in the annual Spiritual and Financial Report be developed to indicate how parishes are implementing these recommendations.**

---

**10. That the diocese commit to ongoing discussion and consultation with education leaders to strengthen and renew collaborative relationships between parishes and education institutions.**

---

**11. That the diocese promote the involvement of clergy and lay pastoral ministers in schools under their spiritual care.**

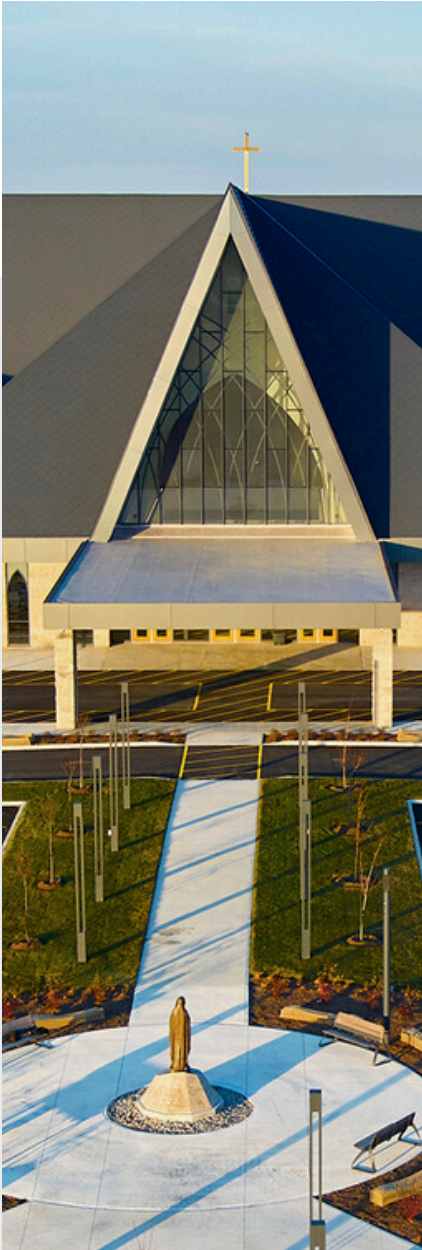
---

**12. That the diocese promote the awareness of the Religious Education and Family Life programs used in our Catholic schools are developed by the Institution of Catholic Education and approved by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario.**

---

**13. That the diocese entrust the ongoing work of Synodality to a body to ensure this good work continues and grows.**

## **B) PARISH LEVEL**



**1. That the clergy, shepherds of God's people, make every effort to be present and available to their people, especially before and after the celebration of sacraments.**

**2. That the clergy continue to develop preaching and presiding skills to ensure the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments are celebrated in union with the Church and helpful to the spiritual needs of parishioners.**

**3. That the clergy need to continue to invite, welcome and prepare the laity to fulfill their responsibilities as disciples of Jesus.**

**4. That all parishes are encouraged to have a Parish Pastoral Council in addition to a Finance Council.**

**5. That parishes establish an annual synodal gathering, where all parishioners have the opportunity to express their needs and concerns. A summary of these sessions is to be forwarded to the bishop or his delegate.**



**6. That pastors make every effort to ensure their people come to a deeper appreciation and knowledge of the Eucharist and other sacraments.**

---

**7. That all the faithful, clergy and laity, take seriously the responsibility to continue to grow in the knowledge of the faith and assist each other to do so.**

---

**8. That the laity be encouraged to take on their proper role in the growth of the parish. Providing proper training is the responsibility of the diocese and parish together.**

---

**9. That parish musicians participate in all available workshops, ensuring the music they offer is appropriate and supports the people of God in their call to “full, conscious, and active participation” in the liturgy.**

---

**10. That each parish develop a Children’s Liturgy of the Word program, based on the celebration of God’s Word (and not arts and crafts).**

---

**11. That parishes discern how to create true hospitality, ensuring all people are invited and welcome.**

---

**12. That priests and parishioners be present, and find new ways to cooperate actively, with their local Catholic school(s).**

---

**13. That pastors develop strong, mutual and charitable relationships with the principals and teachers in their Catholic school(s).**

---

**14. That parishes seek ways to work together to help support each other, willing to share resources, facilities and staff.**

---

**15. That pastors complete a new section in the annual Diocesan Spiritual and Financial Report, indicating what the parish has done to implement these recommendations to move our diocese “*Forward Together in Christ.*”**

# CONCLUSION

---

The Diocese of Hamilton has taken seriously the call of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church today. Having reached out and invited in our clergy and laity to share with our bishop in his role to guide the Church in the Diocese Hamilton, we have found areas where we need to continue to grow, and to heed better the call of the Holy Spirit today. Now comes the task of responding to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

All the baptized, bishops, priests, deacons, religious, consecrated, and laity, together, have the responsibility to build God's Kingdom, each in his or her way, role, and place, for Jesus has given all of us the responsibility to be His presence in the world today and to build His Church. Let us pray for the ongoing success of our **Forward Together in Christ** initiative. May our cooperation help our diocese to continue to be known as the "great and glorious Diocese of Hamilton." For Christ has promised, "Where two or three gather in my name, I am there among them." (Mt. 18:20) Gathered and sent by Jesus, we are well prepared to move **Forward Together in Christ**, as his witnesses and disciples, trusting that wherever the Spirit sends us is for our good and for the building of the Kingdom of God.

*All the baptized, bishops, priests, deacons, religious, consecrated, and laity, together, have the responsibility to build God's Kingdom.*



We place all the present and future efforts of the Diocese of Hamilton under the maternal care of our Patroness, Mary, Our Lady of the Annunciation.

As Mary gave her “Yes” to the invitation of the Archangel Gabriel to be the Mother of God, may she may help us make our “yes” to this invitation of the Holy Spirit. May she teach us to trust God, seeking always to know and to do God’s will. Relying on the maternal care of Our Lady of the Annunciation, may we be ever more open to the call of the Holy Spirit to move boldly **Forward Together in Christ**.



*The Diocese of Hamilton has taken seriously the call of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church today.*



**DIOCESE OF HAMILTON**

[www.hamiltondiocese.com](http://www.hamiltondiocese.com)