

## **NWSC Parish Family Listening Session: “What Opportunities and Challenges Exist for Us?”**

*Saturday, February 28, 2026*

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Approximately 75 people in attendance

Approximately 75 parishioners from across the three parishes participated in this listening session. The conversation reflected both deep love for the Church and honest concern about the future of parish life, family engagement, identity, leadership, and evangelization. Participants spoke candidly about the realities facing Catholic families today while also expressing hope that the parish family can become more welcoming, relevant, relational, and mission-driven.

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### **QUESTION 1:**

#### **“What challenges do you see that exist in the wider community?”**

Parishioners consistently described the wider community as increasingly complex, fragmented, pressured, and difficult to navigate, particularly for families, children, teenagers, and young adults. Participants spoke at length about the emotional, financial, technological, cultural, and spiritual pressures facing people today, often emphasizing that modern life feels more exhausting and uncertain than in previous generations.

Several major themes emerged repeatedly throughout the discussions.

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#### **1. Families Are Under Enormous Pressure**

Participants repeatedly described modern family life as increasingly complicated, exhausting, and fragmented. Many spoke about financial stress, overscheduling, technology, and the pace of life leaving little room for faith, community, or rest.

Specific concerns included:

- Rising housing and living costs
- Student loan debt
- Pressure to work constantly
- Difficulty saving for retirement
- Overscheduled children and sports commitments, often competing with church attendance
- Difficulty balancing faith, family, work, and mental health
- Emotional exhaustion and burnout
- Parents working long hours
- Lack of time for faith, rest, or community
- Weaker faith formation at home and in society

Several participants noted that parents today are navigating pressures very different from previous generations.

- “There’s a really heavy burden on... how do you financially save for retirement while balancing student loans versus rent versus raising a family.”
  - “People are burning candles from both ends.”
  - “There are great challenges out there in a myriad of ways for families.”
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## 2. Technology and Social Media Are Shaping Identity, Community, and Mental Health

Many participants expressed concern about the influence of technology, social media, and internet culture, especially on children and young adults.

Themes included:

- Difficulty grounding children in real-world relationships
- Constant comparison culture
- Helping children understand gratitude and perspective
- Anxiety and depression
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Reduced attention spans
- Confusion around truth, morality, and identity
- Erosion of local/community connection
- Internet influence replacing local/community influence
- Relativism (“everything feels relative”)

Participants repeatedly described concern about how technology affects both emotional well-being and moral formation.

- “The introduction of technology makes community for them almost boundless.”
  - “You’re seeing the highlight reels... and subconsciously you have a feeling of inadequacy.”
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## 3. There Is Growing Uncertainty About Identity, Values, and Belonging

A recurring theme was uncertainty: uncertainty about the future, about what community means, and about how families and young people find stability and moral grounding.

Participants spoke about:

- Weakening sense of community and belonging
- Isolation and loneliness
- Difficulty helping children discern truth
- Parents struggling to provide stable moral frameworks
- Confusion around morality and values
- Cultural instability and rapid societal change
- Anxiety about the future of younger generations
- The declining influence of faith and church life

Several participants reflected on the difficulty of raising children in a culture that often feels fragmented and morally confusing.

- “It’s a Gordian knot... the problems are not going to be solved with one treatment.”
  - “Really complicated.”
  - “How do I prepare these kids for the world they’re going into?”
  - “We need a definition of community.”
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#### 4. Economic Inequality and Material Instability Are Increasingly Visible

Participants repeatedly discussed the widening gap between those who are financially secure and those who are struggling, particularly in Seattle.

Themes included:

- Affordable housing
- Economic inequality
- Economic and social bubbles
- Marginalization
- Aging populations with growing needs
- Difficulty affording life in Seattle
- Job instability for younger generations
- Fear about long-term financial security
- Difficulty helping children understand hardship or broader realities

Several participants emphasized that these realities are increasingly visible even within affluent neighborhoods.

- “There’s a widening gap between people who are well off and people who are not.”
  - “The middle class in America is getting squished and going away.”
  - “Affordable housing, affordable care, especially for those who are marginalized.”
  - “It’s really, really hard for people who are graduating right now.”
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#### 5. Disconnection, Isolation, and Declining Participation Are Affecting Community Life

Many participants expressed concern that people today are increasingly disconnected from one another, from institutions, and from faith communities.

Themes included:

- Loneliness
- Declining participation in parish and civic organizations
- Loss of human connection
- Difficulty sustaining volunteerism
- Younger generations disengaging from communal life
- Increased anger, frustration, and polarization
- Young adults searching for belonging

- Elderly parishioners becoming isolated
- Difficulty forming authentic relationships

Participants frequently described a culture in which people are busy but disconnected.

- “Human connection is being lost.”
  - “Young people are not coming.”
  - “Veteran organizations are dying because young people are not coming.”
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## 6. Safety, Outreach, and Care for Vulnerable Populations Remain Ongoing Concerns

Participants identified both physical and cultural safety concerns throughout the discussions.

Themes included:

- Homelessness
- Undocumented immigrant populations
- Safety around parish and school neighborhoods
- Exposure to harmful online influences
- Emotional and spiritual vulnerability
- The need for outreach and accompaniment
- Caring for people who are suffering, isolated, or overlooked

Several participants emphasized that Christians are called not to overlook those who are struggling in their midst.

- “We may miss the homeless in our midst.”
  - “There’s starving people everywhere, every rich community.”
  - “Outreach is really important.”
  - “Safety in Magnolia is different from safety down in the Seattle Center area.”
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## QUESTION 2:

### **“What challenges do you see that exist in the parish?”**

Parishioners consistently described the parish family as caring, faithful, and deeply committed, while also acknowledging significant challenges related to engagement, communication, identity, participation, and the future of parish life. Across nearly every table, participants expressed both concern and hope: concern about declining involvement and uncertainty surrounding change, but also hope that the parish family can become more welcoming, connected, collaborative, and mission-oriented moving forward.

Several major themes emerged repeatedly throughout the discussions.

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## 1. Declining Engagement Among Families, Children, Teenagers, and Young Adults Is a Major Concern

The most frequently discussed challenge was how to engage younger generations in parish life and help families feel connected, welcomed, and invested in the Church.

Participants repeatedly expressed concern about:

- Young families not attending Mass regularly
- Difficulty retaining children and teenagers
- Young adults disengaging from parish life
- Parishioners feeling disconnected or uninvolved
- Declining participation in ministries and communal life
- Difficulty making church feel relevant to younger generations

Many participants emphasized that children need to feel visible, included, and actively involved in parish life if families are going to remain connected to the Church.

Specific ideas and concerns included:

- Children participating more visibly at Mass
- More youth involvement in liturgy
- Family-centered worship experiences
- Better music engagement
- More opportunities for participation
- Creating environments where children feel welcomed rather than merely tolerated

Participants frequently connected children's participation with family participation overall.

- "The church is aging and the kids and new families are not joining."
  - "Young families are not going to church."
  - "Give them something to do."
  - "Parents love to watch their kids perform."
  - "Building and retaining younger cohorts in the church."
  - "There does seem to be a slight shift of young adults coming back to the religion."
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## 2. Parish Life Can Feel Difficult to Navigate, Unwelcoming, or Hard to Enter

Many participants expressed concern that parish life can sometimes feel inaccessible, difficult to navigate, or intimidating, especially for newcomers or people trying to become more involved.

Participants described:

- Slow or unclear volunteer onboarding
- Difficulty finding ways to participate
- Poor communication and follow-through
- Feeling intimidated entering established communities
- Lack of personal invitation
- Difficulty understanding how ministries and parish structures work

Several participants emphasized that people are far more likely to become involved when personally invited and intentionally welcomed.

- “It’s taken over five months to become a lector.”
  - “You’re sending a message... with lack of response or engagement.”
  - “It is very intimidating to come into that kind of group.”
  - “People like to be invited to do things.”
  - “How do we make people feel welcomed, involved, and needed?”
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### 3. Becoming “One Parish Family” Feels Emotionally Difficult and Unclear

Many participants acknowledged deep attachment to their individual parishes and uncertainty about what becoming “one parish family” actually means in practice.

Themes included:

- Strong parish identity and history
- Emotional attachment to individual parishes
- Fear of losing parish culture and traditions
- Resistance or hesitation around change
- Uncertainty about future structure and identity
- Difficulty imagining what unity will practically look like
- Longstanding parish and school rivalries or divisions

Participants repeatedly expressed that while many support the vision conceptually, emotionally the transition still feels difficult and unresolved.

- “My roots are here, and they’ve grown deep.”
  - “I think a challenge is going to get all of us to accept being part of the other parishes.”
  - “We don’t know what it means to be one.”
  - “How do we make the parish family cohesive?”
  - “We haven’t totally switched into the mindset of embracing this change.”
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### 4. Participants Desire More Engaging, Relevant, and Participatory Parish Life

Many comments focused on the desire for parish life to feel more engaging, relatable, welcoming, and responsive to modern realities.

Participants discussed:

- Homilies needing to feel more relatable and concise
- Better communication tools and systems
- More effective outreach
- More participatory worship experiences
- Greater energy and enthusiasm in parish life
- Better use of modern communication methods
- More opportunities for faith formation and spiritual growth

- Stronger parish-family-wide integration

Several participants expressed concern that parish life can sometimes feel outdated, disconnected, or difficult for younger generations to connect with.

- “Speak to your audience. Make it relevant.”
  - “We do have opportunities to probably do a better job at communicating.”
  - “Communication is again paramount to me.”
  - “St Anne’s is boring... unless the kids are there.”
  - “How do we make church more attractive?”
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## 5. Trust, Credibility, and Relevance Remain Important Concerns

Some participants voiced concern that younger generations struggle to trust or connect with the Church due to past scandals, perceived rigidity, inconsistent messaging, or experiences of exclusion.

Themes included:

- Rebuilding trust with younger generations
- Concerns about credibility
- Frustration with rigidity or resistance to change
- Desire for greater authenticity and openness
- Concern that younger people no longer see church as relevant

At the same time, several participants expressed hope that many people, especially young adults, are still searching for meaning, grounding, and spiritual connection.

- “I think the church needs to rebuild credibility with my generation.”
  - “Falling off of interest of young adults in religion in general.”
  - “Why would it be relevant in someone’s life?”
  - “You need something to ground you.”
  - “There does seem to be a slight shift of young adults coming back to the religion.”
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## 6. Volunteer Fatigue and Leadership Capacity Are Ongoing Challenges

Participants also acknowledged the difficulty of sustaining ministries, volunteer leadership, and long-term engagement, especially as parish structures become more complex.

Themes included:

- Limited volunteer capacity
- Burnout among active parishioners
- Difficulty sustaining programs long-term
- Increased workload from Partners in the Gospel
- Need for stronger systems and coordination
- Challenges maintaining momentum once leaders step away

Several participants observed that many people are willing to participate, but fewer are willing or able to organize, lead, or sustain ministries over time.

- “Everybody wants to participate, but not be in charge.”
  - “The minute I couldn’t be there, it just fizzled.”
  - “Partners in the Gospel has literally doubled our workload.”
  - “They don’t want to make commitments they cannot keep.”
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### QUESTION 3:

**“Having heard information from the community demographics report, what opportunities do you see in our parish and in the wider community to more effectively serve and accompany others? Is there anybody that we can do a better job of reaching?”**

Participants consistently approached this question with a hopeful and outward-looking spirit. While many acknowledged the significant challenges facing both the Church and the broader community, parishioners repeatedly emphasized that the parish family also has tremendous opportunity for growth, evangelization, collaboration, accompaniment, and renewal.

Across nearly every table, participants expressed a desire for the parish family to become more welcoming, relational, visible, mission-oriented, and engaged with the needs of the surrounding community. Many emphasized that people today are searching for belonging, meaning, stability, and authentic connection, and that the Church has an opportunity to meet those needs through intentional outreach, hospitality, service, and accompaniment.

Several major themes emerged repeatedly throughout the discussions.

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#### 1. Families, Children, Teenagers, and Young Adults Represent the Greatest Opportunity for Growth and Accompaniment

Participants consistently identified younger generations as the greatest opportunity for future growth and evangelization within the parish family.

Many participants emphasized the opportunity to:

- Welcome young families more intentionally
- Build stronger children’s ministries
- Foster belonging for young adults
- Create stronger youth ministry opportunities
- Build intergenerational relationships
- Help younger generations feel seen, valued, and included
- Offer meaningful community and spiritual grounding

Participants repeatedly emphasized that many young people are searching for meaning, belonging, purpose, and authentic community, even if they are not currently engaged in parish life.

- “Families, connection, building, communication.”
  - “Building and retaining younger cohorts in the church.”
  - “You need something to ground you.”
  - “There does seem to be a slight shift of young adults coming back to the religion.”
  - “The most beautiful masses we have here that are full are with parents and kids.”
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## 2. Intentional Hospitality and Personal Invitation Are Powerful Opportunities

Many participants emphasized that one of the greatest opportunities for the parish family is simply becoming more intentional about welcoming, inviting, and accompanying people.

Themes included:

- Personally welcoming newcomers
- Helping people find meaningful ways to participate
- Creating easier entry points into parish life
- Building relational rather than transactional communities
- Making people feel known, valued, and needed
- Reaching out intentionally rather than waiting for people to engage themselves

Participants repeatedly stressed that belonging often begins through small personal connections and invitations.

- “Whenever you came into a parish... you were welcomed in some way.”
  - “We need to do more of that.”
  - “People like to be invited to do things.”
  - “How do we make people feel welcomed, involved, and needed?”
  - “Outreach is really important.”
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## 3. Participants Saw Significant Opportunity in Greater Collaboration Across the Three Parishes

Many parishioners expressed hope that becoming one parish family could create stronger collaboration, reduce duplication, and allow ministries and outreach efforts to become more effective and sustainable.

Ideas and opportunities discussed included:

- Shared ministries
- Combined social justice efforts
- Parish-family-wide communication systems
- Unified volunteer opportunities
- Shared service projects
- Better coordination across schools and parishes
- Collaborative outreach ministries

- Shared faith formation and community events

Participants repeatedly suggested that collaborative ministry could become an important source of unity and shared identity.

- “A social action committee that incorporated the three parishes.”
  - “How do we make the parish family cohesive?”
  - “We already have things happening that are good... suddenly we have three parishes of people who can infuse something that already exists.”
  - “We really should act as one.”
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#### 4. Service and Outreach Were Seen as Powerful Opportunities for Evangelization

Participants repeatedly identified service and outreach ministries as meaningful ways to both serve the broader community and invite people more deeply into parish life.

Themes included:

- Building community through service
- Engaging families through volunteer opportunities
- Welcoming non-Catholics through outreach
- Putting faith into action
- Accompanying isolated or struggling individuals
- Serving the poor and marginalized
- Supporting seniors and vulnerable populations
- Reaching university students and apartment communities
- Continuing strong social justice ministries

Several participants emphasized that outreach is one of the clearest ways the Church visibly lives out the Gospel.

- “More service projects would be a great way to invite people in.”
  - “There’s starving people everywhere, every rich community.”
  - “We need to continue to reach out to those people.”
  - “Outreach to people in need and people that are searching.”
  - “How do we take care of each other?”
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#### 5. Communication, Transparency, and Visibility Were Seen as Major Opportunities

Many parishioners expressed appreciation for the work already underway while also emphasizing the importance of stronger communication, transparency, and visibility moving forward.

Participants expressed desire for:

- More updates
- Greater clarity about plans and decisions
- Better awareness of parish-family-wide initiatives

- More communication between schools and parishes
- Clearer pathways for involvement
- Better use of communication tools and technology
- More consistent messaging across ministries and parishes

Many participants expressed that people are more likely to engage when they feel informed, included, and connected to what is happening.

- “Many of us would really like your committee to tell us what’s going on.”
  - “Communication is again paramount to me.”
  - “How do we communicate about that to get more people involved?”
  - “If you don’t tell them what you’ve got, how do you expect them to buy it?”
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## 6. Participants Expressed a Desire for Deeper Faith Formation, Spiritual Growth, and Accompaniment

Beyond programs and activities, many participants emphasized the opportunity to help people grow spiritually and feel more deeply accompanied in their faith lives.

Themes included:

- Desire for deeper faith formation
- Spiritual direction opportunities
- Retreats and small groups
- Opportunities for prayer and reflection
- Helping people grow spiritually amid modern pressures
- Accompanying people who are searching, struggling, or disconnected

Participants frequently suggested that many people are spiritually hungry and looking for greater meaning and grounding.

- “I would love... a spiritual director.”
  - “You need something to ground you.”
  - “People that are searching.”
  - “There’s opportunity here for different kinds of people and strengths.”
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