

Our Synod Prayer

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;

Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.

Do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.

Conversations in the Spirit



***“How can we be a
synodal Church in mission?”***

**A report from our listening sessions
and survey**

***Church of the Presentation
February and March 2024***

Introduction

As requested by Pope Francis after the Synod of Bishops in October 2023, parishes were charged with this question: **“How can we be a synodal Church in mission?”**

The objective of these new reflections was to identify the paths we can follow and the tools we might adopt in our different and unique contexts and circumstances to enhance the unique contribution of each baptized person. Why? Because the Church does not merely “have” a mission. The Church “is” Mission. She is a community of missionary disciples who are sent to all the ends of the earth to announce the Good News Of Jesus. This mission compels all of us to go forth to share this Good News with all those on the margins of society, and to treat them with love and compassion.

We were also called to identify the unique contributions of Presentation in the call to one mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and his Gospel to the world today. This was not a request for procedural changes or improvements to church structures, but rather an invitation to reflect on the concrete forms of Missionary commitment to which we are called. We were also called to look at the dynamism between unity and diversity proper to a synodal church.

These “conversations in the Spirit” had a distinct flavor and style. According to Cardinal Cupich, Conversations in the Spirit means paying attention to the spiritual movements in oneself and in the other person during the conversation, which requires being *attentive to more than simply the words* expressed. This quality of attention is an act of respecting, welcoming, and being hospitable to others as they are. “It is an approach that takes seriously what happens in the hearts of those who are conversing. There are two necessary attitudes that are fundamental to this process:

As a parish community, we aim to put into practice three key words: communion, participation and mission. We aim to move forward in Eucharistic hope, in friendship with Jesus and with one another, with mutual respect, authority and admiration, as we seek to do what the Holy Father is calling us to – to envision a renewal of the whole church as a conversation in the Spirit. This new “model of the church” has the promise of bringing about a renewal for how we make decisions and how we relate to one another. May we, the People of God, continue to journey together and to live as missionary disciples and pilgrims on the road.

We continue to pray for the Synod process and for the Synod of Bishops that will meet again in October 2024.

- Submitted by the Synod Committee
May 2024



“The purpose of the Synod...is not to produce documents, but ‘to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.’”

(Preparatory Document, #32)

Conclusion:

A major theme that was noted in these sessions is that many people suffer from loneliness. This age of screens pulls people into themselves and away authentic community. Elderly people are home alone, and many divorced and widowed persons feel alone. How can we address this? How can we reach out to these people, or create ways to connect with them and with each other? Fr. Timothy Radcliffe said that the Synod is a moment for us to recalibrate how we make friends. Do we set limits on how we make friends? Living in a synodal way means authentic listening, and paying attention to the spiritual movements in oneself and another during conversation. It means respecting and welcoming others just the way they are and recognizing that the Holy Spirit works and lives in everyone.

It was also noted that much of what we have been doing is synodal in nature. Our Metanoia Series, Alpha, Confirmation session with teens and Sponsors, women's and men's prayer groups – all have a synodal dynamic and form. Family Faith sessions with families at tables learning together is synodal. Small groups on retreats are synodal. This all needs to be preserved and celebrated and continued. Going forward, participants said they would be interested in continued “Conversations in the Spirit” on various topics.

As Cardinal Cupich wrote, “This is the new model of the church which I believe has the promise of bringing about a renewal for how we make decisions in the church and how we relate to one another at the universal, continental, national and local levels.” God cares deeply about our decisions (individual and communal), and we *can* come to know God's will for us. A synodal Church does not allow itself to be bogged down by human issues or agendas. Rather, a synodal Church is guided by the Holy Spirit. The only true agenda is God's mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

active listening and speaking from the heart.” (American Mag, 4/24) Participants felt that we did this well.

Specifically, these conversations in the Spirit were not a question of starting the synodal process from scratch or repeating the process of listening and consultation undertaken during the first stage. We were asked to look at the Synthesis Report from 2023 and promote the things most suitable to us, in particular conversation in the Spirit.

We were asked to look at what we, as a parish community, are most passionate, and work towards bringing those issues and needs to light and into action. We had 3 “conversations in the Spirit” sessions, one online and two in person as well as an online survey. A few smaller groups also held their own “conversations.” Here are the main issues and themes that emerged from those sessions.



Question One (Based on Synthesis Report Chapters 8-12, 16 k 18)

Statement: Church structures such as Parish Pastoral Councils, Finance Councils, various advisory groups, diocesan and parish leadership, and ministries encourage the mission to help parishioners encounter Christ.

**In your experience, how have such Church structures and cultures helped and/or hindered the mission today? Use specific examples.*

On the positive side, many affirmed the synod process as a continuation of Vatican II. Many participants praised the par-

ish leadership – staff and volunteers – for all that happens here at Presentation. We know we are a minority and are blessed to have a parish that listens and encourages dialogue. Most participants affirmed our parish’s welcoming culture and are so glad we are open to all people. The sense of “we are one body” is truly lived here. The community at large is very giving and everyone wants to help others.

Participants praised the great Adult Faith Formation programs that are open to all. This year’s programs were diverse in nature and help participants to engage in topics new to them. Family Faith Formation tries to support and encourage families as they live their faith at home. Our proud history of Small Christian Communities was mentioned which has led to a sense of togetherness. Of note was the notion that we are a “circular parish” which provides room for humility and honesty and growth.

The multiplicity of great ministries engages people, helps them grow in a sense of community and personal faith. Participants are proud of our history of lay leadership which started with Fr Jack and has continued with our Pastors since then. There is great trust in Father Bob that he has selected the right staff, and that the staff have the interests of the parish at the center of what they do. There is concern over succession planning and who will be Pastor when Fr Bob retires. People love the parish staff, who are parishioners first, and are very committed to the community. Last, it was noted that Cardinal Tobin is present and visits often and listens to the concerns of his flock.

Concerns that were raised included thoughts about the larger Church – human flaws such as the sex abuse crisis have greatly hurt the Church. How can we heal? How can we move forward? How can we support our parish priests? Can the Church be run better? The question was raised – can the

aged to live their faith every day? We need to help people feel ready to proclaim the Gospel to other and being the light of faith outside these walls. We need to offer training in how to share our faith with others. Overall, we need stronger faith formation opportunities for young adults, and ways to engage them in our community after they get married. How can we learn more about what it means to be a missionary and missionary outreach?

Other questions asked were: Can we have RCIA candidates share their experiences/witness during the Easter Season? Can we have Cornerstone witnesses after the retreats? Or even youth witnesses after their retreats – for the whole parish? And when we have speakers such as on Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, we need to continue to recognize all those who serve in those roles, not just biologically.

As a parish community, how can we better support and celebrate efforts like the community garden that feeds hundreds? That *IS* church in mission. How can we bring this to the forefront? How can we lessen polarization among people?

In the larger church, how can we be even more welcoming to the LGBTQ community? How can we really listen to what people want and are calling for? How can the church really listen to what people are calling for – women priests and deacons, inclusion of the LGBTQ community, and more. How can we push for more transparency and communication from the church hierarchy? It was also stated that pastoral councils should have expanded authority, and that new and different people should be asked to serve in leadership roles.



community. Overall, Presentation is open to new ideas advertising and social media help to keep people informed of opportunities for growth, worship, service and much more. Participants felt that modeling our faith, living it, helps others feel it and experience it. We need to continue to listen to each other and everyday people. We also need to create and offer even more service opportunities for people. Participants mentioned that we need a stronger focus on the elderly, lonely, marginalized – how can we reach these people? How can we take care of caretakers?

It was also discussed that we may need various methods of faith formation to meet the needs of our parishioners. One size does not fit all. Our younger generations need to be pulled in and we need to figure out the best ways how. Can we have a Youth group for younger kids – like a Junior High Youth Group? In general, it was felt that in person meetings and sessions are best, but sometimes virtual options for programs can be helpful. We also need to emphasize true conversion and transformation over just faith formation. We need to deepen our spirituality and not stay shallow in what we offer and preach.

Other questions and challenges arose, such as: How can we stop the rush out after mass? Can we offer hospitality more often so we can engage people after Mass? How can we help and encourage grandparents and parents whose children/grandchildren don't go to Mass anymore? How can we harness the digital age? How can we use digital methods to evangelize? to teach? To reach new people? How do we meet people where they are at? How can we embrace families of all sizes and shapes?

Participants also stressed that we need to be better at evangelization and sharing our faith. Do parishioners leave mass ready to share their faith with others? Are they truly encour-

church hierarchy change? We need more accountability for Diocesan offices and structures. There is still much pain because of the sex abuse scandal and many people have left the church because of that. How can we bring them back and instill trust and hope? How can such an institution, which is a business, be run in a more transparent way? How can smaller parishes without such leadership thrive and grow?

Overall thoughts were that the governing body of the Church are removed from the spiritual needs of the people and that they are out of touch all together. Our leaders need to minister to the people – not the institution. Clericalism is still a large issue, and parishes where a pastor is dominating (not here) turns people away from the church. Things and processes that have hurt people need to change, like the divorce process. We need more ways for the everyday person to be heard and included. Last, the question was raised – how can larger more wealthy parishes help smaller ones grow? Can we create something like sister parishes?

Concerns were also raised about a lack of transparency in how members of our Pastoral Council and Finance Council are chosen. People want to understand the distinct roles of these groups and want to know the people in them. Open Pastoral Council meetings would be helpful to learn and to share concerns. There are also concerns over succession planning – who will be the next Pastor? Will staff stay when Father Bob retires? How can we plan for change, even with the staff? Strong synodal structures in the parish could continue a parish's mission work through multiple changes of pastors and through multiple generations.

As a parish, we need to continue to provide opportunities for everyone's gifts to be used and appreciated. We realize that we are a wealthy parish (both financially and with the gifts and talents people share) and we feel guilty sometimes for that

and wonder who we can better share with other parishes who have less. How do we make that a primary mission?

Another thought was that we need to make overall Faith Formation more organic in embracing and learning the faith – many people do not know how to talk about faith naturally. Mandatory faith formation emphasizes *process over relationship* – a faith formation process works best when people are not forced to be there and when it has less of a “school” feel. The question becomes, how can we change that model? How can we help people have an encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ? We also need to offer tools for parents and grandparents as they help their families come to know Jesus. We also could do even more Adult Faith Formation and evangelization programs that reach more people.

As a parish it was suggested that we need more training for greeters and ministers of hospitality. We need to go back to basics like people introducing themselves at the start of mass to help people feel welcome and to encourage relationship building. How do we get people in the doors and then to stay? There was also a call for more interfaith education programs to help us grow in understanding of other faith traditions and to build relationships with all peoples.



Question Two (Based on Synthesis Report Chapters 13, 19 - 20)

Statement: Specific Church structures (for example: Small Christian Communities, RCIA, listening sessions, various councils and gatherings, ministries, Adult Faith Formation opportunities, meetings with parents, etc.) are to welcome,

invite, motivate, include, and equip *all* the baptized to be *co-responsible* in spreading the Good News of Jesus.

**Using specific examples, how can these leadership groups better help all the baptized in the community proclaim the Gospel and fully participate in the mission of the Church?*

Similar to question 1, it was raised that our Family faith program is positive in that it engages parents and children involved in learning about their faith and encourages parents to explore and renew their own faith. It was noted again that there are many options for adult faith formation with various formats, topics and times offered. We have a multitude of ministries for all people who wish to participate. These opportunities build relationships and the body of Christ. Retreats are powerful opportunities for conversion, faith sharing and building relationships with others. Community is so important to our parishioners, and it was noted that shared meals are so meaningful, such as the shared meals at the Alpha program.

It was also noted that parish-wide service opportunities as the Haiti pack-a-thon are beneficial on many levels. Families get to work together here, and that is important for their own family unit as well as the parish community. Our priests give good homilies that encourage people to stick to your faith and to live it every day. The homilies given here are thought provoking and very much about being a synodal church. Music is important and meaningful here too, and worship is beautiful. It was noted, however, that the music offered is not a concert, and that applause is not always appreciated or appropriate. It was also noted that there is a beautiful message in how non-Catholics are encouraged to come up at Communion time to receive a blessing.

Other programs noted as being powerful were RCIA and Be-reavement – both help so many people grow in faith and find