

# **St. Anthony of Padua Parish – Synodal Sessions**

## **Lent 2024**

### **Introduction**

As a response to the request of the delegates in Rome at the Synod on Synodality in October 2023, St. Anthony of Padua Parish hosted three synodal sessions during Lent in 2024.

The participants engaged in a process called “Conversations in the Spirit,” which is being used by the Synod delegates in Rome, in addressing key questions and topics related to synodality (i.e. “walking together as the people of God”). In each session the participants were arranged in small groups of 4-5 persons. Each small group had a facilitator who kept time for each of three rounds of conversation, listening, and prayer. Each facilitator typed a summary of main ideas the group members shared and discussed, and sent his/her summary to Charlie Miller who combined and edited them into a final summary (see below).

The first session dealt how the individual baptized Catholic is called to witness the Good News of Jesus Christ in the contexts and circumstances of his/her daily life. The second and third sessions dealt with how the local Church (parish and/or diocese) is called to “journey together” (synodality) in advancing the mission of Jesus Christ in light of applicable aspects of the *2023 Synthesis Report* published by the Synod delegates in Rome.

### **Main “Take-aways” from the Synodal Sessions**

**Session #1 – *How can one more intentionally & faithfully be a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ through his/her demeanor, words, and actions? What sort of accompaniment or support might one need to do this?***

- Be truly present, open, compassionate, and listen deeply to others in our encounters with them
- Model and teach the Catholic faith to others, especially children and adolescents
- Empathize with those who grieve the loss of a loved one
- Practice forgiveness
- Cultivate simplicity and silence
- Be of service, especially to those most in need
- Accompaniment and support comes chiefly from one’s parish leaders and fellow parishioners

**Sessions #2 & #3 – *What do you think can help your parish and/or diocese become a more synodal Church for mission? How might we promote this?***

(We used the *2023 Synthesis Report*, Ch. 8, 9, & 11 in session #2 and Ch. 14 & 16 in session #3 to address these questions)

### **Responses in light of Ch. 8 – “Church Is Mission”**

- Parishes and dioceses need to recognize, empower, and utilize the gifts of lay persons more fully, esp. those of women, minorities, immigrants, and particularly young people (see para. j, k, n)
  - engage the energy and interest of adolescents
  - allow qualified lay persons to preach at Mass and at other ecclesial gatherings
- Pastoral structures need to be created or reorganized (see para. l) in local churches to utilize the charisms of lay persons in a synodal way:
  - support marriage and family life with relevant programs (see para. k)
  - develop “Small Church Communities” centered around the Word of God
  - provide for more non-ordained parish life coordinators

### **Responses in light of Ch. 9 – “Women in the Life and Mission of the Church”**

- The contributions of women must be more fully utilized by parish pastors and diocesan bishops
  - expand the roles of women in ministry (see para. m, p, r)
  - support the training and hiring women to teach in seminaries (see para. p) and to serve as judges in all canonical processes (see para. r)
- Admit women to the diaconate in the Church (see para. j)

### **Responses in light of Ch. 11 – “Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church”**

- Connect priestly formation to the daily life of the community” (see para. e)
  - involve qualified lay persons as formators for seminarians so they could be more sensitive to the people of God whom they serve (see para. j)
- Dispense with the mandatory discipline of celibacy by allowing priests to get married (see para. f)
  - to help broaden their understanding of married and family life, and foster their pastoral sensibility
  - to mitigate the sense of loneliness that many priests feel
- Welcome back into Church ministry, even as priests, those men who have left the priesthood to get married (see para. l)
- Develop structures of transparency and accountability, such as conducting regular audits of how priests and deacons are carrying out roles of responsibility entrusted to them (see para. k).

### **Responses in light of Ch. 14 – “A Synodal Approach to Formation”**

- Integrate theology, psychology, and human experience for adolescent programs in sex education and for those being trained for Church ministry, especially seminarians (see para. g, h)
- Undertake consultations of those responsible for initial & ongoing formation of priests (see para. o)
- Conduct reviews and establish criteria for evaluating priestly formation programs on an ongoing basis by qualified clergy and laity, including women (see para. i, l, n, o)
- Young people considering the priesthood should have many people they can talk to, in addition to priests, about what the life of a priest entails

### **Responses in light of Ch. 16 – “Toward a Listening and Accompanying Church”**

- Establish or expand parish and diocesan ministries of listening and accompaniment
  - Constituted by “small Church communities”
  - To support their own members and other parishioners in faith and mission
  - To reach out to others, esp. those at the margins of Church life, e.g. shut-in and lonely individuals, LGBTQ+ persons, disenfranchised Catholics, and many others (see para. n, o, p)
- In our diocese one recently established program and another soon to be developed serve as exemplary means of promoting listening and accompaniment, i.e. synodality
  - Fairfield University established the Center for Ignatian Spirituality, which trains and supplies spiritual directors for those seeking to enhance their relationship with Jesus Christ and develop their faith life for mission
  - Bishop Caggiano is inaugurating a program to train small group facilitators for the ministry of listening and accompaniment throughout parishes in our diocese

### **In Conclusion**

- We are passionate about the present and future direction of the Church, firmly hoping that we become an ever more synodal people of God for the mission of Jesus Christ in the world
- We yearn for more enhanced and inclusive roles for all the baptized in ministry, discernment, dialogue, and decision-making opportunities and processes
- We seek greater collaboration with our clergy, especially those ordained ministers who exercise leadership roles in our local churches
- We pray that our conversations in the Spirit will bear good fruit for the Church, fruit that will last for years to come.

## **Full Summary of Synodal Sessions**

In our first session we considered *what it means for the individual baptized Catholic to be a more intentional and faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ through one’s demeanor, words, and*

*actions, and what sort of accompaniment and support one might need in order to do this.* In light of this question a few main themes surfaced, often connecting with one another.

One dominant theme was the importance of being truly present and listening deeply to others in our encounters with them. Being truly present to others involves respecting their God-given dignity and uniqueness, not being judgmental, but accepting them even amid their differences from us. This stance means being open, flexible, and vulnerable before others, even moving beyond our comfort zone as we notice and accept opportunities to listen to others' joys and pains, with empathy, kindness, and compassion. By exercising his "spirituality of encounter" we are developing our relationship with Christ and witnessing the Gospel of his love and mercy.

Another notable theme was the priority of effective religious education and faith formation for the younger generation of children, adolescents, and young adults in our midst as well as for us as we grow through the more mature stages of adulthood. By their words and example faith-filled adults need to convey the prayers and practices of Catholicism to youth with the aim of their developing a personal relationship with Jesus. We need to create more opportunities to effectively engage them that they might take greater ownership of their baptismal call and foster a Christian culture among their peers. As older adults transition to new stages in life, such as retirement, new work or social engagements, and grandparenting, they are presented with opportunities and challenges in witnessing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One needs prayerful discernment and courage in being a faithful witness to Jesus amid adult peers who are disenfranchised from the Church or dismissive of Jesus and the values of the Gospel. Or how might one try to pass on the faith to one's grandchildren whose parents (one's own children) are not practicing Catholicism or are inimical to it? Such challenges require one to grow in deeper intimacy with Jesus in prayer and knowledge of his Word.

We discussed other non-thematic, intentional ways of being a witness to the Gospel: showing acts of kindness to others, being empathetic to those grieving the loss of a loved one, modeling simple life lessons, being forgiving, cultivating simplicity and silence in one's life, inviting persons of different backgrounds and cultures to our parish community and functions, and being of service to others, especially those most in need.

Finally, the accompaniment and support for doing this, which we most passionately voiced is our own parish faith community. It is the strength we derive from one another as members of the Body of Christ that keeps us energized and committed in living out our baptismal call. The support of spouses, friends, priests, and spiritual directors likewise empowers and enables us to carry on the demands of the Gospel, but our Catholic brothers and sisters gathered around the table of the Lord is what truly binds us together in fellowship and mission, a yoke that is easy and burden that is light.

The foregoing themes and other means of living the Gospel of Jesus Christ and advancing His mission in the world were raised and expanded upon during our second and third sessions in greater detail in light of the October 2023 Synthesis Report of the Synod delegates in Rome. For these two sessions we addressed the questions: *What do you think can help your parish and/or diocese become a more synodal Church for mission in the years ahead? In one or two specific aspects of local Church life and mission how might we promote such synodality?* In our second

session we discussed the “Matters for Consideration” and “Proposals” of Ch. 8, 9, & 11; in our third session we did likewise for Ch. 14 & 16.

Ch. 8 – In Ch. 8 of the Synthesis Report (see para. j, k, n), participants indicated that parishes and dioceses need to recognize, empower, and utilize the gifts of lay persons more fully in the service of the Church’s life and mission, esp. those of women, minorities, immigrants, and particularly young people. Their talents are needed for expanding “the missionary dynamism of the Church” in its liturgical and communal life as well as in its witness and service to the wider society. In many local churches pastoral structures need to be re-organized or created in order to utilize the charisms of the baptized, such as those needed to support family life, particularly parents with youngsters or adolescents, and those with children who are physically or mentally disadvantaged (see para. k). Other structures supportive of faith (see para. l) in parishes or dioceses – like encouraging the development of “Small Church Communities” centered around the Word of God; promoting Marriage Encounter for married couples; engaging the energy and interest of adolescents and exposing them to a variety of cultures and religious traditions; allowing qualified lay persons to preach at Mass and at other ecclesial gatherings; and even providing for more non-ordained parish life coordinators – would help advance the mission of Jesus Christ in a synodal way.

Ch. 9 – There was a strong and pervasive consensus among the participants that the voices, competencies, and contributions of women for the upbuilding of the Church and its mission must be recognized, respected, welcomed, and more fully utilized by parish pastors and diocesan bishops. The proposals included in Ch. 9 (see para. m, p, r) on expanding the roles of women in ministry and access to education and training needed to prepare them for these roles were of great importance. Having had positive experiences for some years with the exemplary leadership of a woman Parish Life Coordinator, the participants wondered how they and other like-minded parishioners might herald the benefits of her leadership, which could serve as a catalyst for diocesan change in expanding the role of women in pastoral leadership. Several participants were supportive of training and hiring women to teach in seminaries (see para. p) and to serve as judges in all canonical processes (see para. r). They were decidedly in favor of admitting women to the diaconate in the Church, some questioning why, in light of the signs of the times and the experience of the early Church to the contrary, many in the Church’s current hierarchy are against this development. Others mentioned that many women, regarded as the backbone of the Church, are already performing ministries consistent with the diaconate, such that those who are called by the Spirit should be adequately educated, trained, and ordained for this ministry.

Ch. 11 – There was general agreement among the participants “that seminaries and other programs of priestly formation remain connected to the daily life of the community” (see para. e). Conducting seminary training beyond the narrow confines of a clerical culture, as the adoption of a synodal style involving those in other life vocations would entail, would engender a priesthood more sensitive and better disposed to the people of God whom they serve (see para. j). What would contribute to a closer connection between clergy and laity is dispensing with the mandatory discipline of priestly celibacy that has persisted for centuries in the Latin Church. Allowing priests to be married might well broaden their understanding of married and family

life, thus fostering their pastoral sensibility. It could also mitigate the sense of loneliness that many priests feel. Many men who have left the priesthood to get married should be welcomed back into Church ministry, even as priests if they so choose, much as some married Episcopal priests who convert to Catholicism remain priests. It is a shame to lose the talents they had once exercised in ecclesial ministry (see para. l). Finally, there was strong support for transparency and accountability in the structures and processes of the local and universal Church, such as conducting regular audits of how priests and deacons are carrying out roles of responsibility entrusted to them (see para. k). A Church, not characterized by an opaque hierarchy but rather by transparent lines of communication and collaboration between clergy and laity, enhances synodality and more vibrantly and strongly advances the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.

Ch. 14 – Participants indicated the necessity of integrating theology, psychology, and human experience in the development of sex education and formation programs for youth and those being trained for Church ministry, especially seminarians (see para. g, h). The local Church should offer talks or workshops by experts in this area. Consultations of those responsible for initial and ongoing formation of priests as well as a review of their formation programs in light of a synodal Church for mission should be undertaken on an ongoing basis. Those involved in the consultation and review processes should be representative of qualified clergy and laity, including women, at diocesan or regional levels (see para. i, l). Criteria for evaluating, adjusting, and strengthening these programs need to be established, and best practices of seminaries, theologates, and other such training centers, particularly those of religious orders, need to be discerned and utilized (see para. n, o). Finally, seminarians should spend some of their formation living in the community, not only within the seminary grounds and buildings. They need to see how ordinary people live, as well as be seen by and interact among these people. Young people considering the priesthood should have many people they can talk to, in addition to priests, about what the life of a priest entails.

Ch. 16 – The strongest consensus among the participants throughout our three sessions was that of listening and accompanying. There was a concern among some of the participants about how communication within and beyond our own diocese does or does not occur up and down the line of authority, especially between laity and clergy. Hence, structures and processes within the parish and diocese need to be established, expanded, or strengthened, which invite and involve the baptized in all vocations, ages and stages of life, and levels of faith development to be engaged with and supportive of one another in faith and mission. A painful reality of life in the Church is that one bad experience of non-acceptance or harsh judgment by a Church leader (e.g. a priest) often does more damage than the good that be accomplished by five positive experiences of welcome, acceptance, or invitation. Listening and accompaniment start with the individual baptized Catholic among family members, friends, co-workers, etc. (see “first dominant theme” in para. 2 above). It extends to persons at the margins of Church life, e.g. shut-in and lonely individuals, LGBTQ+ persons, disenfranchised Catholics, and many others. This basic ministry needs to be conducted also by small faith groups within a parish or diocese: ecclesial communities that support their members in faith and reach out to others in the mission of Jesus (see para. n, o, p). In recent years a Catholic, Jesuit university in our diocese established a Center for Ignatian Spirituality, which trains and supplies spiritual directors for those seeking to enhance their relationship with Jesus Christ and develop their faith life for mission. Also, the bishop of our diocese is inaugurating a program to train small group facilitators for the ministry of listening and

accompaniment. We regard these programs as exemplary means of promoting synodality, thus enhancing the mission of Jesus Christ, and we pray that programs like these and others will be initiated and take root in dioceses throughout the Church world-wide.

In conclusion, the participants in the three sessions during the Lenten Season 2024 were passionate about the present and future direction of the Church, firmly hoping that we become an ever more synodal people of God, journeying together in advancing the mission of Jesus Christ in the world. We yearn for more enhanced and inclusive roles for all the baptized in ministry, discernment, dialogue, and decision-making opportunities and processes as these affect the people of God at large. We seek greater collaboration with our clergy, especially those ordained ministers who exercise leadership roles in our local churches. And we pray that our conversations in the Spirit will bear good fruit for the Church, fruit that will last for years to come.

### **Process and Participants**

Each session was offered twice: in person in the parish hall on Saturday mornings and virtually via Zoom on Monday evenings. Session #1 was held on February 24 and 26; session #2 was held on March 4 and 9; session #3 was held on March 18 and 23. Each session lasted 60-75 minutes.

A total of 46 persons, listed below, participated in the synodal sessions:

Carol Becker	Terry Giegengack	Maurice Magnotta
Eileen Boffa, RSM	Debbie Graser	Jeanne Mathews
Dan Braccio	Mary Halloran	Charlie Miller
Keith Bradley	John Hanrahan	Jack Miraval
Eleanor Burke	Sara Hanrahan	John Mulreany, SJ
Ralph Burke	Tom Healy	Suzanne O'Neill
John Burlinson	Jean Heffernan	Mary Ross
Scott Burns	Jerry Hemenway	Carolyn Rusiackas
Mary Ann Calabrese, CND	Bill Higgins	Barry Ryan
Barbara Carroll	Mary Ellen Higgins	Eleanor Sauers
Maggie Casciato	Pat Kearns	Donna Spigarolo
Pat Caso	Brian Kelahan	Kenneth Tamalski
Angela Crowley	Barbara Kiernan	Nora Tamalski
John Crowley	Paul Lakeland	
Jo Dutcher	John Marshall Lee	
JoAnne Fabry	Jim Long	
	Wendy Long	