



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#183 - February 1, 2023

A Best Practice: What might we do now that the Listening Session of the Synod has ended?

The deadline for the national bishop conferences to submit their reports to the Vatican's General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops was August 15, 2022.

Some people have described Synod 2021-2023 as "the biggest consultation exercise in human history." Originally, this endeavor was to be a two-year process of global listening and dialogue culminating in a gathering of bishops and synod delegates in Rome in October 2023.

In October 2022 Pope Francis announced that the upcoming 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be held in two moments, that is, in two sessions, spaced one year apart: the first from October 4 to 29, 2023, the second in October 2024. Pope Francis referred to the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, which contemplates this possibility (cf. Article 3). This decision stems from the desire that the theme of a Synodal Church, because of its breadth and importance, might be the subject of prolonged discernment not only by the members of the Synodal Assembly, but by the whole Church.

Pope Francis and other church leaders have described synodality as a decisive step in the church's renewal that the Second Vatican Council proposed more than a half century ago.

It has been reported that since fall 2021, more than 700,000 Catholics in the United States participated in synodal listening sessions, either online or in person, or responded to written surveys.

This **GEMS** issue is not a thorough compilation of all that was surfaced in the synod groups. That can be seen in the many parish, diocesan, regional and national reports.

Rather, this is just one small look at some approaches we might take to live synodality, so that the experience which many people had is not a one-and-done event. Did the very process give us a road map of who we're called to be; of how to continue in our pilgrim journey?



"To hold a "synod" means to walk together. I think this is truly the most wonderful experience we can have: to belong to a people walking, journeying through history together with their Lord who walks among us! We are not alone; we do not walk alone. We are part of the one flock of Christ that walks together."

~ Pope Francis, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, 4 October 2013



Let's look, then, at a few ideas under two themes:

- Ways to immediately respond to people's participation
- What did the synodal process show us about what we can be doing

We'll explore the first theme in this issue; and look at the second in next month's **GEMS** issue.

Ways to immediately respond to people's participation

1. **Affirm people for their participation.** Perhaps the words of Fr. Michael Ryan, St. James in Seattle, whose letter was read at an August 2022 Vatican press conference, says it well: "I think our parish can never be quite the same as a result. Reading over the reports and reflecting on them, I found myself thinking how blessed I am to be pastor of a parish that is full of people who love the church so much that they embrace it, affirm it, celebrate it, and thank God for it, but at the same time are not at all afraid to criticize it, challenge it, question it, and express anger, disappointment, and frustration with it."

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The gospel tells us that ‘With God, all things are possible.’ I can’t say that the same is true for the Church! We have to be realistic in our expectations. But isn’t it wonderful that Pope Francis is determined to hear from the whole Church and not just the hierarchy? The idea is revolutionary. To my knowledge, an effort of this sort and on this scale has never been undertaken by the Church – not even in its earliest days when the numbers were modest. And not only does Pope Francis want to hear from the whole Church, he wants us – who are the Church – to listen to each other. And that is precisely what happened during our parish’s synodal process. And it is clear that those of you who accepted the invitation and came together to listen to each other in prayerful, respectful dialogue were surprised by what happened, delighted by what happened, changed by what happened. I think our parish can never be quite the same as a result, and I’m willing to bet that the same is true for the entire Church.”

2. **Gather your facilitators and note takers.** Thank them. As you share your parish report with them, ask:

- Is this summary authentic; is this what you heard?
- How do we learn from what we heard?
- What do we understand about what was said?
- What are we going to do about it?

3. **Invite your groups to come back together.**

- Invite them to go deeper. As Brene Brown says, “‘Tell me more’ is a great curiosity rumble tool.” (<https://daretolead.brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Glossary-of-Key-Language-Skills-and-Tools-from-DTL-2020.pdf>)
- Explore: What surprised you? What do you want to have further discussion on?
- Many people, within their groups, said they had never been listened to by the church. What did they say that the parish can respond to/implement? Are there things that are larger than the parish, that one parish can’t do? Let them know what’s being done; what’s being passed on the diocesan church, the universal church.

4. **Invite all parishioners – and others in the community – to town halls and assemblies.**

- Present your parish report, as well as any regional reports and the national report.
- Ask: what did we hear? What does it mean?
- Explore: what was said; how does it relate to our parish?

5. Specifically, **take the parish report to the Parish Pastoral Council, Finance Council and other commissions.** Invite them to look at the report through the lens of their ministry: what does this mean for your area?

- Help them to see the successes that were identified as well as the needs.
- Ask: How might we move these needs to action? They’re not listening sessions anymore; they’re now consultative.



“The Synod process expresses the spirituality of the Second Vatican Council pointing to a Church that always listens and engages the world. At the heart of that spirituality is a sense of wonder, amazement that love never dies. Out of crucified lives, all creation is created anew in Christ. For all the challenges within the Church, in our society, and in our lives, God’s world is a wonderful world, filled with the possibility of renewal.

~ Father Gilbert Martinez, CSP, St. Paul the Apostle Parish, Los Angeles



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