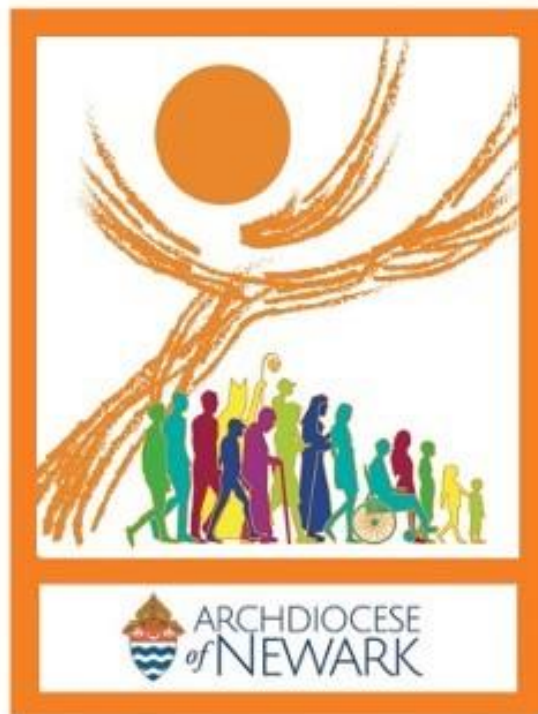


***Church of the Presentation  
Narrative Synod Synthesis Report  
October 2022***



**FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH**

COMMUNION ● PARTICIPATION ● MISSION

**Church of the Presentation  
Upper Saddle River, NJ  
Narrative Synod Synthesis Report**

**The Response to the Pope's Call to the Synod**

On October 10, 2021, Pope Francis commenced a two-year *Synod on Synodality* whereby all baptized individuals - the laity worldwide - were encouraged to participate in local Synods to hear and speak with courage on matters relating to the Church, both universally and locally. All Dioceses and parishes were invited to participate. In response, the Church of the Presentation reached out to the entire parish community. Parishioners were encouraged to participate via the bulletin, posters, emails, preaching from the pulpit and visual reminders in the narthex. Parishioners were also encouraged to invite others to participate, even if they no longer were active churchgoers. Everyone was encouraged to invite others to participate by the method with which they were most comfortable – in person or virtual sessions, via survey, email, or paper handwritten responses.

Approximately 22 Synodal listening sessions were held at the Church of the Presentation with over 875 individuals having participated in person and over 445 having participated online or via written responses. Listening sessions were announced to the entire congregation from the pulpit, in the Bulletin, posters and flyers, the parish website, through parish weekly emails and on *Facebook* and *Instagram*. We began the process by showing Cardinal Tobin's video during Mass early in the Fall and had multiple committee members speak at Mass over the last few months. The Synodal prayer was disseminated in writing, included in the missals, and said at the masses. Efforts were made to suggest that everyone, including the various ministries, engage in the Synod process.

In addition to organized listening sessions, there was a process for receiving responses to the Synodal questions posed through both on-line and handwritten replies. Various ministries such as both our Men's 6am Prayer Group, our Women's Insightful Hour, Justice and Peace Ministry, Small Christian Communities and others held Synodal listening sessions. Both the Family Faith Formation program and Youth Ministry program held sessions using various methods culled from the Archdiocese.

Each session was assigned a facilitator and a minimum of one scribe—more than one for breakouts when breakout sessions were implemented. Each of the sessions utilized a specific protocol with opening and closing prayers and time allotted to address the following four questions:

- How has belonging to the Catholic Church brought meaning to your life?
- How has belonging to the Catholic Church challenged or disappointed you?
- How does the Catholic Church need to change to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century?
- How might the Catholic Church do a better job of inviting ALL Catholics to be actively engaged in the church?

The scribes' notes from each listening session were read by the eight members of the committee facilitating the synodal process to identify universal themes. The written responses were collated as well. The themes which are presented in this report represent those most often raised or encountered with consensus during these processes. Great appreciation was expressed for the experiences of the participants at Church of the Presentation because of these sessions.

The sessions were prayerful, intentional, powerful, enlightening, engaging and left participants wanting more time for deep listening and

sharing. In the Synodal listening process there were also repetitive expressions of great disappointment and challenge as to various approaches and practices of the universal church. Examples and themes will be explored later in the report.

## **Reflections on the Four Discussion Questions**

### **I. How does the Catholic Church bring meaning to your life?**

The overwhelming consensus was that of a deep sense of journeying together and that the Church of the Presentation is a place of clear and active inclusivity where all are welcome.

As to “Journeying Together,” appreciation was expressed by almost every participant about having the opportunity to grow up in communities where the Church assumed a central role during their formative years. There were repeated and extensive descriptions how activities centered around the Church—attending Mass, receiving the Eucharist and other sacraments, participating in the choir, family gatherings on religious holidays and celebrations, Catholic education, youth activities such as participation in sports and music ministry - all had contributed to personal and spiritual growth continuing into adulthood. In most instances these experiences were described as positive and beneficial ones and as Pope Francis has suggested, all who spoke out did so with courage. This journeying together with persons of common Catholic beliefs has provided spiritual guidance, structure, and a sense of commonality in the importance of the teachings of Jesus Christ, community, and a sense of belonging.

To a significant degree, many positive statements as to a sense of community and belonging were reiterated by participants regarding their experiences over multiple decades at Church of the Presentation. There were repeated statements about the energy and enthusiasm of parish leaders and

parishioners in a wide multiplicity of ministries and activities led by lay persons. There is also an appreciation for the excellence in music and preaching at Mass and other liturgies.

Presentation is a parish community to which people journey, often leaving or no longer attending other Roman Catholic parishes. Parishioners come from a catchment area of more than one hundred zip codes in northern New Jersey (primarily Bergen County) and southern New York (primarily Rockland County). Historically, Presentation has emphasized welcoming, listening, inclusivity, lay leadership and excellence in the celebration and dissemination of the word of Jesus Christ. Parishioners endeavor to journey together in the many ways Jesus Christ and the early church modeled for us.

Most participants shared that what they experience at Presentation is a sense of unconditional acceptance demonstrated by the many ministries such as the LGBTQIA+ Ministry, Youth Ministry, the Community Garden (which grows thousands of pounds of produce for the hungry), Divorced and Separated Ministry, Bereavement Ministry, Justice & Peace Ministry, the Men's and Women's Ministries and the Outreach Ministry to those in need. Words and sentiments that were raised often related to their parish experiences included love, inclusivity, faith, open-mindedness, non-judgmental, guidance, respect, and caring.

Relating to these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants included:

*"My community, family and social life all revolve around church."*

*"The Catholic church has given me a sense of belonging – the Church has provided me with stability. I have found the people, now friends, from the support group, to be wonderful companions in this most difficult journey."*

*“Presentation is exceptional in many ways, and it should be a model for other parishes.”*

*“We offer personal and related rituals such as the All-Soul’s Mass and the LGBTQ+ mass.”*

*“After coming to Presentation, as a family we felt more faith and connection to the Church. We speak more about our parish and religion to others especially when people tell us they are not happy where they are.”*

*“It is who I am - it is my culture.”*

*“I get more belonging here – each of us is on a journey, but we are together on this journey.”*

*“I found this church to be welcoming and nonjudgmental”*

*“Love that it is not just one focus at Presentation. It is a welcoming inclusive place with a multi-focus which is a huge plus”*

*“The Catholic Church has always been a special place- a collection space of people believing in the same things. But, over the years, my enthusiasm was reduced by the rules and regulations. Here, however, at Presentation, things are different. We worship through the people. Reaching out to people is what God wants us to do - in good times and in bad times. We, as a couple, have moved to another town, but we will never leave Presentation. This Church teaches us the way Jesus would do things. I get more belonging here - each of us is on a journey, but we are together on this journey.”*

*“We were members of a different parish before coming to Presentation. At our previous parish, we didn’t feel like we were a part of a community. At Presentation, we feel like we really matter. It is such a warm, loving, and welcoming environment. Presentation should be a model church for others.”*

## **II. How has belonging to the Catholic Church Challenged or Disappointed You?**

Through the process of speaking and listening at the sessions, we experienced the Holy Spirit inviting us to commit to one another and become true companions on the journey. The participants heard the call to build the Kingdom of God that has been set forth for all of us by Christ as leader of this Church. We are called upon to pursue this mission by reaching out with love, compassion, and care for all. The Synodal Listening Sessions helped us to identify several themes that the Holy Spirit seems to be asking the universal Church to examine:

- The repercussions of the sexual abuse crisis and its cover-up which have deeply wounded the Church
- Lack of radical inclusivity that Jesus preached such as marginalization of LGBTQIA+ persons, divorced Catholics, and those remarried outside the Church
- Lack of leadership in the Church in adhering to the teaching and example of Jesus as well as ongoing clericalism
- The need to reform in seminary education and formation for priests and deacons; the need to allow for married priests (men or women)
- The need to re-examine Church teaching and doctrine in light of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world in which we live

### **a. The First Theme in the Journey: Atonement and restorative justice are essential for the sex abuse crisis and its cover-up.**

One of the primary themes was that the sex abuse crisis and its cover-up remains a source of aggravation, disappointment, and anger. There was

general agreement that the institutional Church has not dealt sufficiently with the causes of the sexual abuse crisis and its cover-up. As participants spoke and journeyed together, there were repeated expressions that the Church had not yet offered a full and adequate apology for the crisis and that it remains essential for this to occur.

The sexual abuse crisis demands sincere repentance and atonement. The Church needs to take responsibility by telling the truth in all matters related to the crisis. In addition, the Church needs to critically examine Church structures and processes that permitted this tragedy to take place. Additionally, it needs to take steps to continually address the damage caused to survivors by this abuse. Importantly, it needs to take steps to reform the clerical culture in which this catastrophe occurred. Added to this theme is the immediate need for reform in seminary practices and formation.

Relating to these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants were:

*“I imagine the most disappointing aspect of the Catholic Church to all members has been the sexual abuse scandal”*

*“By confessing the shame that has been brought on the church through the sex abuse scandal to both the laity and priests the hierarchy needs to repent with a contrite heart. They need to say what is being done and what will be done, so that trust can be restored in what the church says and teaches”*

*“I have been disappointed by the handling of the scandal and cover up most especially when you hear of the higher ups such as Cardinals being involved in the hypocrisy at the top regarding sexual abuse cases, denial, cover up, and lies are very disappointing”*

*“The church needs to care for these victims both financially and spiritually”*



**b. The Second Theme in the Journey: The universal Church must be more welcoming and inclusive to all.**

Another frequently expressed critical concern was that the universal Church must become more welcoming and must revisit the fundamental messages of Christ's Gospel to be inclusive and to welcome rather than reject people. The primary message of Jesus is to love God and to love our neighbor. This needs to be more evident in the Church. The treatment of women was consistently raised at listening sessions. Many stated that women are marginalized and the subjected to unjust discrimination within the Church. Instead, women should be permitted to serve in the ordained ministry as deacons and priests. We are all baptized into the role of priest, prophet, and king – why can't all serve in leadership?

There were also universal and repetitive concerns expressed for the treatment of LGBTQIA+ individuals, divorced individuals, persons of color, persons with disabilities, the poor, immigrants, and refugees. Great damage, including violence, has occurred due to the unjust and derogatory way individuals within these categories have historically been marginalized by the larger Church. This was unacceptable to the participants.

Relating to these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants were:

*“Divorced people should be welcomed to the Church. The annulment process is not necessary. Communion should be inclusionary – not exclusionary. Receiving the Eucharist is the state of Christ – it is food for the journey. It is not a reward for services. Inflexible rules that are judgmental and do not promote forgiveness and inclusion, but exclusion must end.”*

*“I wish the church would be more welcoming to different people like same sex relationships. It shouldn't matter what orientation people are. We are all people who believe in God and try to live by His ways.”*

*“If I were to dream of a better church it would be one that accepted everyone. It wouldn’t matter if you were married or divorced or gay or straight. Everyone would be welcome because we are supposed to be family. I would tell Pope Francis all of that.”*

*“The marginalization of LGBTQ+ Catholics and divorced and remarried Catholics.”*

*“The church’s homophobic attitudes are hurtful.”*

*“The term all Catholics means all Catholics in their diversity. Adapt to the culture you are in – each has a lot to teach us. Uniformity should not be confused with unity.”*

### **c. The Third Theme in the Journey: Church Hierarchy/Leadership and Clericalism.**

There were repeated statements that the hierarchy and leadership of the Church does not listen to or recognize scientific data, the work of scholars, theologians, or laity, and that the hierarchy seems intent on blocking real reform. One example – Church leadership ignoring all recommendations to rectify the Church abuse crisis and covering up to protect the institution rather than protecting the children or adults who were affected. It was repeatedly expressed that the hierarchy has prioritized rules and regulations. The hierarchy has exhibited rigid application of man-made Church rules especially in situations where people are in challenged circumstances - people in need, the marginalized, persons living with disabilities, and people facing the challenges of divorce and LGBTQIA+ individuals. This was seen as exclusionary, not inclusionary, and further not following the teachings and example of Jesus Christ.

Relating to these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants were:

*“The church does not consider people Catholic if they do not accept the hierarchy’s view. It is not a church of relationships.”*

*“Traditional theology and rules are held as more important than forgiveness and love.”*

*“Hierarchy has limited our potential. We need to claim, ‘we are all called to the priesthood.’”*

*“The church is the people – not the hierarchy.”*

*“Some clergy judge others as being unworthy to receive the Eucharist.”*

#### **d. A Fourth Theme in the Journey: Diaconate and Priesthood.**

The diaconate and priesthood should be open to *all* who are called – men and women - and the laity should have a role in the selection and discernment process. Universally addressed was the theme of the priesthood. Many asserted that celibacy should not be a requirement for the priesthood; instead, celibacy should be an option. Additionally, many suggested priests—whether male or female—should be permitted to marry. In the development of candidates for the priesthood, the seminary experience should be diversified to include both male and female faculty, religious and lay, and studying with men and women in more open and less isolating settings. The insular nature of seminary training, often in “males only” enclaves, needs to be addressed. Many participants in the listening sessions suggested a) an end to celibacy; b) women to serve as ordained deacons; c) women to be ordained as priests; d) all priests - both male and female - be permitted to marry. Women and their distinct gifts and leadership abilities are undervalued and overlooked.

Relating to these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants were:

*“It is challenging and disappointing to know that the hierarchy in the Church supports limiting 50% of the members to the second class; the sexual theology is outdated; the treatment of same sex couples and divorced persons is not acceptable; this is becoming a crisis; younger people want no part in these exclusionary policies; it seems to be all about domination and power; the young are looking for an inclusionary Church.”*

*“The failure to ordain women. Continued view of women as handmaidens to men.”*

**e. A Fifth Theme in the Journey: Certain Church Teachings and Doctrine need to be Re-examined.**

Many who spoke expressed concerns about the man-made teachings and doctrines of the Church which are often more emphasized than the word of Jesus Christ. One point that was raised repeatedly was the fact that many of those teachings, especially concerning gender and sexuality, could no longer be supported in the light of modern science—medicine, psychiatry, and psychology. The failure of the universal Church to revisit teachings on the role of human sexuality including the role of women and same-sex activity was universally criticized by participants. It was also identified as a reason many, including children of some who spoke, are not comfortable with exclusionary teachings and actions of the Church and for these reasons are leaving or have left the Church.

Relating to these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants were:

*“The failure to evolve regarding sexuality.”*

*“We need to be a church that recognizes the signs of the times.”*

*“Rate of change in society is fast while the church moves at glacial pace; change needs to come more rapidly.”*

**We have combined responses to questions #3 and #4 in this Narrative Synod Report because the results presented common themes and the responses often intersected.**

**3. How does our Church need to change in order to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

**4. How can our Church do a better job in getting all Catholics involved in the Church?**

**Practical Steps: Proposals were put forth in areas of inclusion, leadership and governance for the universal Church:**

**a. Inclusion**

This Synod on Synodality has called us to be companions on the journey with the Holy Spirit. Companions accompany each other as equals who listen and dialogue with one another. Jesus offered no prestigious power symbols but instead, offered an “equals around the table manner” by which He treated all as equals with compassion, caring, love and dignity. On inclusion, at this stage of the Synodal journey, participants identified the following points which merit continuing review and consideration:

- There needs to be re-examination as to whether the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to move beyond the traditional male celibate priesthood.
- There needs to be continual discernment as to whether the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to engage and ordain women to both the diaconate and to the priesthood
- Those who are divorced and remarried outside the church (without benefit of annulment) should not be marginalized and should be allowed to receive the Eucharist.

- The marital annulment process should be more accessible, standardized and pastoral, as well as less accusatory, bureaucratic, judgmental and painful to those who participate.
- The LGBTQIA+ community should be welcomed unequivocally; we should all continue to pursue open dialogue and “bridge building” with all our brothers and sisters.
- Theology and teachings on human sexuality with regard to caring and committed couples, including LGBTQIA+ couples, needs to be revisited in the light of modern science and study.
- Persons with differing abilities and physical and emotional needs and capabilities deserve special welcoming and attention; these individuals should have more compassionate and accommodating access to sacraments, liturgies, and programs.

Related to these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants were:

*“What set the followers of Jesus on fire? He called and they heard a message of compassion and non-judgment. They felt He welcomed everyone in His life whether sharing meals or healing or comforting those in need. Just being with them. We all need to be understood and feel welcome.”*

*“We want the Church to be relevant today. For the Church to be relevant today we must speak to the concerns and hurts of the world’s people and most especially those who are poor and victimized.”*

*“Be explicitly open to all just the way Jesus would have done it; I am talking about LGBTQ, all races, even non-Catholics everyone take a public stand on healing this world with Jesus’ values first even if it does not play into the will of local governmental power or donors.”*

*“We are called to be a community of equals where the gifts and talents of women need to be recognized and encouraged as women follow their spiritual call.”*

*“We need to stop excluding women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and divorced and remarried couples from full participation in the sacramental life including the Eucharist.”*

### **b. Leadership:**

This Synod on Synodality has called us to be companions on the journey with the Holy Spirit. Companions accompany each other as equals who listen and dialogue together. Regarding leadership, participants identified the following points which merit continuing attention:

- All decision making must be less hierarchical, less authoritarian, and more pastoral, with greater emphasis on the voice of the laity, thus respecting the presence of the Holy Spirit in all people.
- Seminary reform should include a diverse council responsible for selecting candidates for the seminary and candidates for ordination. This council should be comprised of ordained ministers, religious and lay men and women.
- Mandatory lifelong learning, ongoing opportunities for spiritual development, faith formation and mentoring for clergy is essential.
- Deep listening and dialogue with the people of God through synodal processes and other avenues should be established as a regular practice to continually foster the development of oneself and the community through shared ideas in order to care for the needs of all God’s people.
- Recognizing the priesthood of all believers conferred at baptism, a framework should be established at both the diocesan and parish levels so that their voices will be heard and incorporated in the decision making of the Catholic Church.

- Relational theology needs to be emphasized, including the need for the Church to revise and update language in liturgy and other areas, so that it is more inclusive and welcoming to all. Theology needs to be revisited and revised. There needs to be less emphasis on rules and dictates and more focus on Christ-centered teachings and practices concerning human relationships rooted in love, equality, justice and mercy.

Relating to these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants were:

*“The Church needs to truly become a ‘listening church’; it must communicate openly that it truly values the ideas, wisdom and feelings of its people.”*

*“The Church must show clearly that it understands the lived experiences of its people especially women who have not been fully heard for centuries.”*

*“Truth and transparency, not prestige and power, should be our image in the 21st century.”*

*“Pope Francis is certainly trying to promote a Church of love and mercy.”*

*“The Church needs to learn from the lived experiences of people different from ourselves.”*

*“We need to be a Church that recognizes the signs of the times.”*

### **c. Governance**

The *Synod on Synodality* has called us to be companions on the journey with the Holy Spirit. In summary, participants identified the following points which merit continuing review and consideration in relationship to the governance and functioning of the organization:



- The Church needs to be transparent in all matters.
- The gifts and roles of women in the Church need formal recognition.
- The role of women must be inclusive with women to serve in all roles including the diaconate and the priesthood.
- Seminary formation needs immediate and radical transformation
- Clericalism, as a focus on power and entitlement instead of service, must end.
- Pastors should have training in management, business, and leadership as well as administrative support from the Diocese as well as mentorship.
- Church teaching needs to be more reflective of the inclusive love of Jesus.

On these points, with the support of the Holy Spirit, some comments by participants:

*“The church needs to shift away from the authoritarian style of leadership to a shared style; one based on dialogue and consensus as was done in the early Church; deep listening will make the Church more merciful and forgiving.”*

*“A change in decision making is needed so that the laity participate in the authority and responsibility for the whole people of God”*

*“The church needs to be accountable to the people; it needs a mechanism for communication to flow from the laity to pastors, bishops and the Pope.”*

*“The church needs a change in culture and willingness; communicate a message that we are willing to change the Church.”*

*“Be futuristic greet people where they are; we cannot assume that the concerns of the past are the concerns that people of the future believe are a priority.”*

*“As church we must embrace the challenges of our times, racial justice, diversity issues, climate change to name but a few.”*

*“As church we must broaden our definition about what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ so that all may be.”*

*“The Church keeps sailing along as if nothing has changed in 2000 years: while the basic message of Jesus hasn't changed, the expression of it and the paths to cultivating belief and the development of traditions, rituals etc. must change and must keep pace.”*

*“Pastors should have some management, business, leadership training with a mentor to guide them in their first five years as well as administrative support either centrally or locally depending on the health of the parish.”*

*“Bishops need to lead and mentor their pastors and also their parish priests; don't let them be isolated ‘Lone Rangers’; help them to continue to grow and learn from each other and exchange best practices and even coordinate some activities.”*

*“Let's have a Church that is about ACTION first; Mass is a good, thing but Jesus seems to say that he would like kind, humble prayerful welcoming and giving disciples, before all else, who demonstrate faith through ACTS; we can be that and the Church can help make it happen.”*

***Shared by the Community of Church of the Presentation***

***Reported by The Committee for Healing and Reform***

***October 2022***

***Martha Bauer***

***Dr Stephanie Coyne***

***Dr Marylin Kravatz-Toolan***

***Christine Lagana (Pastoral Council Liaison)***

***Fr Bob Stagg***

***Shea Campbell***

***Joan Riley***

***Mike Sgro***

***Catzel LaVecchia***

***Some thoughts from our young people in Family Faith Formation:***

*"Pope Francis, Thank you for asking and listening."*

*"I would like Church to be more interactive."*

*"Be more open and inviting to ALL people."*

*"Pets should be allowed to attend Church with the whole family."*

*"I love how much you teach me and my family every time I come here." And how welcoming you are."*

*"How can the church become more involved in make the world more peaceful?"*

*"We want a trampoline in church because the higher we jump the closer we are to God."*

*"I love the church and it is a wonderful place to learn about God."*

*"Every person is different and special."*

*"Remember to use kind words."*

*"More games about God and Jesus."*

*"I would want to tell Pope Francis that my middle name is Francis and that I'm honored to share this name because you are so understanding and kind and open-minded towards others."*

*"Kids can contribute too."*

*"For the church to be able to grow we must appreciate the world as it is in 2022."*

*"I think there should be more children's masses."*

*"I think that when I am at church I feel free and close to God and my family"*

*"No more standing up and sitting down."*

*"Please keep teaching us how to love each other as much as possible."*

*"I think the church should make more fun activities for the youth so they don't get bored."*

*"We should invite the homeless, the poor, and the ill to mass."*

*"I love the church but I think it should have more activities for kids during mass."*

*"Holy water makes me feel calm."*

*"Make sure all our voices are heard in churches."*

*"I feel loved and blessed when I am at church. I feel like church clears my mind."*

*"I want the church to be more of a place where you can be like yourself."*

*"I love Jesus."*

