

## Synod on Synodality Update

(Michelle Catania, Parishioner, Co-chair Bellarmine Synod Committee)

Our community has a unique opportunity before us to both grow in our commitment to synodality and to contribute to an important discernment in the global church as we enter the third of the three years of this invitation to synodality. We are called to continued discernment not only within the formal structure of the present synod but within local Churches and on the ground in parishes and communities.

During the winter of 2022, our Bellarmine community answered Pope Francis' call to follow a Synodal path. Pope Francis wants to hear from the entire Church about how we should carry the mission of the Church forward in our times. 174 parishioners thoughtfully submitted responses to questions that offered guidance for our Church and parish. Our discernment summary was shared with Synod offices at the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and directly with the Vatican Synod office in Rome. We joined with all the continents reminding us that we are a global Church.

**The Bellarmine Synod committee** identified the following themes considered to be of the highest importance to strengthen the mission of the Church today:

- Inclusivity - ensure everyone has a voice; welcome the marginalized – the poor, LGBTQ+, youth, women
- Women - expand equal leadership roles/restore to the diaconate/ordain as priests; ordain married men
- Abuse - toughen accountability within hierarchy/patriarchy; end clericalism; stop demonization/judgment/shaming of individuals
- Transformation - strengthen the Vatican II vision; include laity in the decision-making processes of the Church ensuring transparency and communication; shed irrelevant ideals
- Christ Centered - focus on our loving God; follow the healing Gospel to bring about inspiration and redemption
- Faith in Action - reinforce this as the central element of the Church's mission by promoting a culture of encounter and solidarity

**“Enlarge the Space of Your Tent”** is the global synthesis and working document from this consultation phase. It reflects patterns that emerged in hundreds of thousands of listening sessions from around the world where the People of God and others of good will shared their obstacles and joys of journeying together with the church, as well as their vision of a church journeying together in the Way of Christ. The beautiful and embracing language of this report honestly embraced all we celebrate and struggle with in our Church every day.

**Documents from Continental Assemblies** were created in the Winter of 2023 after invited delegates (including a Bellarmine parishioner) shared similar joys and concerns that further distilled all that was conveyed in “Enlarge the Space of Your Tent.” Priorities include: integration of synodal consultation in the local Churches, welcoming the excluded, co-responsibility of all the baptized, unity in the midst of division, a Church that goes out to the peripheries.

**“Instrumentum Laboris”** is the next working document that continues to animate the synodal process in the life of the Church. Teams of men and women, lay and religious, shared the particular situations experienced by the Church in different regions of the world. It is intended to be a starting point, not a point of arrival and will be used as an aid for discernment for the General Assembly gathering in Rome this October. It identifies which pathways the Spirit invites us to walk along more decisively as one People of God.

**“Communion, Mission, Participation”** focuses on the “three priority issues” at the heart of the work to be done in October 2023: Growing in communion by welcoming everyone, excluding no one; recognizing and valuing the contribution of every baptized person in view of mission; and identifying structures and dynamics for participation in a missionary synodal Church.”

[You can find all the Synod documents on the Bellarmine website.](#)

**The General Assembly for the Synod on Synodality** takes place in Rome in October and concludes with a second Assembly one year later. Pope Francis made significant changes regarding who can be a voting member of the synod on synodality and he gave women the right to vote for the first time in the synod. Out of the 364 members who can vote, including the pope, 54 are women -- either lay or religious. The number of cardinals appointed as members is also 54. Among the issues and considerations are: how a synodal church recognizes and values the central role of the poor; the experience of migrants; victims of sexual abuse, violence and other injustices; the disabled; divorced and remarried Catholics; the need for greater commitment to ecumenism and learning from other faith traditions; and the role of women in the church today. The three questions that will serve as the framework for this synod are:

1. A communion that radiates: How can we more fully be a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?
2. Co-responsibility in mission: How can we better share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?
3. Participation, governance and authority: What processes, structures and institutions are needed in a missionary synodal church?

**Going forward** we know there are more questions than answers, but there are unique individuals (that includes us!) guiding us on how to be a more synodal Church. Could there be a final document after the two-year process that reflects what would then be brought back to the local churches to be lived out in deliberate and intentional ways?

Now is the time to build on the momentum the Spirit has already unleashed! The Vatican calls all of us by virtue of our Baptisms at every level of the Church to collective discernment on issues that matter to the People of God around the planet: “redressing exclusionary cultures...expanding the roles of women and their access to decision-making structures.... healing wounds of tribalism, racism and sectarianism that scar peoples and our natural environment...nurturing and empowering our young people...”

We are gathering to deepen existing relationships within our community and to expand our circle of discernment by also continually welcoming new people to this synodal journey and always asking ourselves **[who else needs to be invited?](#)**

**YOU ARE INVITED TO:**

***Taize Prayer Celebrating St. Phoebe, Discerning Deacons, and the Global Synod***

[Please join us on Thursday, September 14, at 7 p.m.](#) for Taize prayer to honor the life and ministry of St. Phoebe. She was a deacon of the first century Church at Cenchreae, the port of Corinth. Phoebe was recommended to the Christian congregation at Rome by St. Paul, who praised her for her assistance to him and to many others. She may have brought Paul's epistle to the Romans to Rome with her. Her feast day is September 3.

Catholic communities and institutions around the world are invited to join Discerning Deacons this September in celebration and prayer for our universal church as we journey together and discern about women's participation throughout our Universal Synod. All are welcome for Taize song and prayer in the Chapel as we celebrate the voices and gifts of women and walk with the universal church for the remainder of the Global Synod in prayer, learning, and witness."