

Synod Final Document summary and reflection - January 2025

In October of 2024 the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops concluded and the final document reflecting their work was immediately approved by Pope Francis.

Those of us in the Bellarmine community who followed the Synod's 3-year path can remember our own important contribution to this global Church effort to become more synodal. We were invited and came together during a global pandemic to prayerfully discern our joys and concerns. We created a summary of our hopes for the future of the Catholic church. Bellarmine's parish document was sent to the Synod offices of the Cincinnati Archdiocese, the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Vatican.

Our parish acknowledged the Church's need for: more inclusivity, the expansion of women's roles, tougher accountability, the strengthening of the laity, a focus on the healing Gospel, and putting our faith into action. It turns out that these themes were common among Catholics around the world.

We are reminded that these Synod gatherings were more than just bishops meeting, but that nearly a third of the 364 voting delegates were chosen directly by the pope and included laypeople, priests, consecrated women, and deacons. Fifty-four voting members (15%) were women, an historic first. These individuals, who deeply love our Church, represented us on a global scale. They prayerfully discerned how we can be an instrument of union with God and humanity, how we can share our gifts in service of the Gospel, and what structures and institutions are needed.

The 65-page final document (also found on the Bellarmine website) emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in renewing relationships, transforming processes, cultivating connections, and how all of us, by virtue of our baptism, can nourish a mission-driven church.

Some of the Synod's main proposals to integrate the practice of community and mission include:

- continue/establish specific study areas for groups to dive deeper into challenges, including a “ministry of listening and accompaniment “ of laypersons, and the possibility of restoring women to the diaconate
- emphasize transparency and accountability in abuse prevention and financials
- empower episcopal (more local) responses to pastoral and doctrinal care, to uphold values of inclusion and equality, such as balanced gender representation in decision-making bodies (i.e., expanding women's leadership roles)
- inclusivity for people with disabilities
- strengthen family and marital support
- promotion of synodal decision-making encouraging regular synods at all levels of the Church, (i.e., organize an ecumenical synod on evangelization

Now we wait to see if this Synod will truly be a guide for our Church in the third millennium. While the final document may still inspire more questions than answers, we can fully know that the process alone has been a gift to those of us who love the Church and long to see it grow and evolve. It is comforting to see how much Bellarmine already does along these lines. The invitation continues to be for all of us to be involved. As it was in the beginning of the Synod on Synodality, we ask ourselves, who else can we invite on the journey? In light of the ever-changing events of our world, how can we welcome all, deepen our relationships with each other, and expand God's love through Jesus Christ? The work continues.....

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