

Synod Report from the St. Paul Catholic Newman Center

Theme One: THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

In the Church and in society,
we are side by side on the same road.

Question One:

When we say “our Church”, who is part of it? Do I feel invited to be part of the journey? When have I felt that I was or was not invited to the journey? Have I seen or experienced persons or groups who have not felt invited to be part of the journey?

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center Response:

Many at the St. Paul Catholic Newman Center see ‘Church’ as including everyone, while others say all Christians. Many appreciate Pope Francis modeling a different image of who the Church is. Some see the patriarchal Church order determining who gets to do anything. They want leadership roles for women, and a broader outreach to non-Catholics and minorities like African Americans.

Many Newman parishioners feel invited to the journey locally, though not globally. Clergy, staff, and the entire parish are very welcoming here, unlike other parishes. ‘The synod listening sessions have invited me to a journey together with the other parishioners whom I am meeting after two years of Covid restrictions.’

Some groups are very welcoming, and the priest’s or deacon’s questions before Mass (Anybody visiting? Birthdays? Anniversaries? Community events?) make many feel welcomed and invited to the worship we celebrate all together.

But many others feel uninvited/unwelcomed (e.g., those who can’t receive Eucharist, those returning after leaving). Some shared that governmental Covid restrictions made them feel unwelcomed.

Some feel that the Catholic Church and parish is “members only”. Unbending, unwritten protocols exclude people and limit our outreach to “non-registered” who feel unwelcome. Youth, young adults, college students and the LGBTQ community, special needs children and adults, divorced and remarried are some of the groups not being welcomed enough. We are behind the times, and have much to learn. Non-Catholics can be put off by our theology, rituals, rules, and regulations. When children are shushed, their parents don’t feel welcome.”

Theme Two: LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices.

Question Two: In your experience, to whom does your local Church 'need to listen to'?
In your experience, to whom does the Church at large need to listen to?

For the Newman Center, it is imperative to listen to our immediate neighbors, resurrect the 'pastoral council', and during difficult times (e.g., COVID) communicate often what is happening along with coping strategies.

It is critically important to listen to parishioners, non-parishioners, new people, students, young people, women, those "unaffiliated and those who have chosen to leave the church".

An effort to listen to each generation separately as groups and together for all generations would enhance efforts to be heard and responded to.

The people making up the church need to have a voice which the hierarchy views as a valuable necessary tool to maintain a vibrant growing church.

Priests must be open to "all", including the LGBTQ community and all those less represented within the body of the church. There needs to be a sincere desire to value what women have to offer.

A top-down approach lacks empathy and fails to address brewing discontent.

There is a lack of forward thinking with an open respected dialogue to be inclusive, honoring the thoughts and desires of those that make up the church.

The hierarchy of the church needs to listen intently to the injustices.

More communication and open dialogue are needed.

Create a place for laity to become more vocal during Mass; perhaps share testimonies or insights of that day's Gospel reading.

Perhaps more opportunities for children to participate in the Mass (e.g., invite to lector?)

Calendar monthly or quarterly listening sessions to increase the environment of welcome, inviting parishioners to opportunities to truly experience community, which can lead to possible change.

Theme Three: SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and boldness,
that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity.

Question Three: Are you aware if your parish has resources where
you may share your concerns with truth, charity, and boldness?

+I reached out to a priest and received a quick response.

+Homilies should motivate us to speak out.

+No feedback group here.

+The Church doesn't have resources for speaking out, so how can the parish?

+I wrote a letter to the Diocese and was disappointed to get no response.

+Family ministry classes help us to speak out.

+I speak out as a cantor.

+We need a Parish Council as we had before++++ or

a suggestion box for parishioners' concerns, even thankfulness.

+We need a strategic planning session for staff and parishioners
to address dynamics, vision, and mission.

+Can we have listening sessions after Mass?+

+Everyone has a story to tell.

+Parish staff supports our speaking out.

+Newman has lots of resources, including its members.

+There are resources, but we don't know what they are+++++
and they aren't shared with 'truth, charity, and boldness'.

+The website needs to promote our many ministries more.

+We need a better way to access resources, like spiritual direction.

+The pandemic made speaking out hard.

+Ash Wednesday, 2022 was the first time back for many people who have
a great desire to connect.

+We need to evangelize those who have left because they weren't
offered the resources they needed to stay.

+Some feel it's "members only", so they don't speak out.

+We need to speak out on big social issues (LGBTQ+,
Homelessness, Divorced-Remarried) and not be shut down.

+Speaking out isn't just words, but generous actions
(e.g., supporting the Poverello House)

Theme Four: CELEBRATING

“Journeying together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

Question Four: How does prayer and liturgical celebrations (Mass and Communal Prayer) at my parish inspire and guide our “journeying together”?

Do you feel engaged in the liturgy and prayer life of your parish community?

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center Response:

Mass is welcoming. Family-friendly, and spirit-filled, as are our Lenten and other season devotions outside of Mass. Ash Wednesday was inspiring and especially welcoming this year.

Through their Baptism, parishioners feel engaged in the Liturgy and prayer life of the community, and appreciate the religious formation classes (Faith, Family and Friends+), Fellowship after Mass, Meditation, Children’s Masses and all the ministries+ being offered.

Suggestions/considerations going forward:

Newman Hall used nightly for small group fellowship

Hospitality/welcoming could be better+

Better sound system

Revive Welcome Sunday!

Some don’t see their devotions/traditions reflected in the Church building (Our Lady of Guadalupe, Santo Nino, Candles, Kneelers, Eucharist on the tongue, Quinceneras, Bilingual Mass, Gregorian Chant.

Some miss Liturgical Dance and Choirs, Taize++, Adoration, Altar Society, Holy Rosary Society
We need to involve more parishioners in the liturgical experience through a strong catechesis on the meaning and the power of the Mass, which few understand (Like the Inquiry process in RCIA! Maybe a few minutes before Mass each week?

More involvement in liturgical and music selections+

More variety of community prayer (e.g., outside?)+

Resources for parents with young children? Childcare/crying room?

Some want Children’s Liturgy of the Word again; others prefer that children learn by attending the entire Mass.

Why music at the 7:30 AM Mass?

Still dealing with Covid restrictions++++, more promotion of online Faith formation and Educational resources.

More Women’s involvement in leadership

Theme Five: CO- RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

Solidarity is at the service of the Church's mission in which all her members are called to participate.

Question Five: We are called to be missionary disciples, how are you as a baptized person called to participate in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel?

How is your parish living the mission of proclaiming the Gospel?

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center Response:

As baptized persons, Newman parishioners participate in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel in many different ways.

Some enjoy sharing their faith publicly (e.g., sign of the cross in restaurants and talking about their faith with others, praying for them+, and inviting people to church. Several read the Bible during breaks at work, and many others find our political climate making "proclamation of the Gospel" more difficult now.

Many prefer to show God to people informally, by loving and treating them with dignity, giving comfort to those in pain. Rather than talking, they live the Gospel by listening to others needs and addressing them.++++

Others proclaim the Gospel by studying, reading, and attending conferences, and trying to find commonality with their non-Catholic family members.

Parishioners see the parish proclaiming the Gospel in many positive ways.

They find their priests inspiring and appreciate their liturgies and all age inclusive ministries.

They value action over words (openness to the LGBTQ+ community and RCIA process, Catholic Charities, Christmas angels, food distribution, Eucharistic Ministry to the Homebound)

They are proud of their excellent educational programs (Faith, Family and Friends, Programs for Children, Youth, High School, and College Students).

What could improve?

Year-round outreach to those not experiencing the Good News,
Better promotion (shared by parishioners before Mass begins?), Bible Study?

It's hard to get to know the parishioners here.+

We talk about but don't really collaborate.+

We need to encourage more outreach.

Theme Six: DIALOGUE IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue is a path of perseverance that is ideally capable of gathering experiences of all persons, including those who feel they have been silenced or have been suffering in silence.

Question Six: Does your parish engage with other believers and with non-believers?

Is there a place for your parish members to dialogue openly?

How has differing opinions been addressed in your parish?

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center Response:

Historically, the parish engaged a lot with other believers and non-believers, but less so now (e.g., interfaith meditation). We need more outreach to minorities (LGBTQ+) and agnostics.

There are places for parishioners to dialogue openly (e.g., Faith, Family and Friends, Grief Support Group, Men's Club, Campus Ministry, Bible Studies, RCIA and after Mass fellowship offer opportunities for dialogue, but no large setting.

The Synod Process and listening sessions have offered a first-time opportunity for open dialogue.+

Everyone knows how to complain, but dialogue, which can get to the bottom of complaints is a discipline that takes time.

We can't dismiss, but must respond respectfully to questions like "Why does the Church do so many things to drive people away?"

We need to reach out more to the "Nones" (non-affiliated) and the "Dones" (past members).

We need to dialogue over how to come back out of Covid as an energized community.

Sadly, except for Pope Francis+, Church isn't always welcoming (LGBTQ+), and doesn't allow much dialogue.++

Many women and divorced-remarried feel isolated from the Church.

Some have fond memories of Fr. Negro's time and feel there is less willingness to take risks.

Many feel that priests and deacons preach well, are open and very approachable, but wonder why the whole Church isn't like that?

Our LGBTQ+ group shared on where God was working in their lives, but everything is polarized now.

Only the St. Paul Catholic Newman Center and St. Anthony Claret Parish currently minister to the LGBTQ+ community.

Theme Seven: WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN CONFESSIONS

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.

Question Seven:

What relation does your parish have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations? What areas do they concern? What fruits have we drawn from this “journeying together”? What are the difficulties?

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center Response:

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center and our college community have always had good relations with other Christian denominations.

Fr. Negro++ and Fr. Perry++ and the parish led in this area, but our laity are less involved now. Covid is partially responsible.

Respectful collaboration is more necessary now than ever.

Some visit other churches personally, following Pope Francis.

Faith, Family and Friends featured presentations on Judaism.

We’ve collaborated on Homelessness, Food Insecurity, Domestic Violence, Climate and Right to Life, Bible Study and Prayer Service Vigils.

Presently, we stand in solidarity with St. Michael’s Ukrainian Catholic Church.

Many fruits include a better understanding of others, realizing how much we share in Jesus and our one Baptism, and learning Social Justice lessons++ from non-Catholics.

Challenges remain:

Misunderstandings churches have of each other, non-ecumenical Catholics and anti-Catholic non-Catholics, difficult topics (e.g., Mary, Transubstantiation, Sacraments, Different Bibles, etc.) and parents wary of interfaith marriages.

In Catechumenate ministry, the team and those speaking to catechumens and candidates must be ecumenically sensitive.

Older parishioners grew up in a Church which was much more dogmatic and less accepting and welcoming of non-Catholics. We also need to share our faith more openly than we are accustomed to do. We have great gifts to share!

Going forward, parishioners suggested connecting with the Interfaith Alliance, promoting interfaith activities better on our website and social media, finding out social justice projects that other churches are involved in and joining them, visiting neighboring churches and inviting them to visit us as well.

Theme Eight: AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a listening Church that provides opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit and People of God in order to discern together and walk forward on a common path.

Question Eight:

How does your parish identify the goal to be pursued, the way to achieve them and the steps to be taken? How are the practices of teamwork, co-responsibility, and lay ministries promoted in your parish?

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center Response:

The Parish Bulletin is the common pathway to announce programs, activities, and goals as well as to provide a monthly update on parish finances.

Classes are widespread, intellectually stimulating and encourage community involvement. There is something for everyone, staff is open to new ideas, resources are available on the parish website.

The disconnect between identifying goals and implementing them is palpable. There is a discrepancy in the desire to advertise programs offered.

Rather than branch out, the fallback position is to simply rely on attendance because people feel accepted here and the atmosphere is welcoming.

The various ministries do not have a cohesive feedback and response system; all work separately without acknowledgement of how the efforts of one support the goals of many.

Reflecting on the past showed evidence that different leadership styles promoted relationship building and transparency as foundations to communicate, but that no longer exists.

The demise of the Pastoral Council created a huge void. When in place, it acted as a conduit enhancing communicative efforts between management and parishioners.

The promotion of teamwork, co-responsibility and lay ministries has a top-down approach with reins tightly held.

Those with power are not open to listen to the powerless.

The spirit of the community must be lived, not just written and forgotten.
Our potential for growth in lay leadership is great.
What is lacking is initiative.

A concerted effort to communicate with the entire parish community, to monitor/report progress and to emphasize teamwork as the cornerstone to accomplishing goals is imperative.

Theme Nine: DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Holy Spirit.

Question Nine:

By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions?
How can they be improved?

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center Response:

Methods by which we discern together and make decisions are fractured. On the plus side, there are educational programs (e.g., RCIA, a building block to discernment), and the Bulletin (our lifeline to weekly news showcasing parish activities).

The children's program is phenomenal.

Fathers Paul and Byron bring a leadership style that is lifegiving and dynamic. Their homilies, daily interaction with parishioners promote discernment as well as an atmosphere of calm and welcome.

How all this come about is a mystery to most, yet important for all to understand.

This question triggered a realization that parishioners are unaware of the decision-making process here at the SPCNC.

The overall view of how, when and by whom decisions are made appears to be a top-down hierarchy with no voice from the parishioners at large.

Faith, Family and Friends is beneficial and our church is progressive and promotes listening. However, follow through, evaluation and implementation is weak.

The Adult/Children's ministries should be synchronized to make both stronger.

There is lack of visible parishioner input which thereby strengthens the concern that only a select few make and carry out decisions.

Perhaps introducing a social media neighborhood app or hosting an evening of prayer and sharing may improve communications.

Simply reinstating the suggestion box would provide insight into what parishioners are thinking and needing.

It's imperative that the suggestions are read and shared to fully embrace community participation.

Concrete suggestions that could help:

Utilize the resources at our disposal,

Bring back the Pastoral Council,

Listen to the parishioners,

Give everyone the opportunity to learn, share and grow.

Theme Ten: FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

Journeying together calls us to lifelong formation and growth in our Christian faith.

Question Ten:

How does your parish provide the tools you need to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

How does your parish provide opportunities for praying together, listening to one another, and engaging in dialogue as a community of believers to further the mission of the Gospel?

St. Paul Catholic Newman Center Response:

The variety of programs offered at the St. Paul Catholic Newman Center are carefully designed to produce an environment highlighting how discipleship enhances parishioners' lives, which in turn blossoms out to attract those seeking fellowship in a safe welcoming place.

The listening sessions provide thoughtful insight to broaden our reach, communicating needs and successes. Hopefully these sessions will be woven into future plans which can strengthen our foundation of being a proactive church.

The homilies are well prepared and thought provoking.

Providing coffee and donut fellowship after Mass encourages discussion and camaraderie. This welcoming opportunity enables everyone to engage with friends, meet people new to the parish or new to Fresno.

Our parish staff has diverse experiences and education that is reflective in managing the various programs offered to satisfy the wants and needs of a vibrant community of worshippers.

Meditation, Yoga, First Saturday, Faith Family and Friends, Women's Guild, Men's Group, Joy of Love Moms Group, just to name a few, all help bridge and build relationships. The 3 Minute Retreat promotes daily connection.

This parish offers a place for worship, conversion, acceptance, and mercy.

We are all sinners, all children of God.

There is forgiveness, so all should be welcome.

The Catholic Church isn't known for flexibility, or good marketing.

We could do better. Outreach must be all inclusive since we are all children of God.

Some programs could look inward to review imbalances of curriculum and redirect or enhance offerings that attract and promote attendance.

The Pastoral Council is greatly missed.