



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#185 - March 1, 2023

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

In our last GEMS issue we explored some ways to immediately respond to people's participation in the synodal process.

In this issue, let's ask the question:

### What did the synodal process show us about what we can be doing?

The following are only a few of the many things we've learned from the synodal responses. It's a new time, a challenging time, but one laden with possibilities – if we listen and act.

1. **Listen.** Many people/teams who collated the responses from their dioceses remarked that participants – over and over again - expressed an appreciation for and a desire to continue the synodal listening, to enter into a sacred space and engage in deep listening and discernment with one another on a regular basis.
  - Continue the process of listening begun in the Synod and discerning your direction using the “Spiritual Conversation Method.” (<https://www.educatemagis.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/2019/05/The-Ignatian-Guide-to-Spiritual-Conversation.pdf>)
  - Commit to having opportunities just for listening, especially being attentive to healing hurts and disappointments.
  - Reflect on everything that happens within the parish setting. Are there always spaces and places where listening and sharing can happen? Is everyone heard and valued for what they say?
2. **More and more, become a welcoming church.**
  - The Synod report from the diocese of Trenton, NJ said, “The Church needs to be welcoming to all, not only in words, but in action. Articulate a ‘theology of welcome’ that is shared among Catholics that focuses on the whole person rather

than the way they are different from the norm.’ The Church accompanies people in time of tragedy, illness, grief (we can put aside all judgments and just be with them). Find ways to do the same and walk with those who are different in their sexual orientation, mental capacity, marital status, etc. In all things our movement needs to be from excluding to including.”

- These issues explore one small (but significant) area of welcome and hospitality: **GEMS** #3-9, 15-18, 46-48 and 56-58.
- Perhaps in paying attention to the reality of a welcoming parish, we will also be able to move to the welcoming that is encompassed in how we respond to persons who have been divorced, whether remarried or not; removing barriers to accessibility and embracing those with special needs and their families, particularly as it relates to an individual's sacramental life; diverse cultural and ethnic communities; racism; young people; and accompanying with authenticity LGBTQ+ persons and their families. (*National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023 Synod*)



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“The most common desire named in the synodal consultations was to be a more welcoming Church where all members of the People of God can find accompaniment on the journey.”

~ *National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023 Synod*

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3. **Continue small groups.** In reference to both parish life and listening sessions, people cited how well a small-group dynamic works to build relationships and strengthen parish life. Many participants were truly grateful for the opportunity to be heard and to listen, and for the spirit of openness. The ability to sit around the table with strangers and share joys, concerns, hopes, and suggestions without intense debate or fear encouraged and motivated many.” (Region III Synthesis) Why would we not continue this process that made a difference to so many (and has made a difference throughout the years even prior to the Synod gatherings)?

- Fortunately, we have today, numerous resources for small group faith-sharing. See especially RENEW International at <https://www.renewintl.org/>.
- “Programs never solve problems; rather, building personal relationships does.” (Region XVI Synthesis)
- Watch for future **GEMS** issues on the what/why/how of small faith-sharing groups.
- For some faith-sharing questions following the synod groups, look at the parish synod report from St. Paul the Apostle Parish, Los Angeles (<https://www.sp-apostle.org/synod-report>). You will find questions such as:

- If you were to describe your image of God today in a word or phrase, what would it be and why? Has that image changed or remained the same over time?
- Looking around our culture today, it is clear that there are many ways to interpret Christianity and to live the Christian life. What, for you, are the most essential aspects of being a Christian? How do you “live the Gospel” in your daily life?
- Do you feel like you “belong” to \_\_\_\_ parish or do you feel like you “attend” \_\_\_\_ parish? What is the difference for you?

- In the past year or two, has your faith in the Catholic Church deepened, been challenged, or remained the same? Why is that?
- As the Universal Church grapples with the issues of LGBTQ acceptance, women’s ordination, the role of the laity, divorce, contraception, abortion, and the sexual abuse scandal, are there any steps towards healing and acceptance that you might personally take in one of these areas?
- During your life, have you ever left the Church and returned? If so, what was the reason for your return?



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“Many who conducted listening sessions described being transformed by the process of listening to others’ stories and hearing about their faith journey. Those who shared their stories, especially those who participated in small group sessions, stated that they felt listened to by the Church for the first time.”

~ Region XI Synthesis

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4. **Intentional and comprehensive on-going, lifelong faith formation.** “Participants of every age and demographic group spoke of the need for lifelong formation. They would like to see more opportunities for Bible study, in-person and online courses, lectures, small-group discussions, and convocations among other offerings. [...] Members of all dioceses also wish the church would do more to support their spiritual growth by exposing them to many aspects of the rich heritage of Catholic spirituality. They ask for retreats and

other opportunities to pray and reflect together as well as for encouragement in their individual spiritual lives.” (Region IX Synthesis)

- From one perspective, it’s sad that people had to say this. Why isn’t it already happening? In another sense, how fortunate we are that people see this need, this desire, for themselves and all of us on the journey of faith.
- Some things to consider as we go forward:
  - Let go of things that aren’t working. Today’s needs call for new approaches.
  - “Flip the approach – instead of starting from rules, prohibitions and rejection, lead with the invitation ‘to come and see.’” (Synod report from the diocese of Trenton, NJ)
  - “True formation involves apprenticeship and mentoring.” (Region XVI Synthesis)
  - Might offering spiritual direction at the parish be a viable and appreciated opportunity for people?



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The need for ongoing formation was keenly seen in the area of social mission, “not surprisingly, since our social teaching is routinely described as our church’s best-kept secret, there were very few explicit mentions of Catholic social doctrine or even the issues of justice in the region. However, when we consider the component themes of Catholic social teaching and the issues addressed, these concerns did surface regularly throughout the region.”

~ Region V Synthesis

Synodal consultations acknowledged that “the Church needs to help parishioners understand the connection between Catholic social teaching and outreach beyond the borders of the parish.”

~ Region XIV Synthesis

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5. **Need to be out-ward focused.** Pope Francis has spoken about “ecclesial introversion;” a sticky attachment to the internal life of the church and its structural-institutional organization. Many comments in the responses addressed recommended changes in and within church life. The sense of outward mission was generally faint.

The crucial point of synodality is to be “on the road together” in mission, going outside of ourselves. Formation for mission, a sense of our ever-expansive purpose in the world, needs to take hold of and in our communities of faith.

The Synthesis report from Region XVI reminded us, “We do a poor job of going out to the marginalized; instead, we often wait for people to show up at our church door.

## 6. A few other possibilities

- We recognize the importance of rituals and traditions that provide the stability that allows us as Catholics to feel at home in a world community of faith and give us guidance for the future rooted in the strength of the past. (<https://www.saintbarbaraparish.org/synodreport>)
- Foster lay leadership.
- More opportunities to interact together (besides Parish festival). Perhaps socials just to meet and share with one another (Anglo & Hispanic).
- More cross-cultural gatherings.

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- More support for programs like Cursillo, Marriage Encounter and Christian Family Movement. (<https://stfrncis.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Parish-Session-03-06-2022.pdf>)
- Ministry fairs: show what parish is doing within various areas.
- Continue to use technology to meet people where they are.
- Building “Front Porch” Faith Forming Experiences. Our “focus on ‘bringing back’ needs to be balanced with an emphasis on “going out.” What if churches and faith formation began to focus on ‘bringing the church to people?’ What if we created ‘front porch experiences’ – spaces, programs, and experiences that expand the scope and reach of the church into the lives of people in the neighborhood and community? What if we made a special effort to reach and engage people who are not involved or have given up on church or were never affiliated with any church or religion?” ([https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/planning\\_faith\\_formation\\_for\\_2022\\_and\\_beyond.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/planning_faith_formation_for_2022_and_beyond.pdf))

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## Some Resources

- [Pentecost Vigil Project: Unleashing the Spirit of Synodality](#)
- [Christ Present in the Eucharist: A Synodal Parish Process for Eucharistic Revival](#)



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com)

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*  
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
  - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
  - [https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons\\_of\\_faith\\_journal\\_special\\_issue.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_faith_journal_special_issue.pdf)