**Passaic Eparchy**

**Synod on Synodality Report/Synthesis**

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This publication is the first of several, to be published in the ECL for the Eparchy of Passaic.

Per the direction of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, he requested that the entire Catholic Church be consulted on the *Synod on Synodality*. Fundamentally, synodality is aboutjourneying together. The concept of synodality refers to the involvement and participation of the whole people of God in the life and mission of the Church. This *Synod on Synodality* is specific to reaching those who have been a part of our church but are no longer active, discerning the future of our church, via an inclusive spirit and way of Jesus. This happens through listening to one another and realizing that the Holy Spirit can speak through anyone to help us walk forward together on our journey, as people of God.

**Overview of Synodal Process**

The synodal process for the Eparchy of Passaic began with the appointment of Synod Coordinator in October 2021, Dr. Joan Grossman, Lifetime Parishioner, St. Nicholas of Myra, Swoyersville, PA, by Bishop Kurt Burnette.

The process then evolved:

Initial Eparchial Virtual Meeting – October 2021

* From this meeting of protopresbyters, an introductory video was suggested to introduce the synod. Dr. Grossman completed this video in her home parish and it was then uploaded to the Eparchial website. Other ideas from this meeting included: weekly bulletin messages, in-person listening sessions, virtual listening sessions, US mail and email.

Virtual Meeting with Archbishop William Skurla – February 2022

* It was determined that the Synod work would become an integral part of the Lenten journey for the Archeparchy, with selected parish facilitators (e.g. deacon/trustee) to facilitate individual parish listening sessions and guided questions provided by the Archeparchy.

Bishop Kurt Burnette provided an introductory letter for the eparchy to be read prior to each listening session, to encourage and support the process. Continued communication of the synodal process for the eparchy was disseminated via email messages to all priests with specific deadlines at each level: parish facilitator(s), syncelli, coordinator and bishop.

The Passaic Eparchy synodal process began February 28, 2022, (the first day of The Great Fast), after which there was a featured article in the ECL specific to the synodal process for the parishes. Dr. Grossman then moderated a clergy listening session during the annual Presbyteral Days in April 2022. The syncelli reports were directed to Dr. Grossman May 2022, and the Eparchial Synod Synthesis provided to Bishop Kurt Burnette in June 2022, with final synthesis sent to Archbishop William Skurla, August 2022.

**Statistical Reporting of Syncellates**

New York/New England – Very Rev. Nicholas Daddona

* Participating Parishes
  + St. Mary, NYC; Resurrection, Smithtown NY; St. Andrew, Westbury, NY; St. Nicholas Danbury, CT; St. John Trumbull, CT
* Non-participating Parishes
  + Not reported

Susquehanna – Very Rev. Michael Kerestes

* Participating Parishes
  + St. Nicholas, Swoyersville; St. Michael, Pittston; St. Mary, Wilkes-Barre; St. Nicholas, Mt. Pocono
* Non-participating Parishes
  + Not reported

Central Pennsylvania – Very Rev. Edward Higgins

* Participating Parishes
  + St. Ann, Harrisburg; St. John, Lansford; Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Levittown; SS Peter & Paul, Minersville; St. Michael, Monte Clare; St. Mary, Nesquehoning; St. John, Pottstown; St. Mary, Saint Clair
* Non-participating Parishes
  + St. Mary, Freeland; SS Peter & Paul, Beaver Meadows; SS Peter & Paul, Bethlehem; St. Mary, Brockton; Blessed Virgin Mary, Coatesville; St. John and St. Mary, Hazleton; St. Mary, Mahanoy City; St. Michael, McAdoo; Holy Ghost and Holy Trinity, Philadelphia; St. Mary, Shepton and SS Peter & Paul, Phillipsburg, NJ

New Jersey – Very Rev. John Custer, SSL, STD

* Participating Parishes
  + Passaic, Woodland Park, Flanders, East Brunswick, Perth Amboy, Jersey City, Bayonne, Trenton, Roebling, Rahway
* Non-participating Parishes
  + Newark, Hillsborough, Dunellen, New Brunswick, Somerset

Middle States – Very Rev. John Basarab, MA

* Participating Parishes
  + SS. Cyril and Methodius, Cary, NC; Ascension of our Lord, Williamsburg, VA; Patronage of the Mother of God Church, Baltimore, MD; St. Gregory of Nyssa, Beltsville, MD
* No Responses Received (included statistically as no data reported)
  + Epiphany of our Lord, Annandale, MD; Epiphany Mission, Gaithersburg, MD

Southern States – Very Rev. Robert Evancho

* Participating Parishes
  + St. Cyril & Methodius, Ft Pierce; St. Anne, New Port Richey; All Saints, N. Ft. Myers; St. Nicholas, Orlando; Holy Dormition, Ormond Beach; St. Therese, St. Petersburg; Our Lady of the Sign, Coconut Creek; Epiphany, Roswell, GA
* Non-participating Parishes
  + Not reported

**Eparchial Parish Participation**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Parishes (total, n=86) | Participating Parishes | Non-Participating Parishes | Unknown/No data reported |
| Number | 39 | 17 | 30 |
| Percentage | 45.34% | 19.76% | 34.88% |

**General Overall Theme** – Parishioners welcomed the listening sessions, and indicated such sessions were long and overdue, as hearing from the laity of the Church is important, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic has been especially challenging for the Church. However, the synod questions lacked clarity of common American English, which may have been a deterrent from the start. A number of the questions overlapped and twelve questions, although far less than the previous synod, were still too many. Interestingly, more “hard” truths were provided from the questionnaires as compared to the listening sessions, perhaps due to anonymity with the questionnaires.

Listed below are the first two of the twelve synod questions with the answers consolidated into main themes teased out from the syncelli reports and clergy listening session. In addition, suggestions are offered after each question, provided as a means to move this process forward and strengthen our eparchy.

**Synod Questions and Thematic Responses**

1. **What are the difficulties, obstacles, and wounds in the local Church?**

* A failure on the part of bishops, priests, and deacons to preach the Truth of the Gospel Message as applied to the difficult moral issues of the present time which plague contemporary people, such as: decades of clergy sexual abuse, divorce, homosexuality and gender issues.
* Lack of leadership and engagement with the body of the Church at meaningful levels.
* Aging population, lack of priests, shrinking congregation due to those who have stopped coming to Church, who have lost their way and faith, parish politics, deaths, churches located in dangerous neighborhoods, family relocation and those who do not feel welcomed, all of which have resulted in increased financial stress for the parishes.
* Parochialism – Territorial within our parishes, not willing to change
* Keeping young people interested and engaged as we are in conflict with the current culture.
  + Suggestion – Transparency is important, openness with sexual misconduct is necessary to begin healing. Explain how the Eparchy is handling any such offenses. Introduce the Safe Environment Program, which is known to parishioners required to participate, but the majority of the laity within the Eparchy are unfamiliar with this positive initiative designed to prevent further sexual abuse.
  + Annual financial statements should be required by each parish and provided to the laity. This is a serious issue that seems to have been neglected among many parishes, particularly since COVID and should be addressed as fiscal health is part of the life blood of the church.
  + Byzanteen Youth Rally – an incredible experience for our youth
  + Make Sunday the most important day of the week for the parish
  + Jesus taught inclusivity and at the forefront of our decisions, we should ask, “What would Jesus do?” and all else will fall in line.

1. **What is the Holy Spirit asking of us?**

* The Holy Spirit breathes life into the Church. We seem to be closed-off, and not open to new life. While traditions are important, sometimes they may keep new people from joining us because they don’t understand or are not invited into “our way”. We do not evangelize nor do we educate or explain our traditions, customs, and beautiful meanings of our liturgical services.
* The Holy Spirit guides us to embrace the changes that take place within the Church, it asks us to open our hearts to people who are different and curious about the Byzantine Catholic Rite. Change in the world and the Church is inevitable, change is good and is needed for the Church to move into the future. Change of attitude, change of the way things are done within the Church and change in our hearts. As the parish sizes shrink, we must work smarter not harder, everyone is needed to do their part, even if it means being a prayer warrior.
  + Suggestion - One way to educate is via brief messages listed in the weekly bulletin, with focused key points about the Byzantine Rite. For example, a *“Did you know?”* section in the bulletin. “*Did you know? That the icons are written and not painted and the ears are larger than the mouths, as we are to listen more and speak less.”* Perhaps such a weekly message could come from an educational point person in the Eparchy assuring we all receive the same, coordinated message? Less is more, it could be one, simple, weekly educational point. And, this educational focus could be followed up in the ECL with a *short* paragraph, to educate all, in a concise, yet powerful way.
  + Provide “greeters” in the vestibule to welcome everyone each Sunday, again, directed from the bishop, as the leader, this sends a strong unified message. This could be a role for the youth in the parish which could instill a deep sense of belonging, simple and subtle evangelizing, yet meaningful.
  + Utilize our priests from Eastern Europe to Evangelize the current clergy, directed from the Eparchial level.

The *Synod on Synodality* Report/Synthesis will continue in the January issue of the ECL.

Note: Parish-level reports can be obtained directly from your priest, parish administrator, deacon or Synod facilitator.