

Heart ♥ to ♥ Heart



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In October 2021, Pope Francis opened the Synod on Synodality with its theme “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” Since then, the Church has been on a journey of sharing, reflecting, and listening at all levels -- parish, diocesan, and continental. A recently published “Working Document (Instrumentum Laboris) highlights the main responses and questions that have emerged these past two years and that will be the focus of the upcoming gathering (October 4-29, 2023) in Rome of bishops, religious women and men, and laypeople from around the world.



In response to many of our Heart to Heart readers, the September issue offers some reflections on the synod process. No matter how involved each of us may have been in the Synod process so far, it is a pivotal moment in our Church and calls for our prayer, engagement and participation. We take to heart Angela’s words: “But pray, and get others to pray, that God not abandon God’s Church but reform it as God pleases, and as God sees best for us, and more to God’s honor and glory” (Counsels, #7).

This issue of Heart to Heart shares reflections from several Ursuline Sisters who have been involved in the synodal process. Included as well are reflections from students and teachers at Ursuline Academy in Dallas, TX, who began the school year with listening sessions in preparation for their diocesan synod. We are also happy to share a few resources for prayer, participation and engagement in the process.



I was a member of the virtual delegation to the European Continental Session of the Synod. There were approximately 150 on-line delegates, and we were able to follow all the sessions, Mass, and prayer on zoom. During the working groups sessions we were also in our zoom groups, which remained the same throughout the meeting.

In the group I was in, there happened to be an above-average presence of members of the German delegation. Of course, this had an impact on the content and the way of working. I thus had the opportunity to experience the echoes of the German synodal journey first-hand.

Participation in a synodal meeting is colored by a wide variety of spiritual movements. I sensed that

there was a need for mindfulness and personal spiritual discernment, while at the same time we were constantly invited to make spiritual discernment about what we heard from others. It was an extraordinary experience to learn what the Church in Europe is like, but also the methods of how such a multitude of people, with so much diversity, can converse in a spiritually rich, profound way. Even more challenging for me was how to produce in such a short time a document that would summarize the 39 reports of the Bishops’ Conferences, the contributions of the working groups, and the echoes of the guests and delegates.

Transparency was chosen as the guiding principle for the European Continental Assembly. And so, the

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meeting could be followed live on the website, and not even a draft document was prepared before the start of the meeting. The drafting committee started to write it after listening to the national delegations.

During the meeting, I was touched by the tension around the German synodal way, by the diversity of views, the variety of life circumstances and the size of the local Churches, from the Scandinavian countries to Turkey, from Portugal to Russia. It was so normal, yet surprising, the high quality of the dialogue among the participants - women, a few young people, priests, bishops, religious.

Sometimes, listening to them, it seemed to me that it would be impossible to come together, but then, in the document that was prepared, I experienced a unity, an affirmation of the common desire to walk together and to seek that which unites. It was a powerful experience that baptism is the source of our unity in Christ, but also of a dignity that empowers us to learn to discover how we can live the Church today as brothers and sisters. I have

seen the face of a Church that is active, that has much to say, but that clings to the desire to be led by the Spirit, while seeking answers as to how to involve women in the Church in the different levels of decision-making, discernment, formation, service, not forgetting Mary, who is the model of all.

From all these dynamics and what we saw on the screen, many touches of the heart remain - testimonies of faith, courage, hope, mutual forgiveness, love, humble acknowledgement of reality, search, encouragement to change, solidarity. Europe is no longer Christian, but a wounded Europe of broken hearts needs all the more the witness of the changed lives of Catholics who reveal the Christ who lives in them.

The call is to discover this in the Church, first of all within ourselves, among ourselves, and then to reveal it to others - it seems to me that this was also the case among the participants in the Continental Session of the Synod.

—Marjeta Pija Cevc, OSU
Ljubljana, Slovenia



I appreciate the opportunity to further reflect on my experience of the Synod process as a daughter of Angela and as the contact for the Ursulines of the Roman Union in the synodal process, and to share a few points from my reflection:

- What has touched me the most is the multiple facets of the process, incorporating, as Angela invited us, both the uniqueness of each and the togetherness of all.
- It reminds me of Angela's invitation: "... pray, and get others to pray, that God not abandon the Church, but reform it as God pleases..." (*Counsels* 7,24). To be a contact person for the Roman Union helps me to go deeper into the meaning of the process, and to understand better each step of this on-going process that includes so many people, for example, to be in communion with the Eastern Church.
- An Angela response to our times is her attention to the Holy Spirit: "Above all to obey the counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit unceasingly sends into our hearts..." (*Rule* 8, 14). The work of the Synod parallels the way we in the Roman

Union are rewriting our *Constitutions* – the involvement of all, the long journey together as we walk the path to new *Constitutions*. I have this image of the Carthusian sisters who, when going for a walk together, change their companions from time to time with the purpose of sharing with others and forming a community that is a whole. For me this has always been the way I understood the "insieme" ("together") on which Angela insisted so much, or the journey to Emmaus in which Jesus is always present in the midst of us when two or three are gathered in his name.

- What has touched me deeply is the frailty of the Church, and also how the writing is being done in the synod process – not from above but by a large diversity of people who share a concern and a voice for the issues facing the Church today. In this journey I hear Angela saying to me and to each one of us: "... **And live a new life**" (*Counsels* 7,22).

—Elisabeth Binet, OSU
Rome, Italy

At Ursuline Academy of Dallas, all students participated in listening sessions for the upcoming diocesan synod. Because such a major event requires significant preparation, Bishop Burns has held many listening sessions in parishes throughout the diocese and has also asked students in every Catholic high school to reflect on how the Church might better reach out to young people, help them strengthen their relationships with Jesus, and encourage them to use their gifts and talents to serve others.

Sophomore Sarah Kelton said that participating in the synod listening session “made me feel more deeply connected to my Catholic community. I feel more appreciated both as a student and as a Catholic in the diocese.” Junior Laila Nieto agreed. “It made us feel like we had a voice and that they valued our opinion.” Junior Lyle Moise “was nervous at first that people would not share their opinions, but it was a very inclusive and comfortable environment to share and collaborate on different ideas and thoughts. I was surprised at the number of new ideas and strategies our class agreed on and came up with.” Freshman Jillian Lim found that “it meant a lot that Bishop Burns believed that our thoughts were important for the future of the Church,” and her classmate Elizabeth Wayne concurred: “I got to participate, even though I am not Catholic. They still really wanted to know how I feel.”

For sophomore Madison Parks, “the most meaningful part of the class listening session was the question about where we are in our own faith and how we can be better followers of Christ.” Sophomore Elizabeth Clapper was “inspired to do more for my parish and to work on my relationship with God.”

Theology teachers facilitated the discussions, held the second week of classes. Kathryn Brandt “appreciated hosting the listening sessions at the beginning of the year because it gave me more of a window into my students’ experiences and ways I can minister to them in class.” Marie-Catherine Letendre enjoyed “the look of pleasant surprise that the Church wanted to hear their thoughts and gather

their ideas,” and Kathy Sherman was thrilled that her students “had inspiring and profound conversations that were beyond their age in wisdom and insight!” For Ashley Hendershott, “Leading the listening sessions was a special way for me to connect with the girls, and for the girls to connect deeper with each other. I enjoyed hearing their thoughts, seeing their bravery in sharing, and learning about their lived experience of faith.” Pam Mahaney had facilitated other diocesan listening sessions but found the conversations with her students to be “incredibly humbling. I was grateful for students’ willingness to share their experiences and ideas regarding Church with me.”

These pre-synodal conversations gave theology teachers insight into their students’ deepest desires for their faith. Melanie Alvares shared that “It was very interesting to hear how much good preaching means to them, and also how much they long for more opportunities to gather and learn with fellow Catholics in youth groups, Bible studies, etc.” Brandt heard similar thoughts from her students. “It affirmed for me, as a theology teacher, that family is the first foundation of a life of faith in our students’ lives, since some students mentioned a desire for their own family’s faith to be more actively lived out. They also mentioned wanting more local parishes’ Masses geared towards their age group, followed by dinner or youth programming.”

The listening sessions at Ursuline Dallas have concluded and the conversation notes have been emailed to the diocesan synod preparatory commission, yet the fruits of the discussions are just beginning to ripen. “The theology department will be reviewing what our students have shared, for we realized that we can respond to many of their ideas right here at Ursuline,” said Angie Jakubik, theology department chair. “We all enjoyed being part of the synod preparation process, and our students’ heartfelt comments will help us better respond to their spiritual needs, even before the synod itself convenes.”

—Ursuline Academy
Dallas, Texas

We are pleased and proud to be part of the synod process in Jakarta. Our contribution is small and perhaps unimportant. But we consider ourselves a small community of Catholics from all over the world. We feel one unity, one purpose, one hope and one belief. It's amazing! We have never

been involved in a synod process before and do not understand completely what a synod is. Fortunately, this time we are guided to share ideas until we find important points for the growth of the Catholic faith.

—Christina Ayda, OSU
Jakarta, Indonesia



Prayer for the Synod

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts.

Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.

All this we ask of You, who are at work
in every place and time.

Amen.

Synod Resources for Further Reflection

<https://www.synod.va/en.html>

<https://www.usccb.org/synod>

<https://slmedia.org/blog/what-is-the-synod-on-synodality>

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/aggiornamento-synodality-bishop-stowe-francis-pope-church>