



March 17, 2022
Feast of Saint Patrick

Most Reverend Austin Vetter
Bishop of Helena
P.O. Box 1729
Missoula, MT 59624-1729

Dear Bishop Vetter:

At the February 8, 2022 meeting of the Missoula Deanery at Saint Francis Xavier Parish we continued our reflection and discussion on the Universal Synod. Our first discussion was held on December 14 and January 18. The report of those discussions were forwarded to you on January 21, 2022.

At our March 15 meeting at Saint Anthony's the notes from the February 8 meeting were reviewed and in a subsequent email all were asked if they concurred with the decision to forward the attached to you. There were no objections.

Attached, for your information, is a compilation of the four small group discussions at the February 8 gathering.

We look forward to meeting with you on Monday evening, March 21 at Blessed Trinity.

With continued prayer for you, your ministry and our Diocese we hope that these reflections assist in our diocesan consultation process.

THANK YOU.

Sincerely,

Fr. Ed Hislop
Dean, Missoula Deanery

cc: Missoula Deanery

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MISSOULA DEANERY



REPORTS FROM THE FOUR GROUPS – FEBRUARY 8, 2022

GENERAL CONCERNS EXPRESSED IN THE GROUPS

Who should be involved/invited? Those “in the pews,” and/or those “not in the pews. We all know family members, friends, former parishioners who are no longer coming to Mass; often they are not interested to discuss their choice and at times become hostile to discussion of the issue. How can we/should we reach out to them? Survey? Town Hall type meeting? Concern that people would come just to “vent” or express their anger, hurt, etc. How can we effectively reach out to those we most need to hear from? What is it we want to ask? What do we want to hear?

Communion, Participation and Mission are all about Community. Communion is the sacramental sign of the Body of Christ; Participation is how we actively engage in the community; Mission is the recognition that we are called to be inspired and driven by the Holy Spirit.

COMPILATION OF INPUT RECEIVED FROM THE FOUR GROUPS

COMMUNION

“Communion,” by its very nature, means diversity—an embrace and respect of and for human diversity. The embrace of diversity is what leads to a true unity (which is never uniformity).

How do we walk with each other as disciples—in our own parishes, deanery, diocese? How can we more effectively share faith and ministry with “all the baptized? How are we engaged ecumenically in our parish, deanery, diocese? These are fundamental questions since Pope Francis is calling for dialogue and relationship with all the baptized AND the unbaptized? These are ongoing challenges and profound opportunities.

Communion, Holy Communion, begins with baptism, the source of new life in Christ. This is the center of our faith. It leads to mission.

For ourselves it is important to recognize how our community “feels,” how the deanery “feels,” how the diocese “feels.”

People have varying understanding of “community.” For some it means “communion” as related to the Eucharist, i.e., the “mystical body of Christ.” In that regard it is important to clearly articulate what “Eucharist” means, i.e., we become what we receive, the Body of Christ, sent together to “love and serve.” “Communion” means “mission.” It also means a clear understanding of what the Church teaches about Eucharist/Communion, not what we “think” it teaches: that is the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, present to nourish the people for Mission. We are sent to be what we receive.

Communion means vulnerability. People, both in and outside the church, must be met “where they are;” we, the Church, must be willing to enter into the “messiness” of people’s lives and admit to the “messiness” of our own lives and that of the Church. Reconciliation/forgiveness does not happen in an instant. It demands a willingness to listen and a sense of truly being heard and respected. We—personally and as the church/parish/diocese—need to witness how to live in a reconciling/forgiving community. We all need forgiveness, whether in or outside the church; to be authentic witnesses we must all recognize and embrace that truth. People hurt one another, communities hurt one another, it is unavoidable, but we need to be able to forgive and be faithful. We need to listen; we need to speak; we need to be heard.

PARTICIPATION

Participation is how we actively engage in the community—the community of the Church and the community of the world. Both are interrelated. It also means how we, the church/parish/diocese participate in the community beyond the parish/church. How do we participate in the life and struggles, hopes and dreams of the “others:” those not in church, those excluded, the “lost sheep,” those of other faith traditions, etc. etc.? Pope Francis calls the church to engage. How are we engaged? How must we be engaged?

In our own parish experiences, we need to attend to the quality and intensiveness of our “full, conscious and active participation.” What has this meant? What does this mean? What can this mean? What difference does such participation make in our own life, in the life of the parish/diocese? What motivates persons to attend and participate? The Second Vatican Council and succeeding popes have reminded us of the primary significance of participation, as described by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, in the prayer and worship of the Church. That participation demands preparation, presence, reflection, articulation, and witness. It involves all the senses—body, mind, and soul. It is work. How well are those values communicated, experienced in each parish? How is Christ encountered in our parishes? What are the challenges? What are the impediments to a “sense of belonging?”

Participation also demands “hospitality.” How are people welcomed, how are they not? What motivates people to participate, to be present, to engage. How are people welcomed, attended to, respected? How many persons are not present because they have experienced a sense of judgement or exclusion, because of marital status, gender, or who they are, etc.? Many express concerns about youth and their general lack of presence. How can they be effectively reached; how do we hear and listen to them? What must change in the Church to facilitate participation, hospitality, and belonging?

Participation, in its true sense, demands attention to and the experience of the real presence of Christ encountered in the world, especially among the poor; felt in the gathered assembly as dwelling among them; heard in the song of the people, in the spoken Word of the Lord, in the prayers of the Church, in the person of the ministers, and in the person of the ordained priest. Then most particularly and really in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist, and finally really present in all who eat and drink at the Lord’s Table, becoming together with the whole Church, the Body, and Blood of Christ in service to the world. These varying nuances of Christ’s abiding presence need much clearer catechesis and more authentic experience if a true understanding of “participation” is to be grasped.

Participation of all in the assembly can often be minimized or even negated by a rising sense of “clericalism” in the church today. Pope Francis cites this as a significant concern. It is a concern that must be faced, addressed, and transformed.

MISSION

Mission is the recognition that we are called to be inspired and driven by the Holy Spirit. It can, however, feel like the community is “stuck.” Covid has put varying restrictions on our ability to provide opportunities for participation. The synodal process itself seems overwhelming and complicated.

While the Missoula Deanery has undertaken, to some extent, the process, there does not seem to be the kind of involvement that seems necessary on the Diocesan level. The vision expressed by the Holy See and Pope Francis seems to call for more extensive preparation and consultation. The necessary “groundwork” does not seem to have been provided. Within our own deanery the process is being frustrated by a feeling of disunity. Perhaps we need to honestly articulate those concerns with a sense of hope.

The “mission” of the Church, as articulated by Pope Francis, seems to require a willingness to “go outside” our comfort zones, both as individuals and as faith communities. We need to focus on both those within the church those no longer participating, and on those who are not part of the church. The vision of the Synod seems to be more on “us going out,” than about getting people to “come in,” but in reality, we need to do both. Such work and vision, requires that we be “on fire” and convicted about our faith and Church. A key point: Among our native communities, the people are the guide for the minister.

Mission also means an understanding of the Ministry of the Baptized vis-a-vis the Ministry of the Ordained. The value, significance and inter-dependance of both must be articulated and embraced. In that regard, perhaps what is needed, is a renewed understanding, and a new articulation of the meaning of the Sacrament of Holy Orders in light of the reality in the Church of the 21st century.

Mission also means:

Attention to the various “divisions” expressed in our diocesan church, particularly regarding the “Ordinary” and “Extraordinary” form of the liturgy. Divisions among priests; division among various groups.

Attention to the history of our Diocese with respect and honor, and to build on that experience.



ALL ARE WELCOME TO JOIN THE CONVERSATION
with Bishop Vetter
and the parishes of the Missoula Deanery on **MONDAY** evening,
MARCH 21 at Blessed Trinity, 6:30—8:30 pm.
We begin with Vespers.