



21 January 2022

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

Dear Bishop Vetter:

The Missoula Deanery, at our previous two meetings (December 14, 2021 and January 18, 2022), spent considerable time discussing the upcoming Synod process in the Diocese.

Following each meeting the attached document was emailed to the entire deanery requesting further comment, based on the reported input at both meetings.

It is our hope that this work, and the attached document produced, will assist you in your continued planning and preparation for the Diocese of Helena participation in this Synod of Pope Francis for the Universal Church.

As you shepherd us all on the path ahead, we embrace Francis' vision that this synod be a "fearless" dialogue among us all—our presbyterate, laity, religious, families, and society at large, and that all feel welcome to share boldly with an "eloquent humility."

With our prayer for you, your ministry, and our Diocese, we offer our reflections.

Sincerely,

Fr. Ed Hislop

Dean, Missoula Deanery

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Missoula Deanery Discussion The SYNOD IN THE DIOCESE OF HELENA December 14, 2021 Discussion report Further discussion January 18, 2022 Deanery Meeting

At the **December 14, 2021** meeting of the Missoula Deanery a discussion of Synodal Process in the Diocese of Helena:

DIOCESE OF HELENA “SYNODOL PROCESS” DURING LENT 2022. Discussion.

“Dialogue is our method, not as a shrewd strategy but out of fidelity to the One who never wearies of visiting the marketplace, even at the eleventh hour, to propose his offer of love (Mt 20:1-16). The path ahead, then, is a dialogue among yourselves, dialogue in your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly. The richer heritage which you are called to share with *parrhesia*” (*i.e., boldness or freedom of speech*), “the more eloquent should be the humility with which you should offer it.” Pope Francis

Table DISCUSSION: What does the Synod called for by Pope Francis mean to you? What hope does it inspire? What are your concerns regarding the needs and gifts of the Church universally, nationally, diocesan and within our own Missoula Deanery? What can we do in our own parishes to advance Pope Francis notion of “synod,” especially his notion of sharing with “boldness and freedom of speech” (*parrhesia*)? With whom should we dialogue and converse? Each table reports back to the full group.

Attachments:

1. *Checklist and Background Materials for a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission (USCCB).*
2. *Bulletin Insert from Diocese to be published in all parish bulletins for the remaining Sundays of December and Christmas. Additional bulletin materials will be provided in January 2022.*

For complete information about the SYNODOL PROCESS as envisioned by the Holy See, go to <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

The group gathered in small groups. Leaders from each group reported on the discussion and submitted those reports in writing. Following is a synopsis of the reports. There were four groups. Three group leaders submitted a report. Following is that report, plus insights articulated at the January 18, 2022 Deanery meeting. Following the January meeting the attached document we emailed to the entire deanery for review with a request for any additional input.

MISSOULA DEANERY

REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

DIOCESE OF HELENA "SYNOD" PREPARATION / PROCESS

DECEMBER 14, 2021 / JANUARY 18, 2022

"SENSE" OF THE SYNOD PROCESS

1. Long term goal is to re-orient the local Church toward an inherent synodal attitude in decision making processes through communion, participation, and mission. The hope is to accomplish a new way of going about decision making processes that invite dialogue with a wider diversity of voices, especially among those not usually heard, or invited into the process of dialogue. How will this be accomplished in the Diocese of Helena?
2. This synod is a call for dialogue among all the baptized. This is particularly significant and challenging.
3. The process demands an open heart and open mind. Preconceived expectations and or/limitations will circumvent and defeat the synodal process as envisioned by Pope Francis.
4. Important at the beginning of this process in our Diocese that there be clarity on the process to ensure that all voices will be heard. How can honest listening and dialogue be assured, especially with what appears to be a limited and predetermined process in the Diocese of Helena.
5. Prior to the Lenten deanery-wide listening sessions already planned, is there a plan or desire to have individual listening sessions in each parish prior to the deanery gatherings? (*Added at January 18 meeting*).
6. Is there a Diocese of Helena Synod team or commission to develop the process throughout the Diocese and in the parishes? How is the synod vision of "collaboration, dialogue and conversation" reflected in the Diocesan planning process? Who is involved? How will this be implemented and when?
7. Clarity on the process must be articulated early on in both planning and process in order to assure that all voices will be respectfully heard, listened to, and valued. The hope should be a desire to accomplish a "new way" of going about decision making that invites dialogue with a wider diversity of voices, especially those not usually heard.

CONCERNS THE DIOCESE OF HELENA SYNODAL PROCESS MUST FACE

1. How can we begin with this vision and hope of Pope Francis: **"THE RICHER HERITAGE WHICH YOU ARE CALLED TO SHARE WITH PARRHESIA" (I.E., BOLDNESS OR FREEDOM OF SPEECH), "THE MORE ELOQUENT SHOULD BE THE HUMILITY WITH WHICH YOU SHOULD OFFER IT."**
2. Concern regarding the current perception that the Bishop is the primary facilitator and chief listener. How does this reflect the synodal vision of Pope Francis and the documents published thus far by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops? Could the process thus far articulated become a "one-way conversation," and not a true dialogue?

3. The initial process provided for the Diocese of Helena seems to favor those with a particular spirituality. Beginning with one hour of adoration could be problematic for some, while especially inviting to others. There needs to be common ground, where all can feel welcome.
4. This process begins as the Covid pandemic continues to influence, and often limit, the whole experience of church and worship. How can the process prepare us to enter fully into the life and mission of the church in this place, especially after the past two years of pandemic and isolation?
5. There continues to be varying attitudes regarding the Second Vatican Council. The synod process in the Diocese must provide an open dialogue regarding the vision and spirit of the Council and its continued implementation. We are still assimilating the council.
6. How do we address the seeming revival of “clericalism” among us today? Why is this happening? How does it affect the life and spirit of the church, especially in the context of Francis’ challenge to it and his call for a synodal church?
7. There must be open and honest dialogue among and with those who have chosen to no longer participate in the life of the church. We must listen with an open mind and heart to their struggle, hurt and rejection. *While it may be challenging to invite such persons into an open dialogue regarding their personal concerns or issues, a process should be designed to engage them in appropriate and “safe” ways (we all know persons who are no longer in church for a variety of reasons—perhaps, initially, personal visits could be arranged for them to share their concerns, issues and/or circumstances (this sentence added following final consultation since it was discussed at the January 18 meeting).* It may be the heart of the church that must change. This is the vision of Francis—his vision that all the baptized be heard: those of other Christian faiths, and especially those Catholics no longer in church.
8. In that context, how do we articulate the relevance of the Church of the Diocese of Helena, in this time and place? Many Catholics and Christians are no longer present in our parishes. Why are they turning away? Where are they going? How can we listen to their concerns or reasons for going away?
9. How do we deal with the perceived reality that “politics” seems to be shaping the church these days? How can our faith more effectively shape our politics?
10. How do we “bring together” in an environment of mutual respect, the various elements, perspectives, theologies, and attitudes in the church and in the community at large? How can we effectively enter into dialogue? Such dialogue, conversation, discussion could move us to a new and different place and begin to lessen the “polarization” so evident in both church, nation, and world today.
11. A final concern: Many parishioners may perceive this process as similar to other Diocesan consultations, such as Living Stones, etc. This process needs to be clearly articulated and explained at the beginning and the invitation needs to be clear and “inviting,” particularly since in some parishes people tend to be “adverse” to meetings, which could affect participation and attendance. *(Added at January 18 meeting).*

**12. THE FINAL CONCERN/RECOMMENDATION WAS
THAT WINE BE PROVIDED AT ALL SESSIONS!!**

