



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

**1475 Eaton Street ~ Missoula, MT 59801**  
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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

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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>

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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.

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# MISSOULA DEANERY

## REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

### DIOCESE OF HELENA “SYNOD” PREPARATION / PROCESS

#### DECEMBER 14, 2021 / JANUARY 18, 2022

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#### “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!!**





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.

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## 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.

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## 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.