



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Walking together on a journey of encounter, listening and discernment

On Sunday, October 10, Pope Francis inaugurated a synodal process designed to help the whole Church mature and grow in its mission. In his homily during the opening Mass, Pope Francis said:

The Gospels frequently show us Jesus “on a journey”; he walks alongside people and listens to the questions and concerns lurking in their hearts. He shows us that God is not found in neat and orderly places, distant from reality, but walks ever at our side. He meets us where we are, on the often rocky roads of life. Today, as we begin this synodal process, let us begin by asking ourselves – all of us, Pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity – whether we, the Christian community, embody this “style” of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity. Are we prepared for the adventure of this journey? Or are we fearful of the unknown, preferring to take refuge in the usual excuses: “It’s useless” or “We’ve always done it this way”?



Our Holy Father has asked us to begin a formal process of listening for the Holy Spirit’s guidance as we “journey together” as God’s people. This is what the word “synod” means—to journey together, to be gathered as fellow travelers in a Church that is on a journey to a better future—both now and in eternity.

This synodal process will unfold in three stages: The First Stage—from Sunday, October 17, until the end of April 2022—involves listening sessions at the parish level. The Second Stage, which takes place in 2022–2023, will feature discussions at the diocesan and national levels. The Third Stage will involve international discussions with the process concluding in October 2023, with a

general assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome. Especially during the next six months, our Archdiocese is being asked to invite Catholics throughout central and southern Indiana to seek the Holy Spirit's help so that we can prayerfully listen to as many people as possible as we journey together as missionary disciples called to proclaim the Gospel of joy, living Christ's mission.

During his homily for the Synod's opening, the pope emphasized three ideas: encounter, listening and discernment. The first idea, "encounter," is the art of meeting people where they are, not being indifferent or uncaring. Our model for this is Jesus. As Pope Francis says in his homily:

The Lord does not stand aloof; he does not appear annoyed or disturbed. Instead, he is completely present to [each] person. He is open to encounter. Nothing leaves Jesus indifferent; everything is of concern to him. Encountering faces, meeting eyes, sharing each individual's history. That is the closeness that Jesus embodies. He knows that someone's life can be changed by a single encounter. The Gospel is full of such encounters with Christ, encounters that uplift and bring healing. Jesus did not hurry along, or keep looking at his watch to get the meeting over. He was always at the service of the person he was with, listening to what he or she had to say.

The second idea—listening—makes genuine encounter possible. True encounters require attentive listening. If we don't hear what others are saying; if we ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts; if we allow our own comfort and concerns to drown out the voices of others, we cannot serve as Jesus did. We "serve as Jesus did" when we freely give ourselves in service to others. But we cannot make this kind of sacrifice if we are deaf to the cries of those around us or if we are indifferent to the hunger, homelessness and suffering of our brothers and sisters.

Thirdly, Pope Francis calls the listening process that we are beginning today an exercise in "discernment of spirits." Encounter and listening are not ends in themselves, leaving everything just as it was before. On the contrary, the pope says, "whenever we enter into dialogue, we allow ourselves to be challenged, to advance on a journey. And in the end, we are no longer the same; we are changed."

Discernment involves learning what God is calling us to do and what is seeking to frustrate God's will. "When we face choices and contradictions," the Holy Father says, "asking what God's will is opens us to unexpected possibilities." The Holy Spirit guides and directs us when we are lost and confused. He can open doors that have been closed for generations, and he can unite us when we seem hopelessly divided from one another.

Our Holy Father describes the Synod as "a process of spiritual discernment that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God." The Word of God "guides the Synod, preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit."

As the Holy Father teaches: “Without the Spirit, there is no synod. And without prayerful listening and discernment of spirits, we cannot be the mission Church we are called to be as a result of our Baptism.”

As we begin this journey together, let’s ask the Holy Spirit to bless us. May we truly be a Church that receives and lives the gifts of communion, participation and mission. May we be open to the voice of the Holy Spirit—taking to heart the call to proclaim the Gospel of joy, living Christ’s mission.

+Charles C. Thompson
Archbishop of Indianapolis

Archbishop Thompson celebrates Mass to start synodal process in archdiocese

By Sean Gallagher

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The Church in central and southern Indiana joined dioceses around the world on Oct. 17 in beginning its participation in the preparation for a 2023 meeting of the Synod of Bishops.

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson celebrated a Mass that day in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis that began the archdiocese’s contribution to the synod meeting.



Unlike the usual practice of Sundays in Ordinary Time in the Church’s liturgical calendar in which green vestments are worn, Archbishop Thompson wore red vestments for the liturgy, noting at the start that they “remind us of how we call upon the Holy Spirit to guide and direct, to be with us through this process.”

The 2023 synod meeting at the Vatican and the preparation for it in the archdiocese and in dioceses around the world has as its theme, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.” Pope Francis called for this theme to help Catholics around the world—lay faithful,

religious and clergy—to experience what it means to come together to discern with the help of the Holy Spirit how the Church is called to live out its mission in this time in history.

In his homily during the Mass, Archbishop Thompson emphasized that humility is essential for the success of the faithful coming together in such a process.

“This is not a time of self-seeking privilege or weak-mindedness, but a time for opening our minds to the Spirit and our hearts to one another,” he said. “We must check our egos and personal agendas at the door while praying for courage, humility and generosity to permeate our experience over these next several months of attentive listening, speaking from the heart and acting with mutual respect.”

Catholics across central and southern Indiana will have opportunities to contribute to the preparation for the synod through an online survey, which can be found at www.archindy.org/SynodSurvey.

Parish councils across the archdiocese will also be invited to take part in the process. Parishioners can share their concerns with the members of their parish council.

Although individual Catholics may have wide and varied contributions to the synod preparation process, Archbishop Thompson invited his listeners to keep Christ at the heart of their vision for the future of the Church.

“It would be good for us to remember that it is his Church, his body, his mission, of which we are privileged to be members,” he said. “In this way, we keep our sights set on the kingdom of God rather than that of the world or of our own thinking.”

To keep this Christ-centered perspective, Archbishop Thompson said following the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a necessity.

“Ultimately, we must be open to the movement and guidance of the Holy Spirit,” he said. “How is God calling us in this particular time and space? It is not so much a matter of whether God is speaking, but how we are to listen and discern his voice amid all the chaos of voices contending for our attention.”

At the end of his homily, Archbishop Thompson suggested various questions that might guide Catholics’ participation in the synodal process.

“How do we continue the mission of healing wounds and warming hearts today?” he asked. “What barriers need to be removed in order to enhance communion and participation while honoring the mission entrusted to us as Church by Jesus Christ himself?”

“Before us is great challenge, great opportunity. A daunting task, but grace-filled, if we are Christ-centered. In the end, it is all about glorifying the Holy Trinity—God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—for the sake of our salvation, not merely as individuals, but as people of God.”

Laura Sheehan, a member of St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis, was glad to take part in the Mass with her 6-year-old daughter Adelaide.

“Anytime that we can participate in something that the universal Church is doing is exciting,” said Sheehan, who also serves as project coordinator for social concerns for archdiocesan Catholic Charities.

She was encouraged to hear Archbishop Thompson speak about how the synodal process is a chance for the faithful of the Church to see how they can respond to the challenges facing society today with the hope of the Gospel.

“All of those things are things that we work with on a daily basis [in Catholic Charities],” Sheehan said. “It was nice to hear that addressed in his homily. The themes of communion, participation and mission were really cool, too, to have put at the front of our minds. To hear someone in authority in the Church talk about those aspects of the Church’s life was refreshing.”

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Dear brothers and sisters, let us have a good journey together! May we be pilgrims in love with the Gospel and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit. Let us not miss out on the grace-filled opportunities born of encounter, listening and discernment. In the joyful conviction that, even as we seek the Lord, he always comes with his love to meet us first.

As we initiate this process, we too are called to become experts in the art of encounter. Not so much by organizing events or theorizing about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another.

True encounter arises only from listening. Let us invoke the Holy Spirit with greater fervor and frequency, and humbly listen to him, journeying together as He, the source of communion and mission, desires: with docility and courage.



My Prayer for You

Come, Holy Spirit, and empower your people with the ability to meet one another, to listen attentively to the Word of God and each other, and to discern God's will for all His people. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints, may the journey we are beginning now unite us with You, and with each other, both now and in the world to come.

+ Charles C. Thompson