

Most Precious Blood and the Call to Synod

Introduction and Process

The Most Precious Blood (MPB) parish enthusiastically embraced the Synod process. The community was thrilled to know that the Catholic Church wanted to listen to us, the laity, and wanted us to be a part of this global journey. This document describes the process of the listening sessions at MPB and summarizes what we learned. It is our hope and prayer that each participant in the listening sessions at MPB can hear their voice in this document and learn from the voices of others.

The MPB community learned about the Synod process through our parish website, the bulletin, and announcements at Mass. We stressed that everyone was invited, even people no longer attending MPB or any Catholic Church. Participants were highly encouraged to review the synod page on the website that included the archdiocesan formation videos, links to resources from the Vatican, and a detailed outline of the listening sessions at MPB.

MPB had a fantastic turnout, better than we could have anticipated. MPB welcomed 473 participants into 11 different sessions, including MPB school children and FAITH families (religious education program). Thirty-eight individuals shared their reflections through an anonymous email address.

Each Synod session began with the attendees gathering in the sanctuary for a scripture reading, a reflection provided by a member of the MPB community, and silent discernment. After this, everyone moved to their randomly assigned small listening groups. The groups ranged from 5 to 7 individuals with a notetaker and a facilitator. All individuals responded to 2 questions:

- 1) Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in the Church?
- 2) What is the Holy Spirit calling the Church to in this time and place?

Once everyone gathered in their small groups, participants reviewed the expectations for the conversation. Just as importantly, all were reminded that listening to others, as well as to the Holy Spirit, was crucial. Participants had three minutes to share their response. After three people shared, the conversation paused for a 2-minute quiet discernment, then the rest of the group shared their responses. The group used the same format to answer the 2nd question. The time allotted for the small group sessions was approximately one hour.

After small group discernment, all participants gathered together to hear the themes revealed in each group. Fr. Daniel or Fr. John concluded the sessions in prayer. After listening to groups give their summations, we discovered that the commonality of the themes is extraordinary.

Question 1: Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in the Church?

The Welcoming Community

Participants in the MPB synod sessions mostly spoke of how they saw the Holy Spirit at work in the welcoming community of MPB. Participants mentioned the MPB ministry staff, school staff, school children, the numerous ministries, the laity, and past and present clergy. The participants made it clear that they feel the Spirit moving when we are in community and in relationship with each other.

Participants highlighted the different ways that we are in community with each other. We connect through liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments. Many spoke of feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit in homilies of belonging, acceptance, and love despite our shortcomings. Several participants described their vision of God smiling as we joyfully celebrate liturgy together. Participants characterize the music during Mass as welcoming and life-giving. Children in religious education programs (FAITH families) note God's presence in the sign of peace, hearing the stories, singing together, and clapping at the end of Mass. When COVID first began and we were unsure how Mass could continue, MPB gathered on Zoom, and we saw inside each other's homes as we prayed and sang together. Participants said the pause in in-person Mass opened their eyes to how much we need our community.

In addition to shared prayer through the liturgy, participants emphasized personal prayer, especially centering and contemplative prayer, as a method of hearing the Holy Spirit. Also, people expounded that they felt the Holy Spirit in religious formation for adults in activities like Sunday Morning Gatherings, Lenten Book Club, and scripture study courses. Others mentioned hearing the Holy Spirit when they connect with the writings and teachings of other leaders and prophets in and outside of the Church.

This sense of community and belonging is so widespread that when people gathered in their Synod small discernment groups, individuals not acquainted with each other felt safe and shared immediately without fear of judgment or ridicule.

Action and Outreach

Overwhelmingly, participants noted the Holy Spirit speaks through action and outreach. Long-time MPB parishioners shared the long history of service and outreach at MPB since its Vincentian founding. There was consistent mention of social justice and Catholic Social Teaching focusing on caring for the poor and the homeless, caring for the Earth, including people with disabilities, and participating in numerous service opportunities. Ministries at MPB welcome collaboration with other religions in their community outreach.

The outreach provided by MPB is not limited to the outside of our community. MPB community members use their generosity and gifts to respond to the needs of the MPB community. People regaled heartfelt stories about MPB members preparing food, visiting each other, grieving together, supporting a difficult pregnancy, and checking in on people who lived alone. They spoke of the accounts of unplanned moments of encounter with each other where they felt supported and loved in their struggles and joys.

Many participants articulated that they were inspired and called by the leadership of Pope Francis. They resonate with his message of care for our common home, compassion, and communion with all of God's people, especially people on the margins. Pope Francis is opening the windows of the Church and elevating the role of the laity, religious women, and voices of the youth. The Holy Spirit is calling the Church through the synod process to continue the work of Vatican II.

Question 2: What is the Holy Spirit Calling Us to in this time and place?

Engagement and Encounter

Participants shared that the Holy Spirit calls each of us to recognize God in all people. The Holy Spirit brings unity, not uniformity. Each of us - individuals, families, parishes, and the Universal Church - is called to love God at all times and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We need to continue this synodal path by speaking with courage and listening to each other with humility.

Inclusive Church Communities

One of the most consistent themes participants at MPB heard the Holy Spirit say is that the Catholic Church, at all levels, needs to be inclusive of everyone. Every person has the same dignity and value. The Spirit lovingly reminds us that the Church needs to be inclusive of everyone to remain “catholic” and universal.

The Holy Spirit cries out to the Church to bring women into leadership positions. Denying women significant leadership roles denies the Church of the gifts of incredible compassion, intelligence, and Christ affirming leadership and love. The Spirit is calling the Church to ordain women and allow them to care for and raise their parishioners as they do their children and families. This begins with creating women deaconesses. The Holy Spirit also calls the Church to listen to women, invite women into leadership roles, and allow their participation in the decision-making forums at all levels of the Church.

The Spirit calls the Church to welcome the LGBTQ Catholics into the Church and encourage their full participation as they have amazing gifts to offer the Church. The Church needs to focus on compassion, respect, and sensitivity to the LGBTQ Catholics and their families by refraining from using dehumanizing language. During the listening sessions, parents of LGBTQ Catholics shared that they have felt judged and hurt by some in the Church and wondered if they could truly belong.

The Holy Spirit asks the Church to be more supportive of Catholics who are divorced and rethink the annulment process, especially in light of the pain of those who cannot remarry in the Church. That divorced people remarrying without annulments cannot partake in the Eucharist is harmful and cruel.

The Holy Spirit calls the Church to be non-judgmental and to focus on each member as a child of God. The Spirit calls the Church to stop using the Eucharist as a weapon or a means to control the laity. The Spirit reminds us that this sacrament is a way to grow in grace. The Eucharist is not meant for perfect people but rather for all people. Participants shared that harsh judgment and treatment have led to friends, children, and families leaving the Church. The Spirit asks the Church to examine its rules and rid itself of the rigid implementation of outdated rules and practices that have no place in the 21st century. The Spirit calls the Church to cease viewing issues from one side only. The Spirit calls the Church to focus on the dignity of each individual at all stages of life, not just the earliest stages.

The Holy Spirit asks the Church to become a home for our youth, a place of belonging where they are encouraged to ask hard questions and to share their hopes and fears. May this synod be the start of more synods, especially geared to listening to young people, to being open to their new ideas, and to grow in community. The Holy Spirit asks the Church to guide, to be calm, to be more accepting, and to recognize that we are all distinctive individuals with unique and much-needed gifts.

The Holy Spirit calls for the Church to be inclusive of families and school-aged children through options for child-friendly prayers and readings, increased opportunities for children and youth to participate during mass, and safe environments, like youth groups, to be themselves.

Re-Imagining the Church

The Holy Spirit asks Church leaders to reimagine their roles and their use of power. In following Jesus, Church leaders are called to lead with humility, forgiveness, and to be a source of joy in the Lord. Jesus came to Earth to lead His people spiritually, thus, He remained out of the political world. The Spirit asks Church leaders to do the same. The Spirit asks Bishops and priests to accompany people on this Earthly journey and to lift them up rather than to judge and condemn them. The Holy Spirit also asks that Seminarians are formed in how to lead with their hearts, not only their heads in applying Church rules.

The Spirit calls the Church to end fear-based teaching. Instead, the Church needs to focus on Jesus' message and what His death and resurrection mean for all humankind. Our experience with the clergy here at MPB who shared Christ-centered preaching and the Lord's love for all people has greatly inspired the MPB community to go out into the world and do as Jesus teaches.

Repentance and Healing

The worldwide Catholic Church, as well as many dioceses, have made grave mistakes in the past. The Holy Spirit calls the Church to recognize these past mistakes and apologize for them publicly. Priestly sexual abuse cases from recent decades have greatly contributed to a breakdown of trust the laity had with clerics. The Church needs to be transparent in its dealings with priests and other religious who have committed sexual, financial, spiritual, and mental abuse. More so, the Church needs to allow the legal system to deal with those accused of these heinous crimes. The idea of one set of rules for laity and a very different set of rules for Church leaders is the height of hypocrisy. All of this contributes to the serious decline in Church attendance and contribution. Church leaders have lost a tremendous amount of authority with the laity because of these heinous acts and because of how the Church has dealt with these transgressions.

Lastly, many participants feel the Holy Spirit is at work in the disruption or tension in all our lives. The Holy Spirit uses this discomfort as a means for growth, encounter, and transformation. It is an opportunity for forgiveness and healing for the entire Church.

Archdiocese Synod Questions

Most Precious Blood Parish used two questions for the Synod to allow time and space for prayerful discernment. The use of two questions permitted every participant to respond to each one. A reader will easily extrapolate the responses to the Archdiocese questions from the themes given by MPB.

Blessed Conclusion

The beauty of the Holy Spirit is in the consistency of the message. The Archdiocese of Denver asks us to discern the mission of the Church of Northern Colorado, the parish, family, and disciple. The unity of responses leads us to a shared mission: The Holy Spirit asks that individuals, families, parishes, and the

greater Church follow the teachings of Jesus as laid out in the gospels with humility and compassion. The Holy Spirit asks us to love God AND to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are called to forgive all transgressions, invite all people to our tables and into our homes, serve others, and act as Christ did on Earth.

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Sue Giovanini

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Most Precious Blood Parishioners

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