**Synod on Synodality Report/Synthesis for the Eparchy of Passaic – Part 3**

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Below are the responses for the final questions 8-12, presented to all clergy and parishioners regarding the Synod process. These responses were compiled from the reports received, and synthesized into the following:

1. **To what extent do diverse people in our community come together for dialogue? What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church?**

* Aside from generational differences, for the most part, diversity is lacking.
* We have a unique opportunity with our Eastern European priests. We should consider engaging them within the community to bring together other immigrants from Eastern European countries.
* Prior to COVID-19, there were opportunities with other parishes, such as Lenten vespers, interparochial confessions at Christmas and Easter, syncellate gatherings for river blessings and St. Thomas Day dinners, supporting local parish picnics and other such examples, but in general, diversity gatherings with those of other faiths and races is lacking.
* Basic needs must first be met within the local Church before more complex discussions with diverse populations could begin.
  + Suggestions: A starting point for dialogue at the local level is via a Pastoral Advisory Board, (as suggested in Questions, 9, 11 & 12) not hand-picked by the priest, but a self-nominated group of interested and dedicated parishioners. These meetings, with input from the priest, deacon and trustees could be regularly scheduled throughout the calendar year, with a focused agenda and perhaps with rotating administrative point-persons selected by the group, to run the meetings. They could be open to the entire parish with meeting minutes distributed for everyone. Transparency equals truth.
  + Church of St. John, Pottstown, Pa offers Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) meetings and this brings a wide diversity of persons to the church, providing exposure while living out the Gospel message.

1. **How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed? What issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to?**

* The global hierarchy of the Church thwarts an honest discussion of important issues, in particular, the American Catholic Bishops and their continued focus on conservative political agendas, which is in direct conflict with the separation of Church and state.
* Issues of conflict within the local parishes are generally avoided and not addressed.
* Some parishes utilize Pastoral Advisory Boards to resolve conflicts, specific to local issues.
* Larger societal/universal issues to address include: climate change, immigration and migrants, sexual misconduct via the clergy, abortion, financial transparency, church closures, addiction, poverty, homelessness.
* There should be open dialogue about divorce and remarriage. People make mistakes or may find themselves married to a spouse who has become abusive or unfaithful and is unwilling to change. A person in this situation should not be bound to stay in that marriage. If they are a person of faith and fall in love again, they should be allowed to re-marry and remain a full member in the Church. In this example, if a person who has children leaves the Church because they chose to re-marry, not only are they no longer a member of the Church, but their children and future generations are lost to the Church, a primary reason why many former Catholics have left to join Evangelic churches.
* If God is love, then love is love. All love is an expression of God’s love for us, His children. The Church should find ways to welcome same sex partners into the life of the Church and bless their unions. God’s love is welcoming and inclusive, God’s church should NOT be exclusive.
  + Suggestions: Local divergences of vision and difficulties should be initially managed by the priest and administrator and further addressed via a Parish Advisory Council, as suggested in Questions 8, 9, 11, &12.
  + Again, education is important in the life of the Church, (Questions 2 & 4). Understanding the terminology, e.g., presbyteral, syncellate, protopresbyter etc., these are not common words known to the laity, yet it is important for the laity to know and understand the organizational structure of the eparchy, such terminology is confusing. As all Catholic Churches have a visible photo of the pope and his flag, perhaps an organizational structure, or something similar, could be posted in the vestibules of the churches, as a means to communicate the local hierarchy: trustees, priest, administrator, deacon, protopresbyter, syncellus, etc.

1. **What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations? (Similar to Question 8)**

* Very little interaction with members of other Christian traditions, some interfaith prayer services have occurred due to the war in Ukraine.
* Some reported limited, but good relationships with religious fundraisers with other Byzantine Rite parishes and Roman Catholic churches and the Knights of Columbus.
  + Suggestions: Hold an “Open House” as St. John’s, Lansford, PA reported, as a way to connect with other faith denominations and educate at a community level.
  + St. Ann, Harrisburg reported they offer tours of their church throughout the year and during their festival.
  + Our Lady of the Sign, Coconut Creek, FL, reported they welcome Catholic high school students the opportunity to experience the Byzantine Rite and offer the sacrament of reconciliation with 50-100 students participating annually.

1. **How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church? (Similar to Question 9)**

* Bishop, priest and deacon exercise authority, as part of the hierarchical structure, although this can result in a closed-off system, resulting in complacency and decline. As expressed in Question 9, it is important for the laity to know the hierarchical levels of governance and authority, particularly if there is a local concern or issue to be addressed.
  + Suggestions: Pastoral Advisory Council (Questions 8, 9, 11 &12) would support the priest and deacon to address issues of concern, such meetings could be open to the entire parish with the minutes of the council meetings, distributed to all parishioners, via bulletin inserts or email.
  + Regular visits from the Eparchy via the syncellus and protopresbyter would be helpful to connect the laity and hierarchy of the Church, communication is key to success.
  + A desire for the Eparchy to issue a State of the Eparchy address, similar to that which the Melkite Bishop issues each year.
  + Create an Eparchial *Office of Formational Opportunities* for ministerial duties for: cantors, family education and formation of lay ministers.
  + Develop formal consultors within the Eparchy, to provide a common vision and strategic plan to support the bishop in a constructive manner to affect positive change.

1. **How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures? Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God?**

* Participation requires openness and an invitation from the hierarchy is important to include others. It requires the ability to really listen and to hear voices that may not always agree or conform to the thoughts of the hierarchy or to the way things have always been done.
* Our present decision-making methods do not help us to listen to the whole People of God, because we have no current decision-making methods. Decisions seem to be made with little input from members of the local community.
* This Synod and the process of asking the people of the Church for input and what they think is an important first step. **Maybe this is the life of the Spirt blowing open the doors to change and dialogue.** Based on dwindling numbers in our parishes and dwindling numbers in the priesthood, something new, evocative, life-giving needs to happen. To continue on the same path, surely will result in a shrinking Church and one that seems more on life-support than one that should be life giving.
* Currently, no Archbishop in Muckachevo, Ukraine.
  + Suggestions: Institute bi-annual full church meetings led by the priest, deacon and trustees with a focused agenda. A running theme that emerged from the synod listening sessions.
  + Pastoral Advisory Council (Questions 8, 9, &11).
  + Formal consultors for the Eparchy (Question 11).

**General Comments**

* The Byzanteen Youth Rally should be announced for months prior to the event in parish bulletins. This is an incredible opportunity for the young parishioners to connect, they are the future of the Church. It is a missed opportunity for many, as they may not read the ECL nor visit the Eparchial website.
* There were many opinions regarding the continued streaming of the Sunday Divine Liturgies. Initially, this was a welcomed opportunity due to the “lock down” from COVID-19 pandemic. However, as we have emerged from the pandemic, many have yet to return to, in-person worship and continue to watch virtually. Is the continued streaming of the Divine Liturgy now hindering parish participation?
  + Suggestion: Offer a limited number of virtual Divine Liturgies each week, directed per the bishop, which may bring back, those who are able to worship in-person.

**Important Point on Identity**

* Our identity has evolved over time and it was mentioned throughout the syncelli reports along with the clergy that we as Byzantine Rite Catholics have an identity crisis. One report in particular highlighted the divergences with our Byzantine communities within the U.S. Membership in each of these Archeparchies/Eparchies is inclusive by way of the Byzantine Rite, but exclusive by country of immigrant origin or descent.
* Established understandably to serve newly immigrated people, however, today, should we look to inclusive prayer and liturgical worship as united Byzantine Catholics of America?
  + Pittsburgh Ruthenian, 1924
  + Passaic Ruthenian, 1963
  + Parma Ruthenian, 1969
  + Phoenix Ruthenian, 1982
  + Philadelphia Ukrainian, 1907
  + Stamford Ukrainian, 1956
  + Chicago Ukrainian, 1961
  + Parma Ukrainian, 1983
  + Newton Melkite, 1966
  + Canton Romanian, 1983
* Are we preserving the nations of origin distinctions to preserve nationalistic identity and customs? Or would we not be more effective as a mission, as there is strength in numbers, in a growth-oriented Byzantine Church to witness our Church’s Catholicity if we were one multi-Eparchy Metropolia?

The Synod on Synodality remains a work in progress. The first step was listening to the voices throughout the eparchy, followed by the creation of the eparchial synthesis and disseminating this work via the ECL.

**Note: If your parish participated in the Synod process, the parish-level report(s) should have been shared with the laity. Please see your priest, administrator, deacon or Synod facilitator for parish-level report(s).**

The next step, in April 2023, the synod coordinators from Passaic, Parma, Phoenix and Pittsburgh will meet in Pittsburgh and report to Metropolitan Archbishop William Skurla the eparchial synod syntheses. The greatest work remains, creating and implementing an action plan to strengthen our Byzantine Rite.