



# *Concluding Report*

ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD

*Synod 2020: Grow + Go*

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**PREAMBLE:**

**EXCERPTS FROM ARCHBISHOP BLAIR'S OPENING ADDRESS TO SYNOD DELEGATES**  
*DISRUPTING THE DECLINE*

“Jesus says, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’ Our personal encounter with Christ bathes us in new light, sets us on the right path, and sends us out to be his witnesses. This new way of looking at the world and at people, which comes to us from him, leads us more deeply into the mystery of faith, which is not just a collection of theoretical assertions to be accepted and approved by the mind but an experience to be had, a truth to be lived, the salt and light of all reality. Let the gospel be the measure and guide of life’s decisions and plans. Then you will be missionaries in all that you do and say, and wherever you work and live, you will be signs of God’s love, credible witnesses to the living presence of Jesus Christ. Never forget: no one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bushel.”

These were the words of Pope Saint John Paul the Great, and it was Pope Saint Paul VI before him and Popes Benedict and Francis after him who have repeated these themes over and over again. What is Pope Saint John Paul saying? Jesus Christ is a living person. Jesus is not dead. Jesus is alive, and he’s in charge. He’s true God and true man, yet many Catholics are put off when they’re asked whether they have a personal relationship with him as if it was something they had never thought about and think of it as a strange notion, to have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

He’s not dead, and he is the way, the truth and the light, not one among many, even though we have great respect in a pluralistic world for other faiths or religions, but not among many. He’s the only one, yet so many Catholics, as Pope Saint John Paul says, “approach their religion only as a collection of theoretical assertions to be accepted and approved by the mind rather than as an experience to be had, a truth to be lived, and the salt and light of all reality.”

To be a disciple of Jesus is to be sent on a mission in life, every life. Not just the priesthood and the vowed life of a religious. As the recently canonized Saint John Henry Newman said, “Each of us has a mission that’s not entrusted to anyone else,” and if we have a God-given mission then that makes each of us missionaries. Jesus says: “No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a

bushel” (Mt 5:15). All of this is the context for what Pope Francis calls “missionary discipleship.” Personal and communal, learned and experienced, lived and shared.

Now these fundamental truths are pure gospel and have always been true even though they’ve been lived in very different ways through 2,000 years of history, and these truths are absolutely essential for understanding and discerning what we’re about in this Synod. A way forward for our local church, our Archdiocese within the communion of the universal Catholic Church. The fact that we have Christ’s promise that the bark of Peter will not sink does not mean that our only task is to rearrange the deck chairs in the face of today’s serious challenges.

What are our challenges today on the stormy seas on which we find ourselves? Well, numbers are not everything. They do not tell the whole story, but consider the following statistics about the Archdiocese of Hartford. Between 1965 and 2015, a 50-year period, the Archdiocese has experienced a 27% decline in Catholic population, a 74% decline in infant baptisms, a 76% decline in Catholic marriages, an 88% decline in seminarians, a 65% decline in archdiocesan priests, a 78% decline in religious sisters, a 69% decline in average Mass attendance, a 56% decline in the number of parochial elementary schools, and an 81% decline in parochial school students.

If Jesus is not alive, I’m going home because these are very startling and discouraging statistics. We speak often about a shortage of priests, but as these statistics show, the shortage is only one aspect of a much deeper phenomenon. And it’s not just a Catholic crisis. Maybe we can take some—I wouldn’t say comfort—but some perspective from the fact that it is not just a Catholic crisis. Just ask most Eastern Orthodox bishops in our country or mainline Protestant ministers or ask the rabbis, and you will find we are not alone. Perhaps we can take consolation from my favorite saying from an old Jesuit that “the truth sets you free but first it makes you miserable.” There’s a lot of wisdom in that. The truth sets you free but first it makes you miserable.

If you want to know my principle hope for this Synod, it is that the Synod will help transform us from an Archdiocese that is managing the decline that these startling and daunting percentages represent, into an Archdiocese that is disrupting this decline, this pattern of decline. Disrupting it with a view to the next 10 or 20 years by a willingness to do what Pope Saint John Paul, citing Scripture, challenged us to do at the turn of the millennium. And what were his words from Scripture in Latin? “*Duc in altum.*” It means “Go out into the deep.” Go out into the deep. You are fishers of men, so go out into the deep when you’re not making a good catch and there you will find the fish.

In preparation for the Synod, I attended listening sessions throughout the Archdiocese among you, the laity, religious, and clergy, and we asked three questions:

- What is the Archdiocese doing well?
- What is the Archdiocese doing not so well?
- What is the Archdiocese not doing that it should be doing?

And I encountered a whole range of responses, as you might imagine. Some responded as though the percentages I mentioned a moment ago didn’t exist. They’re oblivious to these changes.

Some wanted to preserve their own corner of the Archdiocese just as it is and let others cope with reality, with change. And still others were positive and thoughtful in searching for a way forward in the midst of today's realities. The results of these listening sessions formed the basis for further consultation and collaboration leading to the documentation and propositions that form the nucleus of your deliberations for the Synod.

And having been part of the process so far and having reflected now for a long time on my responsibilities in the context of the whole Church, my overall hopes for this Archdiocese are these: that we get out from under the buildings and even institutions of the past that no longer serve or further the Church's mission today; that we address boldly and realistically the things that weigh on the presbyterate and work to provide a way forward for the renewal of our priests, their pastoral care, their preaching, and celebration of the liturgy; that we transform those things that have been largely instructional about the faith into that which is transformational. Even the Devil knows the Catechism from cover to cover. That alone is not enough. It has to be transformational, that what we believe makes a difference, then, in how we live and what we do in our participation in the Church; that we rethink our structure to identify, encourage, and give scope for lay witness in parish life, not just tasks but witness. That's not something we Catholics are accustomed to, but we have to find some way to learn to do that, to give a witness, a testimony to others in our parish life; and finally, to restore Catholic devotional life as a very Catholic way of having a personal encounter with Christ, Our Lady, and the Saints. When Catholics hear "personal encounter with Christ" they think of fundamentalists, and it doesn't make sense. But if you talk about the tradition of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament where Christ is present, or the Rosary and devotions, and devotions to the Saints, those are the personal face of Christ, Mary and the Saints in the Catholic tradition, and I really believe that we need to restore that devotional life in a very healthy and evangelical way.

As for good stewardship, we're in a process of, as you know, right-sizing our parishes and their number so that they correspond to the people and clergy we actually have and not what used to be and is gone, with a view to a more vibrant parish life and to fulfilling our spiritual mission. Similarly, there's an ongoing major restructuring of the Central Service Offices and ministries of the Archdiocese itself to correspond to today's needs and realities, and to bring them together in a united effort with not so many independent entities operating in isolation.

Good stewardship in financial matters is also at work in these major changes at the parish level as well as the archdiocesan. Not only are our parishes disposing of properties that are no longer needed but so is the Archdiocese. Also with regard to temporalities, an audited financial report of the Archdiocese is now being published annually, and with the creation of the Hartford Bishops' Foundation, we have a major lay-led instrument for developing financial resources to strengthen parish life, lifelong education, Catholic Charities, and even future innovation. And the Foundation is also meant to be outward looking, to engage the wider community to be sure that the Church does not turn in on itself but remains a significant contributor to the common good of society.

I also have sought to be fully transparent about clerical sexual abuse, which has so grievously wounded the faith of so many: by the information that's been published for our Catholic people and the general public, by the steps that we've taken to identify offenders, to provide safe

environments for children and vulnerable adults, and to try to make amends in some way, however inadequate, for these crimes and sins.

Before concluding, let me say something that is absolutely essential, without which we would not be the Catholic Church founded by Jesus Christ. I am talking about the Profession of Faith that each of you made in order to be appointed as delegates to this body, and hopefully you have read the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* as well. A formal profession of faith is not a dead letter. It is inspired and upheld by the Holy Spirit in faithful hearts.

Saint Boniface, an Englishman who brought Christianity to what is now Germany in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and who was martyred there for the Faith, once wrote: “The truth can be wearied, but it cannot be overcome.” Today we are being hounded, and even persecuted, in the name of love, to abandon some of the most fundamental truths that come from faith and reason. These include the equal dignity and rights of every person for a lifetime from conception until natural death; the creation of the human person in two distinct but complementary sexes; and marriage as an exclusive, life-long union between one man and one woman, open to the procreation of children. These are just some of the God-given truths that are subject today either to oppressive, unjust and cynical violations, or to skepticism and scorn, radical questioning and rejection.

As members of the Church we must hold fast to the truths that the Church believes and teaches, while at the same time seeking, in the words of Pope Francis, to “accompany” those whose situations are not in accord with that teaching. Love without truth, and truth without love, are both distortions that degenerate into ideologies. Love and truth are at the heart of the Profession of Faith, and they are inseparably the only way forward for our Archdiocese.

A half-century ago the Second Vatican Council told us that the Church, “like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God” and that “by the power of the risen Lord she is given strength that she might, in patience and in love, overcome her sorrows and her challenges, both within herself and from without, and that she might reveal to the world, faithfully though darkly, the mystery of her Lord until, in the end, it will be manifested in full light” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 8). As an archdiocesan family of faith we too “press forward,” with our forebears to inspire us and the good of future generations to spur us on. May the work of the Synod be made fruitful by the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

**PART ONE:  
INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCLUDING REPORT**

*“I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”*

(Pope Francis – December 2, 2013)

With the preparation for and the experience of *Synod 2020: Grow as a Disciple of Jesus and Go Make Disciples*, our archdiocesan family of faith embarked upon a process of discernment. Invoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our clergy, religious and laity engaged in discussion and dialogue to identify today’s challenges and opportunities, and to discern a way forward for our local church as we look to the future of the Archdiocese of Hartford. How are we being called to grow, where are we being called to go and not go, and what is the Holy Spirit calling us to do? In short, this has been a time for us to better understand and recommit ourselves to our vocation to be missionary disciples of the Lord Jesus, whatever our state in life, sharing the gospel message in and through His Church to the ends of the earth.

Everything we are, everything we are called to be, is predicated on the fact that we are baptized. This means that we no longer belong to ourselves but to Christ as members of his body and bride, the Church. Baptism confers great gifts as well as responsibilities and duties, one of which is that we should make Christ known and loved in the world and bring others to join us in the communion of the Church, while also helping to strengthen the weak and call back the straying and the lost. What binds us together is not our race, ethnicity, culture or nationality, but rather our baptismal unity in the one Body of Christ. Our universal mission in the world is highlighted in the Sacrament of Confirmation. And every time we receive the Holy Eucharist we are fed on the Flesh and Blood of the One to whom we all belong, Jesus Himself. Armed with faith and sealed by the Holy Spirit, we go forth to live the unique mission entrusted to each one of us by God, never just on our own, but as members of a parish, a diocese and the universal Catholic Church. We are Christ’s sheep, and there is no such thing as a flock of one!

Today the Church, and religion in general, faces many serious challenges, not the least of which is a decline in numbers – the number of Catholics in our Archdiocese, of participation at Mass, of reception of the sacraments, of those entering the Sacrament of Marriage, the Priesthood and Religious life. We know, however, that this decline of membership or participation is not unique to the Catholic Church but is based on the culture of the world around us that continues to make choices that alienate people from God and from one another and that give them a false sense of what freedom and happiness are. In the words of Pope Francis: “The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer

felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the Risen Christ" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 2).

As today's Catholics in the Archdiocese of Hartford we have a choice of how to respond. We can ignore the realities of decline, live in ambiguity, oblivion or nostalgia for the past. We can choose to preserve our own little corner of the Archdiocese and let others cope with the realities, or we can be thoughtful, proactive and engaged as we search for a way forward in hope even in the midst of today's realities.

As members of the Body of Christ our response has to arise from the three great theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love. Faced with today's challenges to faith and its demanding application to life; to hope and the reality of eternal judgment; and to authentic self-sacrificing love, we must take up anew the challenge that Pope Saint John Paul the Great issued at the beginning of the Millennium, that we "go out into the deep" as Jesus commanded the Apostles (Lk 5:4), to make a great catch, not of fish but of people. Only in this proactive way can we be transformed from an Archdiocese that is managing decline into an Archdiocese that is boldly disrupting a decline, with a view to the future.

**PART TWO:  
THEMATIC PROPOSITIONS UNDERLYING THE WORK OF THE SYNOD**

**Theme I. Encountering Christ – Ongoing Conversion**

1. Our Catholic encounter with Christ is profoundly sacramental, and while there are many exceptions, the fact remains that all too often the celebration of Mass and the sacraments is impoverished by uninspiring homilies or music, for example, or by a lack of reverential understanding and engagement with the sacred mysteries.

— **We affirm** the need of our local church to reinvigorate divine worship in ways that make our sacramental encounter with Christ truly beautiful, reverent, and spiritually uplifting, so that we can be inspired to “grow and go.”

2. Sacramental worship has always been prepared for, prolonged, deepened and intensified by Scripture study, devotional life and popular piety. Today there is a reawakening in the church, especially among young people, of the value of Eucharistic Adoration, Marian devotions and the rosary, prayers to the saints and angels, pilgrimages and other sacramental and spiritual exercises.

— **We affirm** the need for our local church to offer and encourage opportunities for Scripture study and for devotional life, as well as spiritual reading, retreats, family prayer and other opportunities outside the liturgy for growth in the Faith.

3. Besides the sacraments and personal prayer and meditation, we also encounter Christ in other people, especially in those who, together with us, are members of the “household” of our family of faith. Lay movements devoted to spiritual growth and to evangelization remain an important element in the life of the Church.

— **We affirm** the need for our local church to encourage and invite church approved lay movements and organizations, both old and new, to carry out their mission and help them to recruit membership and to provide as much priestly service to them as our diminished number of priests allows.

**Theme II. Becoming Missionary Disciples**

1. Today there are many Catholics who may have been taught their religion, but who have never personally embraced the Gospel and its call to conversion and holiness. Rather than presuming that Catholics, even those at Mass, know, understand and fully accept the Faith...

— **We affirm** the need for our local church not to presume the faith of its members, but to proclaim always anew the basic gospel message “in season and out of season,” as Saint Paul says (2 Tim 4:2), of what God has done for us in Christ and how we are called to respond with faith, hope and love.



2. Sacramental preparation at all age levels is a privileged moment for those who will receive or participate directly in the celebration of a sacrament; Baptisms, Confirmations, First Penance and Holy Communion, and Marriages, in particular.

- **We affirm** the need for our local church to monitor current practices and programs, not only with regard to children, but also the preparation of adults who receive a sacrament or participate in some other capacity as parent, sponsor, etc.
- **We also affirm** the importance of unity in the administration of the sacraments by adherence to canonical norms, archdiocesan sacramental guidelines, and the use of the proper liturgical books.

3. At present, an evaluation is being made nationally of the RCIA program.

- **We affirm** the importance of that study for the Archdiocese and the need to ask ourselves why many people who are received into the Church do not remain when they no longer have the RCIA to support them.

4. Catholic schools in the Archdiocese face decreasing enrollments and financial shortfalls notwithstanding their proven educational excellence.

- **We affirm** the need of our local church to reinvigorate support for our schools among all the Catholic people, especially young parents, and to continue lobbying efforts to give Catholic parents and schools some fair share of financial assistance to continue an educational system that contributes to the public good so positively and effectively.

5. Marriage is a God-given “hinge” between the orders of nature and grace. In Christ it has the dignity of a sacrament, yet both the definition and the living of marriage and family life are in serious crisis in our society. Marriage is being postponed and even abandoned by many today as a state in life to which they can give themselves for life, without reservation, and with an openness to procreation.

- **We affirm** the need for our local church to make a greater and more effective outreach to provide for the pastoral needs of married couples and to equip the clergy and future clergy to minister effectively to those needs.

6. “The harvest is great; the laborers are few.” Today we face a serious shortage of clergy, which is not unique to the Catholic Church, and a shortage of women and men in religious life as well.

- **We affirm** the need for our local church not only to continue and enhance every effort at recruitment of future priests and religious, but also to address the fact that too many Catholic households lack enthusiasm for these vocations among their own family members.

7. The many challenges of today’s rapidly changing society calls for clergy who are well prepared to address the issues of the day with their people from the perspective of our Faith.

- **We affirm** the need for our local church to provide and even require more continuing education and formation by our priests and permanent deacons, notwithstanding the challenge of fewer clergy.

### **Theme III. Sent On Mission**

1. Those in our country who claim no religion (the “nones”) are now at about 23%. It is estimated that 50% of Catholic Millennials have left the church, 79% of them before the age of 23. Making use of the best research and the most effective remedies to address this crisis...

- **We affirm** the need of our local church to marshal its resources of time, talent and treasure at the archdiocesan, parochial, educational and catechetical levels to evangelize the “nones,” as well as win back all others who have fallen away from the practice of their faith.

2. Pope Francis challenges us to “missionary discipleship” on the “peripheries” where people often feel alienated, neglected or even rejected.

- **We affirm** the need for our local church to reach out to Catholics who are living together without being married and to the divorced and civilly re-married, to assure them that they are not excommunicated, to facilitate a canonical review of their previous marriage, and to engage them appropriately in parish life.

3. Today’s culture conditions people to think about our Catholic Church in terms of what she is *against*. The reality is that the Church proclaims from Scripture and tradition a path to well-being and happiness not only in eternity but in this life too. When it comes to the meaning of sex, the Church proclaims it to be something beautiful, good and powerful. However, its God-given meaning and purpose, which can be known by reason as well as faith, has to be respected.

- In today’s sexual revolution, **we affirm** the need of our local church to minister and offer effective pastoral care to those who experience same-sex attraction or other forms of sexual identity or expression that are not in keeping with what the Church believes and teaches.

4. In our increasingly polarized world, the church’s comprehensive teaching on social justice and peace should lead us to address, in a non-partisan way, the many troubling issues facing our nation and local communities, including the right to life from conception until natural death, health care, growing economic inequalities, addiction and substance abuse, racism, sexual exploitation and abuse, human trafficking, immigration, religious persecution and bigotry, war and environmental concerns, to name just a few.

- **We affirm** the ongoing need of our local church to mobilize consciences and to motivate the laity in particular to work for change through their sphere of influence in business, government and community life.

- **We also affirm** the importance of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as an essential element of Christian life and the need to teach and explain them as part of catechesis.

5. Being sent on a mission to bear witness to Christ and the Gospel, we need to maximize the potential of communications in the Archdiocese by coordinating our efforts and going to the “peripheries.”

— **We affirm** the need for our local church to communicate a message that is not just “informational” but “transformational,” that is to say, a message that helps transform lives and bring them to Christ, as a work of evangelization.

6. Although a homily at Mass properly belongs to an ordained minister, personal stories or testimonies of faith by individual laity or religious, married couples or young people are a powerful way of strengthening the faith of a parish and bringing people together.

— **We affirm** the need for parishes to find creative ways to bring this about at the end or after Mass or other appropriate times when the community is gathered.

#### **Theme IV. Collaborating in the Local Church**

1. “The one sure sign of life is growth.” And what is true of individual organisms is also true of the life of our local church in the Archdiocese of Hartford. And yes, growth is sometimes painful.

— **We affirm** the ongoing need of our local church in its organization and outlook to be equipped to respond to the changing landscape and challenges of life today in all its material, demographic, social, cultural and spiritual aspects, and to do so collaboratively in keeping with our Catholic faith, as it has been handed down and guided by the Holy Spirit.

2. The diversity and complementarity of parishes can be a good thing, but it can also take the form of “parochialism.” Like any “ism” this means that a parish turns in on itself and its own interests and survival, sometimes at any cost, without regard for the greater common good of the whole Catholic Church community.

— **We affirm** an ongoing need to broaden the vision of every parish to see itself as truly Catholic for the common good of the whole Archdiocese and all its parishes. Positively stated, this means that parishes should be encouraged to work together, rather than separately, when feasible, for school, religious education, RCIA, retreats, missions, and in the area of administration and purchasing.

3. “Catholic” means universal, and the Church embraces people of every nation, race, ethnicity and tongue. We are one family of faith, yet cultural and language differences can create misunderstandings, friction, alienation and division.

— **We affirm** the need for our local church to encourage and assist parishes with multi-ethnic or multi-racial memberships or diverse languages to learn how to respect one another and work together, giving each other the space they need, while forming one community of faith and often sharing a common church building and parish facilities.

4. Newly ordained priests today can expect to be named pastors relatively soon after ordination. Their theological and spiritual preparation is absolutely essential, but they also need training in parish administration, which includes the ability to supervise and delegate others and to work cooperatively with laity for the temporal and spiritual good of the parish.

— **We affirm** the need for our local church to do a better job at offering this kind of preparation, and given the shortage of clergy, also exploring other possibilities for administration by other qualified individuals, whether permanent deacons or laity.

5. At a time of diminished ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and increasing persecution of Christians and others throughout the world...

— **We affirm** the value of entering into dialogue with members of other churches and with other religions for the sake of the common good and out of love and respect for all others.

6. The Church continues to be deeply wounded by the sin and scandal of sexual abuse of minors by clergy.

— **We affirm** the need for absolute vigilance and cooperation at every level of the Archdiocese to ensure that the safe environment program that is in place will be faithfully and fully observed, and that no noncompliant individual, whether clergy, religious or laity, will be permitted to continue in ministry, employment or any other contact with the young.

7. Financial transparency is a requisite of good stewardship, together with the assurance that funds are handled and accounted for in a professional and secure way.

— **We affirm** the need at both the archdiocesan and parish levels to observe established policies and procedures and to publish annual reports.

**PART THREE:  
THEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNOD DELEGATES'  
RESPONSES TO THE PROPOSITIONS**

A synthetic “global perspective” of the major areas which emerged from the Synod, particularly vis-à-vis the working sessions of facilitators and delegates in the numerous small groups is key in discerning the way forward. Every group’s responses for each of the 25 propositions were recorded, collected and compiled into a single document by the Secretariat of the Synod Office. It should be mentioned that the comments in each section were marked by attitudes of openness, honesty and candor revealing a sincere hope to make positive contributions to the future life of the Archdiocese. An extensive and thorough review of its more than 100 pages has made it possible to identify key areas that reflect the “pulse” of the delegates, clergy and lay alike, around significant aspects of our shared life of faith in order to grow in our encounter with Christ and, in turn, to go and make disciples. The shared hope is that, in naming our strengths and targeting areas that call for improvement, the Archdiocese of Hartford will be in a position to embark on the process of transformation into “missionary discipleship” evidenced on the archdiocesan, local parish, family and individual levels.

The focus areas discussed herein were extracted in general fashion from the four themes chosen for the Synod: *Encountering Christ – Ongoing Conversion, Becoming Missionary Disciples, Sent on Mission, and Collaboration in the Local Church.*

## **I. LITURGY**

Sacramental and liturgical prayer is the primary, and indeed the essential encounter we have as believers with the living Person of Jesus Christ. The encounter is at one and the same time personal and communal. There is a direct and vital relationship between this faith encounter and liturgy. “Both have their source in the same event: Christ’s gift of himself in the Paschal Mystery” (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 34). The *Catechism* teaches that liturgy is “service in the name of and on behalf of the people” (n. 1069), a participation of the people in the work of God.

To be sure, there are many experiences of liturgy in our Archdiocese that are beautiful celebrations of our faith both individually and communally. At the same time, however, there is a sincere desire, articulated through multiple references to aspects of liturgy by Synod delegates, for a recommitment on the part of both clergy and laity alike to enhance and/or transform the quality of the liturgical experience in a comprehensive and consistent way. One emphasis is formational, that is, a re-catechesis across all levels, particularly with parishes and families, on what the sacred liturgy is and its essential and preeminent place in the life of a believer. Catechesis on what it means to participate in the liturgy is also essential. Personal interior preparation precedes exterior participation. The silent and prayerful recollection of one’s mind and heart is a necessary prelude to truly listening to God’s Word in Church, then receiving his Body and Blood

in Holy Communion before going forth to live according to what we have celebrated and received at Mass.

The other emphasis must be qualitative, that is, a greatly improved quality of liturgical practice in all its aspects. Specifically, five areas which consistently surfaced for consideration and improvement are: the homily, the music, the participation and engagement of the laity, cultural and intergenerational sensitivity and hospitality. While it is true that this onus falls first and foremost to those who are responsible for the preparation and arrangement of the liturgical celebrations on the archdiocesan and parish levels, a greater involvement of more of the faithful across generations and cultures is crucial and necessary.

With far fewer priests and fewer churchgoers, it is also no longer possible to sustain the multiplication of Masses simply for convenience with relatively few people in attendance. Quality not quantity is a legitimate consideration in these circumstances.

In the areas of liturgical formation and improved quality of the liturgical life, an Archdiocesan Office of Divine Worship needs to be reinvigorated and consideration given to the formation of a liturgical commission. Attention to the liturgy is meant to bring clergy and laity alike to a deeper and richer experience of divine worship as part of a revitalization of parish life.

## **II. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE**

For the majority of our Catholic population, marriage and family life are still the Christian state in life to which they have been called for life in the world and in the Church. Viewed from a faith perspective, the family constitutes a “domestic Church,” and it is there that the daily living out of the encounter with Christ largely occurs.

However, contemporary society increasingly challenges the truths that our faith holds to be foundational and most sacred when it comes to marriage and family. Ideologies contrary to family life are not new, yet the wide range of issues and varying ethical challenges that affect Catholic married couples and families today is undeniable. The concept of the “traditional family” is undergoing significant change. It is important to acknowledge the diverse forms that family life can take in the particular circumstances of individual homes, each of them with their own challenges, each seeking a welcoming community and ministerial outreach. Adoptive families, blended families, families with members challenged by mental or physical disabilities, foster families, and multi-racial families are all realities that call for our attention and pastoral outreach. The parishes in urban centers of the Archdiocese serve immigrant families in search of a new life who naturally find themselves caught between two cultures and, in many situations, two languages; these brothers and sisters are in need of assistance in adjusting to a new place and a new way of life. The ever-growing number of our children being raised in single-parent homes or a home where grandparents are the primary caregivers also begs an outreach of support and service.

In the circumstances of today the Church is also challenged by a civil redefinition of the very reality of marriage between one man and one woman and by the need to provide pastoral care to persons who self-identify sexually in ways that do not correspond to what the church believes

and teaches about the human person created as male or female. This presents an enormous challenge not only for persons in this situation, but also for society and the church, which has no desire to spurn them but rather to provide pastoral care and spiritual support even as she challenges them with her teaching.

### III. YOUTH

There was strong consensus among Synod delegates that the Archdiocese must do more to reach out to young people. Service opportunities were cited by many as a vital link that joins faith to the world in meaningful ways for young Catholics who have a desire to reach out to the less fortunate. Encouraging our youth to understand and accept that they share the pastoral role of the Church was seen by many delegates as a priority. The particular gifts and creative energies that characterize youth must be tapped and given the space and freedom to bear fruit in their own lives and in the lives of others. Along with their passion for service, youth participation in faith-sharing groups with peers emerged as a necessary outflow of faith formation. By providing more opportunities for young Catholics to come together in a context of faith, it is to be hoped that they will discover that there are others in their peer group who share the same desire for God, for discovering the meaning of life, and for discernment of their own life's purpose in the context of the Church's life and ministry. Parish youth groups are vital; they engage and give hope to the parishioners at large.

Admittedly, we have not done a good job in engaging cradle Catholics or new Catholics after Confirmation or upon graduation from a Catholic high school or university. The resurgence of the placement of archdiocesan clergy as Catholic chaplains on campuses is seen as an aid in bridging that gap. Meaningful outreach and programs for Catholics in their 20s and 30s, individually or as couples or in a group, was identified as an immediate priority. New lay led movements for young adults are very encouraging, but these efforts, of themselves, are not enough to attract and retain active Catholic young people in great numbers.

Interestingly, there were “mixed reviews” at the Synod on the concept of providing “Youth Masses.” Neither young people themselves nor the rest of the parish community wish to see the former separated in a way that can be simplistic. As Pope Francis stressed in his Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment in 2018: “Young Catholics are not merely on the receiving end of pastoral activity: they are living members of the one ecclesial body... They help to enrich what the Church is and not only what she does. They are her present and not only her future” (n. 54).

On all levels, our local church needs to re-envision youth ministry so that it reflects the invitation that this Synod is putting forth to all: to encounter Christ and to become missionary disciples. Again, Pope Francis pinpoints the direction for youth in our Church: “Youth ministry has to be synodal; it should involve a ‘journeying together’ that values ‘the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the church’s members, through a process of co-responsibility... Motivated by this spirit, we can move towards a participatory and co-responsible church, one capable of appreciating its own rich variety, gratefully accepting the contributions of the lay faithful, including young people... No one should be excluded or exclude themselves” (*Christus vivit*, n. 206).

#### **IV. CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

Catholic schools in our Archdiocese have a great product but must do more to make that known through public relations in the face of significant challenges on both the elementary and secondary school levels. Despite bold and creative initiatives under archdiocesan leadership, the model of “parochial school” that many still have in mind is becoming more and more challenging. In the face of economic and demographic realities, there is often resistance to change among current stakeholders. Not seeking alternative solutions in favor of maintaining the *status quo* is simply not tenable. Clustering and new and varied governance models need to be considered. Many factors surfaced in discussion around our Catholic schools because of the role that they have played and continue to play in the Church’s mission to evangelize.

To attribute the “woes” of the present situation to the lack of religious sisters teaching in the schools is simplistic at best. A greater, fact-based issue seems to be the location of our schools in relation to the location of the Catholic population in the Archdiocese, as well as the high cost of education relative to the past and the lack of significant support for parochial education by the State of Connecticut. Efforts need to continue and be intensified to persuade legislators on the state and national levels that parents are the first educators of their children and that state support for education should not exclude Catholic schools. Regarding the significant number of our non-Catholic students, the adage is true that “we serve students not because they are Catholic, but because we are.” However, the high percentages of non-Catholics in our Catholic schools is striking. Further, the age of many of our school buildings presents structural and maintenance issues. Well-funded or newly-renovated public schools and charter schools present formidable competition for Catholic schools. In the context of the parish school, the level of financial stress upon the parish challenges the call to responsible stewardship. In Catholic private schools within the Archdiocese, rising tuition costs and lower enrollments are realities that threaten the existence of some of these more traditionally modeled schools. Due to state economics, many families experience real difficulty in meeting tuition costs. It is logical to conclude that if Mass attendance is low, parish collections will be adversely affected and this, in turn, severely hampers the parish’s ability to continue to subsidize its parochial school. Also, the trend toward fewer Catholic marriages and a decline in the birthrate reduces the number of children for whom Catholic school may be an option. The efforts of leadership to explore and implement new models is recognized. Just as with parishes, so too the attempt to merge schools that are facing real struggles toward the creation of a stronger, regional model is only one of the creative approaches already being taken to address the issue. There is confidence in the value of the Catholic school and hope that there will still be viable and vital options moving forward, but this will occur only if parish communities are willing to honestly face all the factors already mentioned.

#### **V. EVANGELIZATION, CATECHESIS AND COMMUNICATION**

To evangelize is not just a task that we engage in from time to time nor is it the sole realm of those who are directly involved in the pastoral, educational or catechetical ministries within our Archdiocese. The message and experience of the Synod affirmed that evangelization is at the heart of the very identity of the Church. In fact, it is the very reason why we exist as Church. Evangelization is not about “imposing” but rather “proposing” the Person of Jesus Christ and a new way to live that is based on the love and the truth that He himself is.



One of the obstacles in our efforts towards evangelization stems from the difficulty that we have in relating to the very persons with whom we are trying to share the Gospel message. To be fruitful in our efforts, it was noted time and again that a clearly conceived, serious and well-organized strategy is a must. To be inclusive of everyone, it must also be able to be carried out in the language(s) of the people it seeks to evangelize, and it must take into account the spirituality and culture of those to whom it is directed. We must have a wide vision of those to whom the mission of the church is directed: people of various races, cultures, and languages; those who have left the Church, and those who may have been baptized but have never really been presented with the most fundamental “Good News” of who Jesus is and what he offers to those who “repent and believe.” It was widely acknowledged by the delegates that we cannot give what we do not have, or better, we cannot be credible witnesses to the reality of God’s love and our love for God, what God has spoken to us in His Word, in His sacraments, and in His Church, if our lives do not mirror this.

As a necessary corollary to evangelization, there was widespread agreement that a dynamic, effective and unified program of catechesis needs to be promoted across all of the parishes in the Archdiocese, one tailored to meet the needs of different groups. This will ensure that our youth, in particular, are educated in the faith by competent, skilled and accredited adult catechists. There is also much support around the idea of “catechesis of the family” so that re-education of parents in faith will become a cornerstone for a strengthening of the family unit within the context of our Catholic faith and the transmission of that faith.

In our evangelizing and catechetical efforts we cannot ignore the fact that new digital technologies offer unique and creative opportunities for our parochial and archdiocesan efforts. We are urged by Pope Francis to discover ways in which technology in general, and communications in particular, can assist in supporting a “culture of encounter” and assist in spreading the Good News. It is certainly true that the world of virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact. It is also true that technology cannot be a substitute for the sacramental and liturgical experience of the People of God. Yet, it is equally verifiable that the internet and others forms of social media provide complementary means toward creating connection and communicating our identity and mission to all who utilize digital media. The younger members of our parish communities challenge us to learn how to present our message in ways that they both seek and understand. As a local church, we will need to address how to best utilize the outlets of social and new media as new forms of communication and interaction and, most importantly, as meaningful strategies to further our outreach and effectiveness.

## **VI. PARISH LIFE AND VIABILITY**

Parishes remain the principal focus of Catholic life and practice within the Archdiocese of Hartford, but demographic and cultural changes create worry on the part of many parishioners for the future viability of the parish as they know it. Although the archdiocesan financial report that was shared with Synod delegates bears witness to responsible stewardship, the financial situation in many urban parishes remains an area of concern, especially when coupled with a decline in church attendance. The diversity of geographical location of parishes, their individual circumstances, the shortage of priests, the lack of religious sisters, the disengagement of younger Catholics post-Confirmation, property and facility needs, aging parish population, language and

cultural issues, lack of staff and a paucity of resources for outreach were all elements noted by delegates. In the face of these challenges an apathy can arise on one hand, or resistance to change on the other, among parishioners and clergy alike.

A number of national parishes erected to accommodate past generations of immigrants, or parishes erected to accommodate suburban growth, now no longer fulfill that purpose as parishioners have moved elsewhere or no longer participate in large numbers. Efforts need to continue to educate all members of the Archdiocese of Hartford in a transparent manner regarding the motivations and necessities of a pastoral planning process. Unfortunately, the “success stories” and the positive results that many have experienced are not the stories which have always had the loudest voice. To ensure a viable future for parish life in our local churches, restructuring will continue to be a necessity not merely so that a parish will survive, but that each parish will thrive. In summary, what does emerge in this area is the need to continue to educate and to invite each member of the local church to be more “catholic” and less “parochial.”

## **VII. CONCERN FOR PRIESTS**

Synod groups expressed both a love for and appreciation of their priests. In addition, a real concern for the wellbeing of the priests of the Archdiocese emerged from the discussion among delegates. The fact of the diminished number of priests coupled with the rising number of pastoral responsibilities facing the clergy today make it difficult for them to fulfill all their various roles. This reality was readily acknowledged. The pressing societal and cultural challenges spread existing clergy too thin, and this reality negatively impacts their personal health and may compromise both the effectiveness of their pastoral work and their preparation for liturgical and sacramental involvement. Consequently, there is an overarching acknowledgement and concern that our priests are not able to fulfill their primary role, that of guiding and leading the community, of meeting the sacramental and pastoral needs of the people. It was wisely noted that, while autonomous, parishes ought not to exist in isolation. No parish priest can fulfill his role in an isolated way. This underscores the necessity of building up a sense of fraternity among priests, which will provide them with a source of mutual support, ongoing priestly formation and vehicles for renewal and rejuvenation. A collaborative effort that grows out of mutual respect can and will yield better results for the priest, for the parish and for the priestly vocation itself. Cooperation and collaboration need to grow among priests of various parishes, between diocesan clergy and members of institutes of consecrated life and between the clergy and the laity.

The priest is not meant to do everything in the parish. Delegation of responsibilities to properly trained and committed people does not destroy a pastor’s proper authority or position, but only enhances it. The office of sanctifying, and the administration of the sacraments in particular, are the realm of the priest, assisted by deacons as appropriate. And ultimately the Pastor bears responsibility for seeing to it that parish life is faithful to church teaching and is organized and conducted according to universal and archdiocesan law, but not without the close collaboration of parishioners and other qualified laity. Many other aspects of parish life, whether in prayer, study, service, outreach or administration, can also rightly be entrusted to competent laity. This naturally presupposes that opportunities for formation and education be provided for the laity. It also presupposes the clergy’s willingness to collaborate fully with competent lay people and religious men and women.

The fact that recently ordained priests are being asked to assume the responsibility of a Pastorate highlights the value of promoting a mentoring relationship between older priests and younger ones, between senior priests and those who are actively engaged in pastoral ministry. It is hoped that a genuine rapport and fraternity among the clergy of our Archdiocese will be a source of great encouragement, joy and hope among the faithful who will seek to respond, in turn, in mutual support of our archdiocesan clergy.

## **VIII. VOCATIONS**

Vocations to ordained ministry and forms of consecrated life, or better the lack thereof, continues to be a serious concern. So is the reluctance of many young people today to get married and raise a family. A Christian state in life can be defined as one in which a baptized person makes a gift of himself or herself in marriage, priesthood or a form of consecrated life such as a religious sister or brother. Remaining “single” apart from these states of life presents the challenge of finding a way to live a gift of self in a stable and recognized way in keeping with one’s baptismal call. It is possible to do so, as many unmarried people have through the ages, but always with a view of loving God above all things and one’s neighbor as oneself.

What is needed is an effort focused on revivifying the notion of “vocation” in and of itself before specifying vocations to a life of service in the Church and the world. The belief that God loves each one so much as to gift each person with a particular plan, a personal “mission” that has everything to do with our happiness, is a conviction that in and of itself reaches beyond the comprehension and belief of most people in today’s world.

In the context of priesthood and consecrated religious life, especially, discussions at the Synod did not center on the reasons for the diminished numbers other than to make reference to a direct correlation between the “breakdown” of Catholic family life and a lack of vocations to service in the Church as a priest, deacon, brother or religious sister. Pope Saint John Paul the Great affirmed that “the family is the seedbed of vocations.” It is easy then to understand the parallel and the subsequent challenge to creating a “vocation-friendly environment” that assists families in teaching their children to discover the vocational pathway especially chosen for them by God, and never to discourage a call to priesthood or religious life among family members, especially children.

Turning attention to vocational awareness and vocation promotion to priestly and/or consecrated life, it seems that the prevalent attitude is that it is the business and responsibility of the Archdiocesan Vocation Office and not the individual parish. However, without coordinated, vigorous efforts in vocation promotion and outreach in the parishes, by local clergy and parish families, the chance of success is greatly diminished. To reverse the trend, parishes must take responsibility to foster a “culture of vocation” so that men and women of all ages may be assisted with the necessary resources and accompanied by a supportive and prayerful parish community as they discern and respond to God’s call.

Vocation is not just about “recruitment” of candidates to seminary to replace our aging archdiocesan clergy. Vocation is much more than this and must include a stronger message about Baptism as a call to embrace a way in life in which a person makes a gift of self to God and others,

including priesthood, of course, but also the promotion of Catholic marriage and family life, and an acknowledgement of the consecrated life as a viable option that is alive and well despite the paucity of numbers. Ample resources are available to assist parishes in priestly and consecrated life promotion; these resources should be accessible to everyone.

When it comes to the priesthood in particular, every parishioner needs to “ask the harvest master to send laborers into his harvest” (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2) and to accompany their fervent prayers with acts of sacrifice for vocations. They can invite and encourage worthy potential candidates to come forward and then continue to encourage them in their discernment of a potential vocation. Prayers for families and especially for parents are also encouraged so that they too can respond with generosity in support of a family member who is seriously discerning his or her vocation.

## **IX. A CHURCH THAT EMBRACES ALL RACES AND WELCOMES IMMIGRANTS**

In speaking of our Christian vocation to be “missionary disciples” Pope Francis emphasizes “accompaniment,” that is to say, walking with one another in a supportive way, especially when the one we are accompanying is suffering or in want spiritually, morally or materially.

Catholic social teaching calls all people of faith to stand with and speak for those without a voice in society, for those who have no home to call their own. Our brothers and sisters who have left their native countries and have settled among us deserve our attention and welcome, for they reveal to us the face of Christ in a particularly profound way.

Research has shown that the Catholic Church in the United States is one of the most culturally diverse institutions in the country, and it will become even more diverse in the future. Parishes, schools and colleges, hospitals, charities and other ministries need to adapt and prepare for this growing diversity.

Sociological studies also indicate that many of those who are most comfortable with growing diversity are those who immigrated to the United States, though African American Catholics are one of the most likely to say they welcome diversity in the parish and that diversity enriches parish life. Those who are descendants of previous waves of immigration from Europe appear to be the least comfortable with diversity and less willing to engage in parish life beyond attending Mass.

As part of our formation into “missionary discipleship,” we are called to accompany our immigrant brothers and sisters and also to learn from them the richness of their devotional spirituality and Catholic faith heritage. There are Catholic agencies under the auspices of the Archdiocese, as well as those privately funded and staffed by religious congregations, which offer valuable legal and health care services to our immigrant brothers and sisters. However, there is a need to raise awareness and understanding of Catholic social teaching in this area within our own Catholic community. There is hope that in doing so the dignity inherent in each person and the significant contributions of immigrants to our local church across generations will be more greatly recognized and appreciated.

Presently, the number of bilingual members of the clergy and religious is not enough to address the needs of these communities, particularly among the Hispanic/Latino, Haitian, Portuguese, African and Asian communities. Consequently, they are in danger of being underserved. The need for recruitment and/or invitation to religious communities to come into the Archdiocese to assist in this area was noted by the delegates.

The Synod met prior to the events that gave rise to deepening racial tension in our country in the aftermath of Mr. George Floyd’s death in Minnesota. Nevertheless, racial equality was an issue raised during the proceedings. For a very long time the Church in the United States, through the voice of the Bishops, has called attention to the sin of racism and the need we have to address it in our society and in our own Church. Their most recent appeal was made in 2018 in a document entitled *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call To Love, A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*.

Notwithstanding the progress that has been made since the last century, the pastoral letter notes “the deterioration of public discourse” and “the episodes of violence and animosity with racial and xenophobic overtones” that have re-emerged in American society in the last several years. Racism, the Bishops say, is what makes us see the “other” with suspicion or to attribute negative characteristics to an entire group of people.

One of the initiatives that arose from the pastoral letter was the promotion of a “culture of encounter” spoken of earlier in a different context. It called for parishioners of different races to come together to share their experiences of one another, especially the personal stories of Black Catholics. Sadly, the pandemic brought such meetings to a halt, but an initiative like this, together with others yet to be determined, cannot be ignored or allowed to end. Having an honest and courageous conversation can help to heal the wound of racism in our society and in the church.

Intercultural and racial concerns and enrichment remain the work of the Office for Faith and Culture of the Archdiocese of Hartford.

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Other topics also arose as part of the Synod. Noteworthy among them were the ongoing commitment to many important social justice issues, greater opportunities for the laity through lay associations and lay movements, and involvement in the continued process of restructuring currently underway in the Archdiocese. A serious and underlying concern remains the clergy sex abuse crisis in the Church at large. The Archbishop, together with other members of leadership and archdiocesan offices connected with these cases, have pledged themselves to handle them in accordance with both civil and church law and all the commitments that have been made by the Holy See in Rome and the Church in the United States for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, and to do so with the greatest amount of transparency possible.

## **PART FOUR: CONCLUSION**

The success of *Synod 2020*, for now, can be measured by the listening sessions and consultations that led up to it, and by the enthusiastic uplifting and joyful atmosphere that prevailed when the Synod actual was convened on October 25-27, 2019. It was an experience of what Pope Francis refers to as *synodality*, that is, ecclesial communion and shared responsibility. Participation in the liturgies and in presentations by the keynote speakers provided further opportunities for delegates and non-delegates alike to be included in the process and to see themselves as “agents of the positive.” For the hundreds of individuals, clergy and lay alike, who were privileged to be on the Synod Preparatory Commission or to serve as delegates, the total experience was one marked by openness, honesty, trust and a sincere belief that each one’s contribution would be heard and respected in a shared effort to discern the “signs of our times” with the help of the Holy Spirit in order to revitalize the Archdiocese of Hartford.

We are a pilgrim Church journeying together, on the road, on “the way,” with Christ, through Christ, and in Christ. All the People of God, the laity as well as the clergy, are “co-responsible” for the church’s life and mission. *Synod 2020* has summoned, guided and challenged us to listen to the Holy Spirit and to be agents for the transformation and future vitality of our Archdiocese by incorporating the principles of synodality outlined by Pope Francis. A Synod Commission or even the Archbishop himself does not bear the sole responsibility for discerning the way forward toward our goal. It is rather the responsibility of each parish community and each Catholic individual to respond with boldness and creativity, for it is our Baptism that calls us to fan the flame of our faith.

In reality the Synod only begins now that it is concluded inasmuch as what has been summarized here has to be brought to bear on the life of the Archdiocese, its parishes and institutions and the formation and Catholic life of the clergy and people. But the fruits of the Synod cannot be reduced only to organizational or bureaucratic measures. Those who participated in the Synod have to be given a voice on the local level of our parishes, schools and other institutions. Otherwise, the insights and enthusiasm generated by the Synod experience risks becoming a dead letter. So we entrust this work to the providence of our heavenly Father, the abiding presence of Christ the Church’s bridegroom, and the work of the Holy Spirit who by wind and fire leads the Church “into all the truth.”



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**MOST REVEREND LEONARD P. BLAIR**  
ARCHBISHOP OF HARTFORD

*On the Occasion of the Synod 2020 Closing Mass  
At the Oakdale Theatre – Wallingford, Connecticut  
Memorial of Blessed Michael McGivney – August 13, 2021*