



September 8, 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In October 2021, Pope Francis issued an invitation to the whole Church to gather and listen to the Holy Spirit in prayer, sharing, and discernment in preparation for the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. While a synod is a meeting, our Holy Father invited the Church into a process of "synodality," a way of being a Church that includes all the baptized in a humble search to understand what the Spirit is saying to us today. One of the goals of synodality is to find ways to connect the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, to people's everyday lives. All the information culled from this process has been summarized and shared with regions of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, an assembly of representatives from North America, and ultimately with the Synod on Synodality in Rome next year.

Many people of our local Church responded enthusiastically to the invitation to participate in listening sessions held through the Archdiocese earlier this year to aid in preparation for the Synod on Synodality 2023. Parishioners, whole families, marginalized persons, catechists, and many others expressed appreciation to Pope Francis for the opportunity to dialogue, discern, and be heard. Persons from many different cultures, age groups, and languages joined in small groups to pray together and listen to each other to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling us to "light for the world" and "salt for the earth. I regret that the Archdiocese could not arrange listening sessions with persons of other Christian churches and different religions.

As I reviewed the summary report, I found that many concerns had already been expressed by the members of this Archdiocese. These listening sessions, however, have opened a way to think concretely about how to address issues on the local level. So, whatever happens in Rome next year, we already have some valuable insights into our mission here. Moreover, the synodal process produced new experiences in online communications, social media, videotaping, and other digital platforms that have opened new missionary techniques for the Archdiocese.

Over 700 listening sessions were held; most were in-person gatherings while some were conducted online. About 33 parishes developed their own online surveys to attempt to reach a larger number of people who do not participate in parish life. Some 3,000 pages of reports were received in English and 1,500 pages in Spanish. In total, the voices of more than 15,000 people were heard. It is impressive that 200+ small groups that met in Spanish, gathered five times each, and some continue to meet today.

A summary of "what we heard" in these listening sessions is provided on our website. I urge you to read the full report. This will give you a better understanding of the gratitude and concerns expressed by diverse individuals and communities throughout the four counties of northern New Jersey that make up the Archdiocese of Newark.

Please join me in continued prayer for the success of the synodal process which Pope Francis has inaugurated. May our hearts be open to the grace of the Holy Spirit as we pray, listen, and discern together to walk the same road in the twenty-first century.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark