



The Church of St. Francis Xavier
A Jesuit Apostolate in New York City, USA • www.sfxavier.org

**Parish Report to the
Catholic Church Global Synod on Synodality
May 2022**

Founded in 1847, the Church of St. Francis Xavier is a Jesuit apostolate located in the Archdiocese of New York, USA, in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York City. We are a vibrant parish with a strong tradition of lay leadership and communal discernment. We embraced Pope Francis's convening of the Global Synod with enthusiasm: more than 200 parishioners gathered in small groups, taking part in 40 separate spiritual synodal conversations between February and April 2022. Parishioners from St. Francis Xavier also participated in the multi-parish synodal conversation held by the Archdiocese of New York on April 2, 2022.

Our parish's response to the Synod was Spirit-filled and deeply meaningful to those who took part. Some participated by attending a spiritual conversation; others participated in prayer and hopeful expressions support for the Church. Here we report on what unfolded in these spiritual conversations: the joys and obstacles of people's journeys with the Church, and how we heard the Holy Spirit prompting and challenging us as a parish and as a Church to improve the ways we are journeying together.

The Report in Brief

Members of the Xavier community, whether or not they participated in the spiritual conversations, frequently spoke with joy about the opportunity the Synod presents to Catholics in our parish and across the world. To be called together as the People of God – as Church – by the Pope to pray, talk, and listen to each other's experiences of God's Church was repeatedly described by members of our parish as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Participants in spiritual conversations named many graces that they felt flowing from listening to others express experiences, desires and pains that differ from their own. The grace most frequently described was of having their hearts opening in loving embrace. People spoke of yearning to hear the voices of Catholics from cultures and communities around the world who have been engaged in similar conversations as part of this "extraordinary" Synod. Finally, people spoke of perpetuating this gift from the Holy Spirit with the prayerful hope that Catholics around the world will see the Synod as the beginning of ongoing local and global conversations among the People of God.

The Xavier community sees a path forward in our journey with, and as, Church that is hope-filled and faithful to Christ's Gospel and God's Plan. The path is grounded in love and its actions are directed toward including all God's people and care for God's world in the coming of the Kingdom. The plan sees all baptized Christians as *alter Christus*, as St. Paul taught us: equal before God. And the plan calls on us to listen deeply for the commonalities that exist among us and all God's people in our local community and around the world.

About the Church of St. Francis Xavier

The St. Francis Xavier community is home to parishioners who are diverse in multiple ways, including generation, race and ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and gender identity. Many members of our community are people who were raised Catholic and with intentionality have returned to the Church after being away from a faith community for a number of years. Our most recent annual parish census conducted in December 2021 counted 843 people—including 120 people under the age 18—in 374 households. Of these households, 25 percent had at least one member who is a person of color (that is, identifying as Asian, Black, Latino, Native, or Other). As the COVID pandemic has receded, more parishioners have returned to the pews, bringing weekend Mass attendance closer to the 1,308 parishioners we counted in our last pre-pandemic census in 2019.

Faith formation at Xavier is manifold and robust. These opportunities include preparation for the sacraments; guidance in the Ignatian spiritual exercises and spiritual direction; our Family Faith program, catechism, and Youth Ministry providing religious education to those in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and their parents; our Lay Spirits spiritual formation program; Ignatian Spirituality in Everyday Life; and our Christian Life Community initiative.

The parish is committed to social justice in the tradition of Catholic social teaching, as reflected in our environment, immigration, peace and justice, racial justice, unemployment, and other social justice ministries as well as the Xavier Mission, which operates out of our church building providing food, clothing, and pathways to self-sufficiency for New Yorkers in need.

We have long been a welcome home to those on the margins of the Church. These sisters and brothers find community and solidarity in our ministries devoted to women in the Church, the Hispanic community, our LGBTQ communities, and people with disabilities.

Music and the arts are integral to our Masses and other liturgies. Parishioner ensembles include our choir, bell choir, musicians, and liturgical dancers.

Lay leadership of the parish includes our Pastoral Council, Finance Council, and the leadership of all ministries. Together we collaborate with our pastor and staff to envision and bring forth parish priorities in accordance with our parish mission statement:

The Church of St. Francis Xavier, a Roman Catholic parish in the Jesuit tradition, strives to be a prophetic, welcoming community, and an inclusive witness to the presence of Christ Jesus in our midst. Mindful of our utter reliance on God, and need for God's grace, we rejoice together in our celebration of the sacraments and proclamation of the Gospel. As a people of hope, we commit ourselves through prayerful and creative discernment to respond to God in our time by: being a respectful community where seekers and their questions are welcomed, where injustice is challenged, where the poor, the alienated and the marginalized find a home, and where people are refreshed, reconciled and renewed.

Our Participation in the Global Synod

Xavier's participation in the Synod adhered closely to the guidelines released by the Synod of Bishops, which called for spiritual conversations taking place among small groups of 6 to 8 persons led by a trained facilitator and recorded by a trained notetaker. In these sessions, devoted to active listening and speaking from the heart, participants shared the joys and obstacles they had encountered in their journeys with the church, and the ways the Holy Spirit might be prompting and challenging us as Church to improve the ways we are able to journey together. See our "Facilitator's Guide," "Notetaker's Guide" and "How to Host a Spiritual Conversation," attached to this document, for more details about how we conducted these conversations. Special recognition is due to Robert Choiniere, PhD., Director of Adult Formation, and Luz Marina Diaz, PhD., Director of Religious Education, for their tireless efforts to bring forth the Synod at Xavier.

We kicked off our participation in the Synod in February at our annual retreat held by parish servant leaders and pastoral staff. The 50 people gathered at the retreat took part in spiritual conversations, and thus became "trained" to serve as facilitators and notetakers themselves in subsequent synodal conversations. The Pastoral Council scheduled four parish-wide Zoom sessions for the Xavier community to participate, one of which was hosted by the Family Faith ministry and another by our Racial Justice Study Group. In addition, we encouraged all Xavier ministries and programs to conduct spiritual conversations of their own. The groups that held sessions included our Family Faith program, the Youth Ministry, our Catechism classes, and our Catholic Lesbians and Gay Catholics ministries. All told, 200 people took part in 40 synodal spiritual conversations. About a dozen participants were Catholics who do not live in New York City, and have been drawn to Xavier by our livestreamed weekend Masses that began during the COVID pandemic.

Joys in Our Journey as Church

Church as Communion with God

Many people described their experiences of being Catholic in terms of *communion*, in the sense of deeply sharing their relationship with God through many different experiences with others in the local and universal Catholic communities. Individuals described the experience of deep sharing of belief in Jesus Christ and His call to love as God loves us as abiding joy and the fulfillment of personhood when the person has been embraced in the Catholic community. This deep sharing of common belief in Jesus's gospel message happens when the community gathers for the Triduum services, periodic calls to Reconciliation and devotional practices such as the Rosary and Stations of the Cross. Ritual and the music and scripture that accompany ritual were repeatedly noted. This deep sharing also happens when ministries live out their Ignatian mission to find God in all things. This includes pursuing racial justice, expanding the parish's church art to include Catholic holy men and women from around the world, feeding and clothing those with no shelter, and myriad other ministries. People describe the sense of wholeness that emanates from these experiences as a profound moment of recognizing God's deep love for them.

Conversely, people described experiences in their lives when that yearning for deep sharing was rejected by Catholic communities and by the Catholic organizational church. Statements and actions taken in local parishes or at the diocesan or USCCB level, often by the priest or member of the hierarchy, were described as the source of bone-cutting pain, deep desolation and life-threatening alienation.

Church as Community, Being Known, and Support

When reflecting on their journeys with the Church, our synodal conversation participants overwhelmingly expressed the experience of a close-knit parish *community* as a source of joy. This sense of community was important for participants to feel supported in their lives and journey with God. As an active parish with many different ministries, connections and bonds are formed in places where parishioners find a place to use their gifts, connect with others in the parish and form meaningful relationships. Community bonds are made stronger by the fact that ministries' activities often overlap and people hailing from diverse backgrounds and bearing different gifts are able to share in their experience of serving God and each other.

For our participants, community and connection make their communion with God stronger. As one participant said, "The church has been a place where we can connect to the divine, connect to each other, and carry out God's work." And as one youth participant noted, "You don't just go to church to pray; you can do that at home. You go to get a sense of community." Community also engenders the comfort of being truly *known* to others: the sense that one's presence is valued and one's absence is noticed. One participant named this as yet another pathway to communion, because being known is a welcome reminder that they are also "known by Christ" and thus that they are "being called to communion with Christ." From our strong sense of community grows a desire to participate and *support* one another, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Support comes in many forms, including spiritual support. As one parishioner put it, "I appreciate having others to help me grow with my faith."

Church as Welcome, Authenticity, and Belonging

Many of our parishioners are Catholics who have returned to the Church after experiencing rejection by their faith communities of origin. Their discovery and experience of the *welcome* offered by Church of St. Francis Xavier was often named as a source of joy. Participants mentioned Xavier's sources of solidarity and support for those at the margins of the Church—particularly its lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) ministries—as elements of our parish that make it safe to be their *authentic* selves, as God sees them. People feel solidarity in the knowledge that this community is grounded in deep love of God and Church.

The joy of return was particularly poignant for those who recalled their experience of Church as *belonging* when they were children through rituals, traditions, sacraments and holidays. After many years of seeking, parishioners—whether "cradle Catholics," "returning Catholics," or hailing from other diverse spiritual backgrounds—expressed delight in finding such a welcome home. As one participant said, "I realized Xavier is where I belong and what I've been searching for."

Church as Universal as Expressed in the Sacraments and Rituals

As participants in our spiritual conversations reflected upon why they remain Catholic despite the considerable obstacles many have encountered in their journey with the Church, a theme that arose was an appreciation of the *universality* of the Catholic Church as the worldwide Body of Christ.

The foremost element of this universality was the joy of participating in Catholic Mass. Parishioners in particular often spoke of the beauty of Xavier's Triduum liturgy, calling it "moving," "exciting" and even "life-changing." The participants were enriched by the liturgy and found it to be life-giving, especially being able to pray with a wonderful music ministry and witness the joy of the liturgical dancers. A few mentioned how moving it is to witness the whole congregation washing each other's hands and feet on Holy Thursday. Others voiced their joy at witnessing catechists joining the Church as they are baptized and confirmed during our Easter Vigil service. This joy extended throughout the year, as participants expressed their wonder at experiencing the different liturgical seasons. They reported feeling closer to God and to each other during the Mass. The liturgy, and the peace encountered there, make living out the words "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life" a possibility for these participants.

In addition to profound devotion to the Eucharist, participants spoke of the importance of other *sacraments* in their lives. Some cited Reconciliation as a positive experience. Another participant spoke of the joy felt after their Confirmation, saying "I couldn't explain it but knew my life would never be the same."

Many said they found peace in the Church and its traditions and *rituals*. They expressed love for devotions, praying the Rosary, the Communion of Saints, and the Ignatian practices such as meditation and imaginative prayer. A related theme that arose was the stillness and beauty found in many of these rituals. Rituals that highlight the great mystery of the Divine have a sacred and vital beauty. The quietness of ritual allows one participant to "experience the Gospel." The stillness of church is hard to find in the business of everyday life, and is critical for an ongoing relationship with God.

Many participants spoke of the joy they experience in helping to bring forth liturgy, sacraments and rituals. Those who are liturgical ministers were grateful to be able to provide the Eucharist and proclaim the Word of God to their gathered community. As one participant put it, "being a eucharistic minister and liturgical minister, or distributing ashes on Ash Wednesday" is "a beautiful experience to share."

All of these joys are tied together by the universality of Catholic liturgies, sacraments, and rituals. Through them participants feel a connection with those well beyond the person who may be next to them in the pew: a connection with everyone in the worldwide Church. "I can go to the same Mass all over the world," said one participant, "and it feels like home."

Church as Religious Women and Men, and the Institutions to Which They Dedicate Their Lives

An overwhelming number of participants spoke lovingly and at length about the important role *religious women* and the Catholic schools those sisters ran played in their lives. Also recalled with great affection and respect were *religious men* – ordained and not – who taught and otherwise mentored the participants. The importance of these stories in the spiritual conversations must be recognized as formative of the faith and experiences of Church that the participants live out today.

Some adults expressed that having strong, positive experiences of Catholic community as a child was important for them when their faith and relationship to the church became strained in adulthood. Turning to the present day, many participants expressed gratitude for the Jesuit tradition, the Jesuit apostolates, and the priests and brothers of the Society of Jesus who have journeyed with us and encouraged our Xavier community.

Obstacles in Our Journey with Church

Church and Clericalism

Clericalism was named a major component, and for many the very heart, of the obstacles in our journey with and as Church. Participants defined clericalism as ordained clergy believing they have a right to the exercise of power and privilege, having the expectation of being not accountable to non-ordained persons, being dismissive of questions, and foreclosing discussion summarily when they “have had enough.” One person described clericalism as “a toxicity of power.” In the sacramental life of the Church, another person said that clericalism was a priest’s belief that the Mass “belonged” to him, rather than that he was the presider at a celebration made possible by the participation of all the people.

A separate note is warranted regarding the sin of clericalism that is at work in the Church structures that have protected predatory sex abusers, justified solutions that have enabled abuse to continue, and failed to take accountability and atone for the harm done. While many instances of abuse occurred in the past, clericalism’s role in the crisis continues to this day.

Participants named—and expressed gratitude for—the many priests who have earned the respect of their Catholic faith communities without resorting to the trappings that give rise to the clericalism critique. An antidote to clericalism is active and empowered lay involvement in the decision making of the Church and in parishes. Such a leadership paradigm – true servant leadership – enhances both ordained and lay vocations. Participants noted that the Xavier tradition, while far from perfect in this regard, strives for mutual, collaborative partnerships between the pastor and the lay-led Pastoral Council, Finance Council, and parish ministries, with all endeavoring to act together as servant leaders to the community.

Church and the Sex Abuse Crisis

There is no way to get around the never-ending *sex abuse crisis* as a major obstacle in Catholics' journey with Church. For many participants, it is a major source of doubt about their continuing participation in the Church. Participants expressed deep anger and utter revulsion. Many said that the crisis has made them feel "ashamed" to be Catholic.

People stated that the ongoing revelations of the breadth and depth of these abuses have a re-traumatizing effect on those who suffered abuse themselves, inflicting deep pain over and over. And they said that this deep pain is also inflicted on the body of the Church, deepened and kept fresh by the Church's inadequate response to the allegations and putting the institution's interests ahead of those who suffered abuse—a manifestation of clericalism. The Catholic Church's zealous (and ultimately unsuccessful) effort in recent years to stop passage of the New York Child Victims Act was named as a particularly egregious example of this behavior.

Going forward there is still hope that the Church will properly acknowledge these sins and apologize.

Church and Women

Many participants in our spiritual conversations—women and girls, and also men and boys—named the unwillingness to embrace *women* as full, equal participants in the life of the Church as an obstacle to their experience of the Church as manifesting the fullness of God's plan. Mentioned most often was the Church's explicit exclusion of women from the priesthood and diaconate, but participants also noted the marginalization of women in many other ways. One participant aptly called this the "containment of women," and many see this containment as the direct outgrowth of clericalism.

In spiritual conversations women and men expressed deep sadness and anger with the limits placed on women's service within the Church. Women reject the notion that their gifts are not valued in the Church in their exclusion from ordination and certain roles. One parent said in exasperation, "My daughter can be an astronaut or a doctor. But she can't give a homily at church." Another participant called the exclusion of women as priests and deacons—and the subsequent sacrifice of the insight derived from their lived experience—as a "deep loss for every practicing Catholic."

Xavier seeks to include all people in the life of the parish, and women currently lead most ministries and serve as catechists, as Pastoral Council members, the current chair of the Finance Committee and as Spiritual Directors. Women and men in our parish community remain faithful and hopeful that women will be fully included in the work of the Church and see ordination to the diaconate as a good next step.

Church and Exclusion of the Marginalized

A consistent obstacle that participants raised was the Church's *exclusion of the marginalized* including LGBTQ Catholics; people of color, especially African Americans; and people with disabilities.

When reflecting on the Church's exclusion of LGBTQ people one participant said, "if Christ were among us today, He would say to us: 'this isn't what I was telling you.'" Many LGBTQ participants shared stories of priests and other Church representatives trying, through words and deeds, to exclude them personally from God's embrace. They spoke of the deep and lasting harms—the fracture of identity—caused by feeling it might not be possible to be both queer and Catholic. Young people, parents, and members of gay families stated that the Church's stance on sexual and gender identity is hard to reconcile with God's embrace of all people.

In the United States, the Catholic Church has been complicit in our shameful history of racial exclusion and segregation. One participant shared a common story of attending a parish for years, never to be acknowledged or welcomed or known because of the color of her skin.

The sexism, homophobia, racism, ableism, that plague our society also plague our Church and parish communities. When we exclude, ignore, shame any members of the Body based on who they are, the harm is many-fold. It extends beyond the individual and their family to the community. Some participants who did not experience exclusion personally nevertheless said that that Church's record on judging and excluding people is a barrier to ongoing participation and affiliation. One person expressed, "I don't like to tell people that I'm Catholic, not because I am ashamed of what I believe, but because I'm afraid that they will then assume that I am racist and homophobic."

Participants said that the Church has an opportunity to become a place where those sins are confronted and healed rather than reinforced and upheld. They said that God sees and loves all of us and we are called in community to extend this same radical love to each other. For the Church - the Body of Christ - to thrive, the welcome extended to all God's people must be active and unconditional. Many participants said that the welcome and healing they have experienced at St. Francis Xavier have been life affirming.

Church and Judgment

“I wish the Church would lead with welcome and not with *judgment*.” A consistent theme present in the spiritual conversations was a hope that the Church would reconsider what participants felt was an undue prioritization and amplification of its teachings about sexuality, birth control, abortion and divorce. When we lead with shame and judgment, we do not welcome everyone as they are and as a result, raise an artificial barrier between people and God built upon our human sin and fear.

Participants wished Church leaders would give as much weight to other elements of Catholic social teaching, and bring into sharper focus the many good works performed by Catholics and Catholic institutions combating poverty, violence, and the death penalty, and striving for immigrant and environmental justice. One participant called these concerns “the urgent call of our time.” Pope Francis’ call for the Church to be at the margins in solidarity with the poor, the outcast, sick and imprisoned is not evident. “[They are] wasting so much discussion and time debating who belongs,” despaired one participant.

In this vein, a source of profound disappointment for many participants was the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which was seen as embracing words and actions that unduly politicize the Catholic Church and implicitly take a side in America’s ever-deepening partisan conflicts. With sadness, many saw the Church itself mimicking the polarized national political conversation and thus allowing itself to be exploited as a political weapon by elected officials. One participant proclaimed that the Holy Spirit calls us to “become a simpler, poorer Church that creates a space for friendship that is filled with trust.” Participants have concluded that, with too few exceptions, the nation’s Church hierarchy is not a prophetic witness to the Gospel message of love, forgiveness and inclusion.

Our Ministries’ Journeys with the Church

A number of individual Xavier ministries held synodal spiritual conversations focused on their own memberships. These conversations followed the same format as our parish-wide gatherings, with discussion turning naturally to the facets of journey with Church that were particular to these groups. Here we briefly report reflections and learnings from these conversations.

Family Faith

Xavier’s Family Faith program engages parents in their spiritual development as well as provides catechism classes for school-aged children from pre-K to Confirmation in 7th grade. The Family Faith program hosted multiple opportunities for parents and grandparents to participate in Synodal spiritual conversations.

During those conversations, parents expressed deep joy in sharing their faith traditions with their children and witnessing them develop their own spiritualities and contributions to the community. Parents expressed sadness and loneliness as older generations either pass away or leave the Catholic Church, fraying the familial ties that had connected them to the Church in the

past. Parents generally both appreciate the opportunity to connect as adults through Family Faith and are seeking and expecting more from the Church in terms of supporting parents and young people navigating the modern and rapidly evolving world around us. Some parents of older children expressed the experience that Confirmation in 7th grade is too early and that children at this age would benefit from continued participation in Family Faith programming to keep them engaged and learning, particularly since if they have siblings in the program they are already coming to the Family Faith mass with their families. Parents are also hopeful that Xavier's Youth Ministry, just a couple of years old, will thrive and attract and engage their children once they reach their teenage years. Other parents expressed a desire for Catholic Social Teaching and service to be more of an integrated part of the faith formation for our children.

Multiple parents expressed that the Church's teachings on human sexuality are more harmful than helpful. Parents are trying to help their children to develop into whole, healthy people and part of that includes a respectful understanding of sexuality rather than a shameful understanding of their bodies and sexuality. The sexism, homophobia and rigid rules around sexuality within the Church works against some of these goals and make messaging to their children complicated.

Parents expressed a desire for greater accessibility and inclusion. Parents of special-needs children hope for more acceptance and inclusion of their children in ministries and liturgy, even though they may not be able to be quiet for a full hour. Parents of school-aged children recognize the absence of parents of younger children from participation in the Family Faith ministry and hope for ways to include and support families with babies and toddlers. Parents generally expressed a desire to help programming be as accessible and welcoming as possible to all (including differently-abled, special needs, non-English speakers, and non-traditional families).

Young Catholics

Xavier encouraged participation in synodality conversations from our youngest parishioners—with discussions organized by age and grade level—ranging from kids in Pre-K to teens in our Youth Ministry.

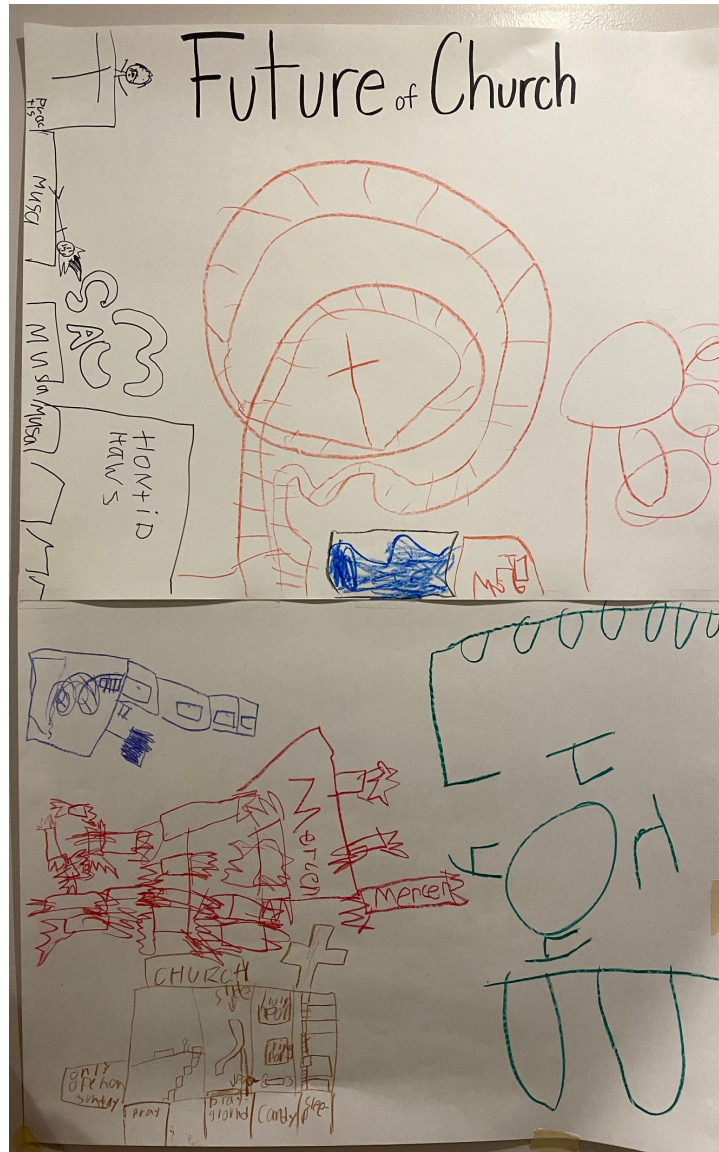
Common joys among all these groups were the community they feel in church, their catechism classes, the opportunity to experience peace and quiet in church, and the sacrament of Eucharist. Many children cited receiving their First Communion as an important and positive experience, while children who had not yet received First Communion were looking forward to the day they do.

Across all ages, Xavier young people struggled with participation in Mass. Many said it is “too long,” “boring,” and that they “don’t know what to do” or “don’t understand what the priest is saying.” The younger children said they do enjoy Mass when there is children’s Liturgy of the Word and the language is accessible to them. They also appreciate when the music is more lively or “upbeat,” and when there is liturgical dancing.

A few commented that the different liturgical seasons are exciting because they have more opportunities to participate in the liturgy (such as in Xavier's annual Christmas pageant). Some said they enjoy the art in the church, but would like a space to create and display their own sacred art throughout the liturgical year.

The older children were, the more they struggled with issues within the wider church. Many find the lack of welcome, inclusion, acceptance in the wider church an obstacle. One youth said, "I think people are using church to justify their lack of acceptance. I think we need to talk about homophobia. There are a lot of churches where I can see why people would feel scared." Some also said they feel like the church is sexist and not diverse enough.

Some expressed that they do not like nor understand why women cannot be priests and why priests cannot be married. Some older children were aware of the current tensions regarding the Latin mass and felt upset at it, feeling like there are people "splitting off" from the church. They also struggle with the hierarchy, power structures, and what they see as hypocrisy within the church. As one teen said, "There's a need for humility that we don't have at all, whether it's with the people who are in our churches or the people who are in positions of power. It is difficult for me to find myself going along with a lot of the things the Church says because it's so hypocritical."



Our young people's hopes for the future of the Church include a spirit of inclusion, more accessible liturgies and opportunities to participate, more space for spending time as a community and more community activities they can participate in, livelier music, and a diversification of church leadership. Our youngest conversation participants were encouraged to put their visions for the future of the Church on paper; one of these drawings is shown here. It depicts an ideal Church as a place for music, prayer, and (perhaps overly optimistically) candy.

Catholic Lesbians

Xavier's Catholic Lesbians ministry held a pair of synodal conversations among their members facilitated by Cristina Traina, PhD, who is the Avery Cardinal Dulles SJ Chair in Catholic Theology at Fordham University. The group's discussions focused on three themes: expanding participation in the worldwide synodal conversation; asking what is the right and just way for authority to function in all levels of the Church; and deliberating over the proper ecclesial process for discerning and deciding.

Participants expressed both fierce love for the Church and deep cynicism that the synodal process will yield decisions that are the true product of the Holy Spirit's movement among the faithful. They observed that preparations for the synod had been largely top-down and hierarchical, and that synodal efforts in many parts of the world—including the US—have fallen short of Pope Francis's vision for full participation of the laity.

Participants' vision for the Church included a call to return to "the spirit of Vatican II," affirming the *sensus fidelium*, the primacy of conscience, the communion of saints, and the priesthood of the baptized. They hope for and work for a decentralized, less hierarchical Church that draws wisdom from models of ministry in the early Church. They called for the ordination of women, married people, and others currently excluded to guarantee greater clerical familiarity with lay life and sense of accountability to laypeople.

The Catholic Lesbians have produced a report on its synodal conversations that the ministry intends to share directly with Pope Francis, Cardinal Dolan, and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. It is attached as an addendum to this report.

Gay Catholics

Xavier's Gay Catholics ministry held a rich and heartfelt synodal conversation that focused on the experience of joyous belonging to Catholic communities in youth, the pain of exclusion as they grew older and realized the Church rejected their authentic selves as gay men, and the contentment and delight of discovering Xavier as a welcome Catholic home. They discussed how Catholicism so often forces gay people to choose between their Catholic and gay identities, and how rare it is to encounter spaces where these elements of selves aren't "mutually exclusive." Several mentioned the spirit of renewal that accompanied Vatican II and what they feel is the Church's failure to deliver on its promise. Moving forward, participants said they hoped for a Church that was more inclusive on multiple dimensions, and that they were committed to helping to bring that inclusion forth both personally and institutionally.

Participants in the Archdiocesan Synod Conversation

The Archdiocese of New York hosted a series of multi-parish synod conversations organized according to the deanery to which each parish is assigned. Seven members of the Xavier community participated in the April 2, 2022 session held at the Church of Our Saviour.

The participants said that the day was an amazing opportunity for Catholics from the broad diversity that is New York to talk with each other about what it is to be Catholic. Each participant reported that listening deeply to others was a faith-filled experience. Sitting around a table, listening to experiences of Church and views different one from another created a desire to talk and listen more. During the session, as time passed understanding and appreciation, if not agreement, increased. In some instances, assumptions and misapprehensions reduced. A frequently expressed hope was to find ways to continue the conversations going forward.

The Path Forward in Continuing Our Journey as Church

For the Church

Stay open; keep listening. The invitation to participation that is the hallmark of this Synod on Synodality fills us with hope. The enthusiasm with which our Xavier community greeted the opportunity to engage in spiritual conversation is a sign of a deep hunger in our midst for dialogue, learning, and deep listening. We must continue to listen to the people of the Church, the Body of Christ. Engage the Church's people in discerning how to interpret what has been shared by Catholics worldwide and in determining how to move forward.

Lift up every valley. So many of our participants spoke of rejection and marginalization at the hands of the Church. Their sustained faith and faithfulness to the Church in the face of exclusion is a sign of the power of the Gospel's message of radical and inclusive love. A Church that truly embraced this message would focus on the law of love, not rules—and on embracing over shaming. It would invite the full and equal participation of women; end hurtful and alienating practices toward LGBTQ people; allow priests to marry; address racism and make reparations where they are due; dismantle ableism by finding ways to make participation more accessible to all; and change Church structures that oppress and fall short of the Gospel's call—all while raising the profile of Catholic social teaching and the justice work of the Church.

Make mountains low. We believe the Church is called to reflect the collaborative spirit of Synodality by dismantling the centuries-old systems of hierarchical decision making that are the signatures of clericalism. This means striving to rebalance the power shared by the ordained and the laity, and it also means welcoming and engaging with respect the questions that arise from the faithful in an increasingly secular and technical society. And quite specifically, it means addressing the wounds of the sex abuse crisis by acknowledging the harm done, requesting forgiveness, and making amends.

Embrace the encounter. The sacred encounter at the heart of each synodal spiritual conversation is a model of what Church is and can be. Arguably no religious denomination in America is more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, immigrant status, languages, politics, and other key characteristics than the Roman Catholic Church. Just like Jacob's well, our Church can be a place for us to encounter, engage, and ultimately embrace the Other as we draw up the living water of mutual recognition and understanding. Such a Church can celebrate the infinite possibilities in God's creation and be a desperately needed voice for holy unification instead of adding to the cacophony of secular polarization.

For the Church of St. Francis Xavier

All of the joys, obstacles and aspirations described in this report form the roadmap for the Xavier community's continuing journey as Church.

As a human community, we are flawed and so must strive to recognize our errors, call them out, and find ways to redress the harm we cause to each other, the community and the Body of Christ. We do this by listening deeply to others, rejecting the defensive urge to insulate ourselves from criticism and reflecting on our weaknesses. We actively seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Communion of Saints. And, with the grace that comes from our communal life in Church's sacraments and rituals, we seek to love as God intends for us to love God, our neighbor and ourselves.