



## The Church of St. Francis Xavier

A Jesuit Apostolate in New York City, USA - [www.sfxavier.org](http://www.sfxavier.org)

### Report to the Global Synod on Synodality, May 2024

The Church of St. Francis Xavier's response to the question "How can we be a synodal Church in mission?" is rooted in our experience that is different in several ways from that of many Catholic parishes in the United States. Across the country, parishes are shrinking or closing as the faithful leave the Church for myriad reasons. By contrast, a great number of our parishioners are people who left the Church but returned later in life because Xavier helped them rekindle their Catholic spirituality. This is in part because many of our parishioners—in particular, people of color, women, young people, and members of the LGBTQ+ community—have found Xavier to be a welcome home in ways that stand in contrast to their experiences of being ignored or rejected in many Catholic environments. Within this home, Catholics renew their devotion to traditional spiritual practices and commitment to the Gospel's imperative to love one another. Another element of our distinctiveness is that we walk with the Society of Jesus, which established our parish as an apostolate in 1847. Our parish life is thus infused with Jesuit practices and perspectives, including Ignatian spirituality and communal discernment.

As we did in the Synod's first phase, the Xavier community welcomed the opportunity to once again be part of a global Catholic dialogue. We held Conversations in the Spirit at our retreat of some 60 ministry leaders and parish staff in February 2024, and did so again at a parish-wide Town Hall with nearly 50 participants in April. All participants began with a shared understanding of three key terms—***synodality***, ***evangelization*** and ***mission***. As has been the case since the launch of the Global Synod, we interpreted ***synodality*** as **journeying together**. We embraced the meaning of ***evangelization*** as encouraged by Pope Francis: **the proclaiming of Christ's love** by the way we see others, what we do and how we do it. We grounded our interpretation of ***mission*** in the traditional sense of **putting faith into action**. In response to the Secretariat's invitation that each local Church "focus on those aspects that enable it to make a contribution in the light of its own situation, character and experience, sharing good practices," we considered together what Xavier does well with regard to synodality, evangelization, and mission, and how we can improve.

**Synodality: journeying together.** Xavier community members felt that the principle of journeying together is most evident in our parish's strong commitment to leadership by lay members of our community working in partnership with pastoral staff. This includes an active Pastoral Council whose members are selected entirely by parishioners and nearly two dozen lay-led ministries. Our Masses often feature reflections by lay members of our community. Parishioners work with pastoral staff to create and sustain initiatives that deepen our spiritual practices, including RCIA, spiritual direction and Ignatian spirituality programs, our Family Faith religious education program for children and their families, a

contemplative Mass, and book groups. Our fervor for journeying together has found particular form this year in our parish's embrace of the National Eucharistic Revival, which has featured well-attended events planned by a committee of lay leaders and pastoral staff.

It was our sense that efforts to journey together can be improved with continued prayerful discernment about how our communal decisions are made and carried out. This includes taking tender care in identifying the proper roles for parishioners, staff and ordained clergy in decision making with an awareness of the deleterious allure that clericalism can hold for all involved. It also means a commitment to opening up lay leadership to fresh voices and perspectives, particularly from those who are newer to the parish or not in inner circles.

**Evangelization: proclaiming Christ's love.** Xavier parishioners felt that we are most effective at evangelization when we offer radical welcome to all, meeting people where they are on their journeys with the Church. This includes liturgies that encourage engagement and participation, with a special role played by our vibrant music ministry. Radical welcome includes special Masses and liturgies recognizing Juneteenth, Dia de los Muertos, the Festival of Santo Niño, and other holy days—as well as our sanctuary with inclusive iconography of saints and other holy people of color—all with the goal of embracing the full diversity of the Body of Christ. Evangelization at Xavier takes place through a rich range of faith sharing activities that includes scripture discussion, study groups, Eucharistic devotion, and our Stations of the Cross, healing prayer and Rosary ministries.

We agreed that our efforts to proclaim Christ's love would be stronger if we committed to reaching outside our "bubble" of homogeneous perspectives arising from the similarities among us with regard to our views and values, geography, and social class. And we recognized that we could do much, much more to evangelize among the hundreds of people who join us remotely each week via our video livestream Mass seeking a welcoming home.

**Mission: putting faith into action.** With James, many at Xavier strive to live out the idea that "by works I will show you my faith" (James 2:18). The Xavier Mission—which provides meals, resources, and social support to New Yorkers—is housed in our church building, has the strong participation of parish volunteers, and is a priority for our charitable donations. Putting faith into action is also reflected in our parish's *Laudato Si'* Action Platform commitments on the environment, and in our ministries that address humanitarian needs in Honduras and India. Xavier manifests mission in places where Catholics are often absent with participation in our city's annual AIDS Walk and its LGBTQ Pride March, and other calls for social change on issues such as the climate crisis and racial justice.

It is our sense that our efforts at mission face the perennial challenge of establishing right relationships between those who help and those who are helped. This requires recognition and navigation of wide distances in privilege. We agreed that Xavier could do more to welcome the many people who have recently arrived in New York City after crossing our country's borders and to help address their many needs. We recognized that all of our mission work would be stronger with better communication and collaboration, both within our parish and with the many initiatives on these efforts around our city.