**The Eucharistic Congress and the Synod on Synodality**

*"One bread, one body, one Lord of all, one cup of blessing which we bless. And we, though many throughout the earth, we are one body in this one Lord.”*

Have you had a chance to read Beautiful Eucharist? If so, you may have noticed that several chapters point out that when we receive the Eucharist, we all become one--one spirit, one person with Christ.

The Diocesan Eucharistic Congress, September 29-30, is a phenomenal opportunity to come together as the body of Christ. This unity will provide a springboard for us to pray together in the coming weeks for the Synod---which will be starting the following week. As the hymn says, “*and we, though many, throughout the earth, are one body in this one Lord*.” As one body, we can pray with all other Catholics throughout the earth for the discernment happening at the Vatican.

October 4, 2023, marks a major event in our Church. The Synod of Bishops meets at the Vatican for a month-long assembly that includes lay delegates and theologians from all over the world. This is all unfolding now, right now, and we need to be praying for it. Where will it lead us? What is our role? Catholics from all over the globe have been participating for the past two years and we can join them now with our prayers of gratitude and support. Together as *one body.*

You may be thinking, I haven’t heard much about this; and asking, “What exactly is a Synod?” “Synod” comes from the Greek word “synodos” meaning, “an assembly.”

Synodality is the process of discernment of an assembly or council. “It means journeying together as the people of God.” (Pope Francis)

In 2021, the Holy Father initiated the process of synodality asking clergy, theologians, and Roman Catholic lay people all over the world to consider, “What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journey together?”

In Pope Francis’ words: “It is to be a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome, all listening together, all listening to the Holy Spirit, in the ‘Spirit of truth’ (John 14:17).”

In 2021-22, people in parishes and dioceses, in universities, convents, non-profits and seminaries around the world gathered in small groups, listened, and identified the questions and concerns people wanted to be considered for further discernment. We, in the Diocese of Madison, were a part of that consultation in February 2022. We were all invited to gather and discuss with each other and with Bishop Hying, “what we, in the Diocese of Madison, do well and what we need to improve upon.” A summary of that discussion was then sent to the USCCB Committee on Synodality.

In 2022, the planning document, “Enlarge the Space of Your Tent” was published by the Vatican at the conclusion of the global diocesan listening phase in preparation for the seven continental assemblies.

In April 2023, our Holy Father directed that lay persons be selected to be included in the Synod of Bishops as full participants with voting rights. The July 13th Catholic Herald had an article about who these delegates are.

On June 20th, the Vatican released the planning document that will guide the October assembly in Rome. The recommendations of the delegates at the conclusion of the Synod will undergo further discernment at the final assembly in 2024 with the purpose of advising the Holy Father.

Over the last two-years, articles in both the National Catholic Register and the National Catholic Reporter, were pointing to these groundbreaking gatherings as the most important since Vatican II in 1962-65.

*What does the recently published 60-page guide for the Synod tell us, and why does it matter?*

First, the document addresses the Holy Father’s vision of a more inclusive and listening Church. It identifies the themes for discussion.

**Communion:** *How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all of humanity?*

**Mission:** *How can we better share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?*

**Participation:** *How can we participate in the governance and authority of the universal church?*

Second, it provides the framework and specific questions for small group dialogue at the Vatican in October 2023.

*What are concrete steps to welcome those who feel excluded from the Church?*

*What is the possibility of women deacons, priesthood for married men in special circumstances?*

*What is the possibility of penance for sexual abuse and abuse of power?*

*How might the Catholic Church transform and expand its structures to become more welcoming to all its members?*

*What is our view of Church governance and decision making? How might we participate under new guidelines?*

**Conclusion**

Why does the Synod matter? It matters because it’s our Church. Our Holy Father has given us a stake. We, the laity along with the clergy, have a voice at the table. Our voices matter, even and maybe especially in prayer right now. *“We are one body in this one Lord.”*

Let us remember the Holy Father’s vision: a more inclusive and listening Church, universal/catholic to our very core. We are that Church. Let us pray during this very important time. The Holy Father is leading us. “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful, enkindle in us the power of thy love.”

Together, the Synod and our own Diocesan Eucharistic Congress, are ways in which the Holy Spirit is quickening us. Let us respond--as individuals and as *one body*--with humility and prayer.