Last year, Archbishop Bernard Hebda called for the archdiocese to embrace becoming a ‘listening Church’ in preparation for an archdiocesan Synod. From September 2019 to March 2020, thousands of Catholics shared what was on their hearts and minds when it comes to their parishes and the Church, and listened to what others had to say. Archbishop Hebda listened, too, and also tasked a team to code and analyze the information received. After prayerful discernment and consultation, the archbishop has determined which topics deserve a deeper dive as the local Church looks to its future.

At the beginning of May, I shared with you that I was poring over the input that had been gathered at the 2019-2020 Pre-Synod Prayer and Listening Events and through the Disciple Maker Index survey. Not surprisingly, your feedback was superb and really insightful. Thank you! I was happy to learn that so many of you share my assessment that there are many indicators of vibrancy in our archdiocese, but we could be strengthened and enriched by a Synod process that would intensively address a limited number of targeted areas.

Having reviewed your comments, I am now pleased to announce that the 2022 Archdiocesan Synod will focus on three areas: 1) Forming parishes that are in the service of evangelization; 2) Forming missionary disciples who know Jesus’ love and respond to his call; and 3) Forming youth and young adults in and for a Church that is always young.

For those of you who participated in the Synod prayer and listening events, the three focus areas chosen should not be surprising: We heard those three broad themes as priorities time and again. There was an awareness that we would be a stronger Church if we would focus our time and attention on these three areas in the next five years, giving us a foundation for addressing more vigorously some of the other areas of concern that surfaced at the prayer and listening events.

— Archbishop Bernard Hebda
**Focus areas: A deeper dive**

Archbishop Hebda is particularly looking forward to hearing responses to the following questions.

1. **Forming parishes that are at the service of evangelization.**
   
   **1. Welcoming parishes**
   
   What can we do to make parishes more welcoming and accessible? Are there those who feel excluded from parish life or are afraid to attend them? What have we learned from livestreaming parish events to build inclusion?

   **2. Collaboration in parish ministry**
   
   How can we promote a greater sense of ownership of parish activities? How do we call forth the gifts that God has given to strengthen our parishes? How should parishioners be involved in setting a vision for the parish? How does a parish regularly assess its performance? How can a community provide for continuity when clergy and staff regularly change?

2. **Liturgy and the Sunday experience**
   
   What needs to happen for Sunday liturgies to more completely satisfy spiritual needs and send us forth for service? How should we address the needs of multicultural, multilingual communities at Mass? Are there ways to create an Archdiocesan liturgical identity so that we feel at home in any one of our parishes? What would be important components of that identity?

3. **Parishes as “central driving force” of evangelization**
   
   How do we foster the “pastoral conversion” of parishes to more fully serve the Church’s evangelizing mission? How can parishes train parishioners to be evangelizers, especially in homes and neighborhoods? What are parish practices that have worked in bringing Catholics back to the Church or in attracting new members?

4. **Bringing the implications of the Gospel into our communities**
   
   How can parishes be instruments of Christ’s healing? How do we transform parishes to be attentive to the needs of others and to engage in the work of justice and racial equality?
How we got here

Standing in front of hundreds of Catholics in St. Peter in Mendota in June 2019, Archbishop Bernard Hebda prayed for the Holy Spirit to guide the Synod process, he’s the Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis. “I look at our local Church and see it crying out to be molded, to be renewed, to be transformed,” he said. “I’m confident that that’s the Lord’s desire for us. I’m confident that he will send his Holy Spirit upon us if we ask him.”

That Mass officially launched a multi-year Synod process designed to involve every Catholic in the archdiocese. A few months later, at St. Victoria in Victoria, Archbishop Hebda and a team of volunteers and archdiocesan staff kicked off the first of 19 Prayer and Listening Events for the general population of Catholics in the archdiocese.

Over the course of seven months, more than 8,000 Catholics gathered together across the archdiocese to reflect on what is working well in the archdiocese, and what pastoral challenges and opportunities lie ahead. Archbishop Hebda attended each of these three-hour events, and Auxiliary Bishop Andrew Cozzens, chair of the Synod Executive Committee, said that he was impressed by participants’ engagement and the depth of passion they expressed. He feared that the sessions might feel like a political caucus, but was heartened that instead it was a forum for people to share on a deep level the desires for their faith and the life of the local Church, he said.

The reason for that is prayer, Bishop Cozzens said. “All along, the goal of the Synod process is to let the Holy Spirit lead,” he said, “and since we wanted the Holy Spirit to lead, we knew that we needed to give the opportunity to the Holy Spirit to lead us. And so that meant providing a chance for people to listen to the Holy Spirit. And so many people did comment on the beauty of that prayer time, and they were surprised how beautiful it was that the Holy Spirit did show up when we gave them time to pray.”

On May 31, Archbishop Hebda celebrated Pentecost Mass at the Cathedral of St. Paul, the first public Mass he celebrated after public worship resumed in Minnesota during the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that it felt “just like yesterday” that he had celebrated last year’s Pentecost Mass in Mendota opening the pre-Synod process.

“We give ourselves to the Holy Spirit this evening,” the archbishop said at this year’s Mass, “that he might use us to do great things in this local Church.”

— Maria Wering
The prayer and listening events wrapped up just as Minnesota’s officials were addressing the spread of the novel coronavirus in the state. Due to pandemic-related restrictions and uncertainty around in-person gatherings, Synod leaders decided in April to recognize this as the Synod process and extend the timeline by a year. Instead of culminating in a Synod Assembly weekend in spring 2021, as originally planned, that event will be held in June 2022, with Archbishop Bernard Hebda planning to release a pastoral plan informed by the Synod later that year.

The extended timeline allows for the Synod to unfold in three phases: the first year (2019/2020) being The Church Listens; this upcoming year (2020-2021) being The Church Preparers; and the third year (2021-2022) being The Church Engages.

In this upcoming year of preparation, the Synod team is offering two series in the fall, and one in the winter/spring. The series will start in September with a five-week virtual series on praying with Scripture taught by Archbishop Hebda and Bishop Andrew Cozzens, followed by a five-week virtual retreat beginning in October on healing and hope (see sidebar). The catechetical series this winter is designed to engage important topics that surfaced during the Prayer and Listening Events, including the dignity of women, sexuality and the family, and the nature of the priesthood. The Synod at Home initiative during Lent 2021 will engage individuals, couples and families in a Synod process for their lives. The year will close with live events in the spring (assuming they are safe) on the focus areas.

Archdiocesan leaders acknowledge that people’s lives — and, for many, their relationship to their parish and Church — have changed during the pandemic. While the pandemic required Synod leaders to extend the process, Father Joseph Bambenek, the Synod’s assistant director, sees the new timeline as a blessing in disguise, “one of many ways in which the Holy Spirit has taken our plans and made them better.”

“This year of preparation will allow us to be even more open to how the Holy Spirit wants to work through the process,” he said. “The biggest downside is that the archbishop and all of us involved are looking forward to the implementation of what comes out of the Synod to address the situation the Church faces. The process is important, but the ultimate fruit is what will determine the success or not of the Synod. So the year delay means a year delay in reaping the fruit.” Theres Coons, Synod director, hopes people who participated in the Prayer and Listening Events feel inspired to continue their involvement with the Synod process. “The success in meeting the goal of the Synod — to set Church teaching priorities in the focus areas — depends on the faithful being engaged and sharing their wisdom,” she said.

“The Prayer and Listening Events were a first step, and an important step, but there are more important steps in the process that will benefit from (Catholics’ involvement),” Coons added. “We hope they participate in the Year 2 opportunities. Most importantly, we hope they join in the small group discussions that inform the parish fall 2021 in the Parish Consultation Process.”

The Parish Consultation with Small Group Process will take place in the fall of 2021 and consist of parish-based small groups diving deeper into the focus areas. Archbishop Hebda has just announced. Even though that process is a year away, Father Bambenek encourages Catholics to begin praying about the focus areas now, observing how their own parish currently engages the topics, and discerning what best practices might look like.

Prior to the Parish Consultation Process, some parish representatives will gather in January or February within their deaneries — a geographic grouping of parishes — to discuss the focus areas. Trained facilitators and scribes will assist those small group discussions, which will inform the Parish Consultation Process later in the year, Coons said.

The Parish Consultation Process will then inform the Synod Assembly, which will take place with about 500 participants Pentecost weekend, June 3-5, 2022.

“A very important part of the Synod — why the archbishop has chosen to chart the path ahead through this vehicle — is that he believes in the importance of being a Listening Church, following the lead of our Holy Father, Pope Francis,” Father Bambenek said. “That has not always been the leadership style in the archdiocese, and it takes time to grow in skill and even in the trust necessary for Year 3 and beyond to be fruitful.”

“The ultimate goal of the Synod,” he added, “is to help us as God’s people grow in unity in Christ and to develop a spiritual strategic plan to more vigorously proclaim the Gospel in our place and time.” — Maria Wiering

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE SERIES • SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2020**

This five-part virtual series on praying with Scripture will offer practical tools for growing in holiness, drawing upon the rich tradition of the Catholic Church. Archbishop Hebda and Bishop Cozzens will teach the fundamentals of praying with Scripture and explain how to use a Prayer Companion resource to enrich your prayer experience. Participants can watch at their convenience with family, friends or on their own. This series begins Sept. 12.

**HEALING AND HOPE SERIES • OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2020**

This five-part virtual retreat will ground each person in his or her fundamental identity as a beloved child of God. Yet, each person has experienced wounds that bind. This retreat will explore how to unbind these wounds through the intercession of Our Lady, Undoer of Knots, and open these wounds to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The aim is for participants to better understand how encountering Jesus’ love and mercy brings healing and hope. This series begins Oct. 18.

**FAITH AND CULTURE SERIES • JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2021**

Inspired by the thousands of participants at the Prayer and Listening Events, this series will connect their stories to the story of the Church. It will explore:

- The sources of Catholic teaching (Scripture, tradition and magisterium)
- The Church’s teaching on sexuality and the family
- The Church’s understanding of the dignity of women
- The priesthood (both the baptized and ordained)

**SYNOD AT HOME: GROWING IN FAITH TOGETHER • LENT 2021**

In the Synod process, the Church is taking time to listen to one another, pray and discuss in order to determine priorities. These steps are important for every home, too. The Synod at Home will give local Catholics the structure and tools for walking through this process together. Individuals, couples and families will find their faith and relationships strengthened by this Synod at Home.

**Volunteer-driven process**

Behind the scenes of the past and upcoming pre-Synod events are dedicated staff and hundreds of volunteers who have generously given their time to ensure each phase of the process runs smoothly and achieves its goal.

**SYNOD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Nineteen people serve on the Synod Executive Committee. Bishop Andrew Cozzens serves as the committee’s chair. Visit archspm.org/synod to see the full Executive Committee membership.

**SYNOD PRAYER TEAM**

Twenty-six people who have committed significant time in prayer praying for the Holy Spirit to guide participants, the Executive Committee and Archbishop Hebda, as well as for the local Church.

**PARISH AMBASSADORS**

Catholics who represent each parish and are trained to understand the Synod process so they can assist their pastor and fellow parishioners through phase. Last year, members of the Synod executive team held 13 live trainings, attended by approximately 1,800 ambassadors.

**PRAYER AND LISTENING EVENT VOLUNTEERS**

Numerous individuals and groups who assisted in the work of the first year Prayer and Listening events. At each of the 19 open Prayer and Listening events, a team of about 20 volunteers from various groups across the archdiocese staffed the events. Others translated feedback into English and entered the feedback into an Excel spreadsheet so it could be analyzed by the Data Analysis team.

**DMI PARISH POINT PEOPLE**

One pastor-appointed parishioner served as the information and communications hub regarding the Disciple Maker Index, a 70-question survey that was administered in each parish in February 2020. The Point People are now collaborating with parish leaders to understand and communicate their individual parish’s results.

**PARISH DEANERY REPRESENTATIVES**

Up to 10 pastor-appointed parishioners who will represent their parish at the Deanery Consultation in 2021.

**PARISH SMALL GROUP PROCESS MANAGERS**

Two people who, in collaboration with their pastor, will manage the small group process at their parish fall 2021.

**SYNOD ASSEMBLY MEMBERS**

Two pastor-nominated parishioners who will represent their parish at the Synod Assembly June 2022.

**FACILITATORS AND SCRIBES**

Parishioners who are trained to facilitate and provide feedback at parishes during the Parish Consultation with Small Group process. Another team of trained facilitators and scribes will assist with table discussion at the Deanery Consultation and Synod Assembly.

**PRAYING AT A GLANCE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Synods are gatherings of Church leaders to address major topics in the Church. The best-known form of this is the Synod of Bishops, a meeting of bishops from around the world to discern a topic, such as the recent synods in Rome in 2014 and 2015, young people in 2018. On the diocesan level, a Synod is a coming together of the local Church, and they’re intended to be held on a regular basis. Even though diocesan synods have a long history in the Church, the archdiocese of St. Paul has not held a synod since the late 1930s. Last year, Archbishop Bernard Hebda called for an archdiocesan Synod to help him discern and address the most pressing needs of the local Church. He stressed his desire for the archdiocese to be a “listening Church” — to hear and respond to the needs of the faithful — and the responsibility of the faithful to share their needs with their bishops. He appointed a Synod Executive Team, which developed a multi-year pre-Synod process leading up to the Synod Assembly, planned for Pentecost weekend, June 3-5, 2022. Then Archbishop Hebda will prepare a pastoral plan for the archdiocese, which he expects to release Nov. 20, 2022, the feast of Christ the King. The Synod Assembly will include about 500 representatives, the pre-synod process seeks to engage the entire local Church. Already, more than 8,000 Catholics participated in the Prayer and Listening Events held September 19 to March 2020, and more opportunities lie ahead for Catholics to continue their involvement or get involved in the pre-Synod process, especially the parish consultation process, which will take place through small groups in the fall of 2021. Learn more at archspm.org/synod.

**PRAYER AND LISTENING EVENTS SITES**

St. Victoria, Victoria • St. Michael, St. Michael • Guardian Angels, Oakdale • Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Paul • St. Peter, Forest Lake • Divine Mercy, Faribault • St. Wenceslaus, New Prague • All Saints, Lakeville • St. Anne-St. Joseph Hien, Minneapolis • Holy Cross, Minneapolis • St. Peter Claver, St. Paul • Pax Christi, Eden Prairie • St. Stephen, Minneapolis • Providence Academy, Plymouth • Lumen Christi, St. Paul • St. Stephen, Anoka • Our Lady of Grace, Edina • St. Pius V, Cannon Falls • Transfiguration, Oakdale