

**The Paulist Center Community**  
**5 Park Street**  
**Boston, MA**

The Paulist Center Community held twelve listening sessions to encourage and include as many voices as possible, with a special emphasis on reaching those whose voices might not always be heard. These included: 5 sessions held after-Masses, over two weekends; 3 weekday evening sessions via Zoom; and 4 small-group sessions, including our LGBTQ+ministry, the Struggling to Stay Catholic Group, Worship Committee, and Staff.

In these sessions, participants were asked to respond to the following question, taken from the “Vademecum” (Latin for “Come with me”), Appendix C:

*A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in the Paulist Center Community? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?*

*In responding, we are invited to reflection:*

- *Recall our experiences: What experiences of the Paulist Center Community does this question call to mind?*
- *Re-read these experiences in greater depth: What joys did they bring? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds did they reveal? What insights have they elicited?*
- *Gather the fruits to share: Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound? What is the Spirit asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our community?*

*Listening often involves listening across borders. How can we listen better:*  
*... in our conversations?*  
*...in our families?*  
*... in the Paulist Center Community*  
*... in our archdiocese?*  
*... in the global Church?*

The following notes and excerpts highlight themes and individual thoughts from these sessions. The majority of comments focused on what participants have experienced within our specific faith community - how the Paulist Center community journeys well together - as a framework for how the Catholic Church at large can grow together in listening and faith.

## WAYS THAT THE PAULIST CENTER COMMUNITY JOURNEYS WELL TOGETHER:

### COMMUNITY

- “How we “do good” together:
  - We love one another well
  - We tend to one another (before Mass, after Mass) and show up for one another. You can see the blessing of how we care for one another.
  - This community brings joy—one-on-one. We *care* about those next to us—those we know, and greeting visitors.”
- “Such a genuine place - authenticity is key to making it relevant.”
- “The Paulist Center Community is truly a Eucharistic church.”
- “At the Paulist Center, there are “people who know your name” – and in our lives outside the walls of the PCC, it is hard to be known. There is something so valuable about being connected.”
- ‘Bearing witness’ to each other’s existence - this doesn’t always happen in other aspects of our life. There is a shared sense of the sacred present here.”
- The Paulist Center Community asks, “What is it about Jesus that brings us together?”
- “The world doesn’t think about the things we think about in this community.”
- “Groups have emerged to help community members through difficult times – community members journeying together. (Rosary Group is one example.)”

### WELCOMING:

- “The Paulist Center is welcoming to all; the social vision of the work draws people.”
- “The Paulist Center responds the way Christ would: by including people.”
- “The Paulist Center presents an option for people who may have been hurt by or are uninterested in other churches.”

### FAITH IN ACTION

- “The Paulist Center allows one to put one’s faith in action: Walk for Hunger, Wednesday Night Supper Club, Racial Justice Advocacy Group, LGBTQ+ Ministry, to name just a few.”
- “This community encourages us to commit ourselves to our baptismal Mission, and to ask ourselves, “Am I contributing to the Church’s living out of that mission?”
- “For me, what the Paulist Center has done in terms of “journeying together” is via the ministries: the focus on putting the gospel in action (even through the ministries that one is not personally involved in, but learns of by others’ involvement).

### **WORSHIP AND LITURGIES**

- “I experience [at the Paulist Center] a gratifying sense of fellowship during the weekend liturgies and a helpful form of quiet contemplation during the daily Masses.”
- “Listening to the Spirit through Holy Eucharist...people who hang in there, hopefully come back”
- “Gratitude for thoughtful and challenging homilies.”
- “Music bringing the community together, the Lector teams.”
- “Vibrant and beautiful liturgies”

### **VALUING THE ROLE OF LAITY**

- “The Paulist Center is a unique worshipping community, marked, for example, by active involvement of the laity in planning and helping to execute the liturgies.”
- “We benefit from voices and leadership from the pews about environment /climate.”
- “Initiatives by community members who lead on issues that are important to them...which continue to be life-giving for participants even after the event ends, due to relationships formed.”

### **PANDEMIC WORSHIP AND COMMUNITY**

- Responding to the circumstances of the pandemic, our community journeyed well through a series of beautiful virtual and hybrid gatherings when we couldn’t gather in person, including live-streamed Masses, Family Worship Gatherings over Zoom, Weekly Prayer Services on Zoom led by members of the LGBTQ+ ministry, and weekly Rosary groups. These were a new source of strength, joy and connection. One person said,

“The Wednesday service led by the LGBTQ ministry was an incredible experience and helped get me through the pandemic,” and another said, “Over Zoom, we expanded the notion of community and how to share that.”

- There were many additional small groups of folks during Covid that made up prayer groups.
- When we could gather safely, the community held vibrant and thoughtful services outside on Boston Common: a Fall 2021 Service of Remembrance and an Advent Festival of Lessons and Carols.

### **LISTENING**

- We are very blessed in our community to hear not only from Paulist Fathers but also from trained lay people. That is one way that we listen to one another.
- “A listening church has to be made up of listening people” and “Because the Paulist Center is a place of listening, I feel comfortable sharing.”
- “A Young Adult Group event held with another Boston parish brought people together across different theological opinions. Listening happened - a beautiful possibility of some communion and grace across differences.”
- “Covid has perhaps helped us be better listeners – Zoom church and other impactful ways of being together. Kudos to the staff.”
- “With the support of ministerial staff, our community examines different topics that might not be explored in other ways – a willingness to take more risks. Harkening back to the early Church – smaller groups and discussion-based.”
- “An example of when we have had that “journey of listening” – remembering the play about clergy sexual abuse and how we listened together. It was indeed a real journey for all those present to hear and learn and take part in the presenter’s journey. That evening was both a journey for us all and a gift.”
- “I appreciate the conversation about journeying and listening as acts of solidarity, and not just “doing”, which our community is also good at.”

### **JOYS AND CHALLENGES WITHIN THE PAULIST CENTER**

- “Working together for RCIA: It has always been joyful to walk with the candidates and catechumens, welcoming new people into the Church.”
- “I had left the Church, but when my first child was born, I returned to the Paulist Center and have been able to stay in the Church since then because of this community.”
- “Families and their journey, a lot of joy and a lot of sorrow; families are modeling how to be Christians so well, how do we define community: Many families are walking the line and wondering how they can bring their experience to the larger community where many fall into niche communities and silos.”
- “Most amazing part is that I am still Catholic (or a recovering Catholic) and go to Mass. The Paulist Center has created space, kindness, and dialogue, allowing for a distinction between the “institutional church” and “faith”.
- “What is called to mind is the experience at the Paulist Center of sharing “in” community. “Being church” is different than being “in church”.”
- “Personal, one-on-one interaction with fellow members - but also the events, auction, concerts, Holy Week services, the intent to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable” that challenges my comfort zone. And the Paulist Center provides far more of that than other communities.”
- “The Paulist Center has accompanied me on a journey that started with weekday Masses, then after a divorce, an invitation to join the Divorced Catholics group became a lifeline during that pain. That group and the staff and members of the community have truly shown love. It has been a healing and saving community for me all the way, and I’m so grateful. The lector team experience has also been meaningful – I’ve learned so much from our team and from the ministerial staff.”
- “I appreciate the language of “journeying together” – an active moving towards a shared goal or place, or a journeying together toward changing and growing. The experience is rooted in the liturgy, and the richness of everyone’s faith has been meaningful.”
- “I am still angry about the clergy abuse scandal and moving priests around, and I found solace here in this community.”
- “The Paulist Center has made me stronger in my faith.”
- “Thank God that I found the Center. The Paulist Center brings the Eucharist alive.
- “Journeying together goes way back to 1980 – trying to figure out what to do with the Catholic church. There were options if you were gay, but the PCC had a “Gay and

Lesbian” group. That was the first real journeying. It was a venue to pray, to claim ourselves as Catholics. There were friendships there too – and it was an important place to form Catholicism. It felt separate, though. Other groups felt more integrated.”

- “In a broader group, a band of solidarity for those who also find this community and experience important -- an almost unspoken sense of what brings you back to Catholic spaces.”
- “I started attending in my 20s – have come back and forth during many tumultuous times, but always a strong-knit community.”
- “I am safe there; I am not going to be abused there like I might be in another parish. The journey together is – gay and lesbians can be integrated into the community, in addition to forming our own group, and can be respected, which I find to be rare.”
- “It has been a blessing to be a part of this community. There is an actual community. The dozens of people I have met. In whatever way involved – it feels like a source of joy for me. And another joy about the integration piece – there is a level of safety in that I feel like I can explore my faith and not have it centered on my identity as an LGBTQ+ person.”
- “I am comfortable enough bringing myself, I have a faith sharing group going on eight years. A member of the Paulist Associates – I bring my perspective as a lesbian there. There are challenges and blessings. It doesn’t have to be separate – that is a joy of being at the Paulist Center Community.”
- “My small sharing group has been going on for 10 years and is very affirming and meaningful.”
- “I moved to Boston in 2003, during the sex abuse scandal time. I had also tried Dignity but wanted a Catholic church. I heard of the PCC and started coming. People are just included – that’s both really beautiful and thinking about ways it’s not always visible.”
- “Sometimes we forget that there is so much hurt in our community that is the result of actions taken by the larger church. No matter how welcoming, people don’t want to come. Even with effort to get programs started for the LGBTQ+ community.”

**WAYS THAT THE PAULIST CENTER COMMUNITY CAN GROW IN OUR JOURNEYING AND LISTENING TOGETHER (WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LARGER CHURCH)**

- “We must work on how to be a truly welcoming community - More outreach to those out of our comfort zone - more outreach needed so that people of color feel welcome .”
- “All are welcome, yes - but are we aware when we put up walls?”
- “We need to learn how to dialogue. How do we admit mistakes and keep growing?”
- “When have we not listened well as a community?” can be hard to answer. For example, would more conservative people feel comfortable?
- “A difficult question to consider at a time we have had so much time apart. Where is the evidence that we are of one mind and one heart in our sense of discipleship?”
- “Some of the “wounds” (*part of the question prompt*) have been biases that I brought, but the grace of the Holy Spirit brings us together past these biases.”
- “It may be that the way of listening to those on the margin may require more of the community to live out the mission.”
- “If we are going to make this intentional journey as a community, we have to be the energy that brings people together.”
- “As an intentional (not geographic) community, having “elected” or “chosen” to be a member brings additional meaning to the experience.”

### **THOUGHTS ON SYNODALITY:**

- “I am happy to think Pope Francis wants the Church to be better at listening to its members, and I trust he will listen to what we say.” *and* “I am uncertain about this process, but I have an appreciation of Pope Francis and what he is trying to do.”
- “The synodal movement is quite beautiful and inspirational. I hope it’s going to work. It’s important to reflect and reflect as a community.”
- “There is a disconnect between the hierarchical structure - How will this Synodality process translate to the church? Will the hierarchy listen?”
- “There is good and the bad, both local and beyond – so perhaps things beyond are not as bad as we fear. There are a lot of wonderful things about Catholicism that we can value and many wonderful things are happening within the larger Church.”

- “The resistance I’ve heard and seen to Pope Francis’ vision for the Synod makes me doubtful that anyone else at the Vatican is listening. I never felt that it was even possible for the laity to be “heard” by the institutional Church.”
- “Thinking of the experiences we hear of from family and friends elsewhere: the impediments and obstacles that are thrown up unnecessarily that block faith – what people have to go through to cling to the faith. Will there be a dichotomy (in the Synodality reporting) among those who share in a similar worship community to ours and those who face those obstacles in a more institutional setting?”
- “We hope that the result of Synodality will be a moment of hope that communities can experience in a variety of ways – not being told institutionally what they must feel.”
- “Will this process (Synodality) really “hear” and understand and welcome Catholics who have left the church?”
- “The ‘promise’ of the church is there, but is not fulfilled (similar to democracy). Yet, - even if it is not perfect, it is perfect for me.”

### **JOYS AND DIFFICULTIES WITHIN THE CHURCH:**

- “I am a born and bred Catholic. Sometimes the church has not been a loving parent to me as an LGBTQ+ person.. I don’t need to abandon God for that. “
- “I have struggles with the institutional church and I am in an interfaith seminary program. In Catholic places, I feel the pain of the church’s exclusions, but in multi-faith spaces, I find great joy in being Catholic and all that that means.”
- “I have remained faithful to the (larger) church throughout the difficulties in leadership, due to the presence of Jesus.”
- “My spouse and I were together for 35 years but not married. I wanted the sacrament. I couldn’t get married in the church, so I resisted it. We did get married. The wound (as an LGBTQ+ person) is from not being able to have all the sacraments that the Church has.”
- “I struggle with being a person of faith, and finding God in the Catholic Church and its sacraments is important.”



- “It is a struggle - loving the Eucharist and the community, yet dealing with the pains of the church’s imperfections (the church’s exclusion of people), while doing my part to expand the reign of God.”

## **THOUGHTS ON WAYS THAT THE CHURCH CAN BETTER LISTEN AND JOURNEY TOGETHER:**

- The wounds and hurt caused by the Church must be addressed, including the clergy sexual abuse scandal, the treatment of LGBTQ members, the treatment of women, and treatment of BIPOC members.
- “The history and culture of the Catholic Church does not embody a listening quality. Often the teaching from the hierarchy is doctrinaire and indifferent to the lived experience of the laity.”
- “A hope that the church would have an appreciation for the gifts of trained lay people who share their reflections on the Gospel.”
- “The voice of the laity must be heard - in all ways, including preaching.”
- “People are looking for women in leadership.”
- “The Catholic Church doesn’t always support women.”
- “I hope that the winds of the Spirit will blow – I don’t want a “tolerant” church. I want a church that Jesus had: Prophetic, courageous.”
- “Many in the next generations are not going to Church because of the sexual abuse crisis, treatment of LGBTQ+ members, and the unequal treatment of women.”
- “The history and culture of the Catholic Church does not embody a listening quality. Often the teaching from the hierarchy is doctrinaire and indifferent to the lived experience of the laity.”
- “I was raised as a Catholic and still feel I am one, however, as a gay woman, I feel the institutional Church has no respect or appreciation for me. “
- “We are again in a tumultuous time – the church is so divided. Can we listen to one another? The church is not really addressing the issues that face us. It is paying “lip service” at some levels. Can we name the obvious issues that are dividing us – go beyond our comfort level?”

- “Some friends and family feel they aren’t spiritually fed in their parishes – the resources and creativity aren’t there for them in their own church.”
- “ It is much more common on the part of leadership in other churches to seek dialogue and listen. I feel sorry for those who don’t get to be part of a faith community with a staff that listens.”
- “All my friends who were Catholic have left the Church. At the height of the child abuse crisis in the Church, I went to a Mass and heard a lengthy diatribe against gay rights legislation. Not a single mention was made of the sexual abuse of children by priests. This struck me as hypocritical and tone deaf; it certainly did not exemplify “listening.”
- “A powerful reminder from a recent homily: when you feel like you have had enough, if the church is closing its door, remember to stay close to Jesus. Pope Francis is sending this message a lot – when he calls out people who place the church as the end instead of the means to the end.”
- “We come to church in order to be reminded to be courageous, out in the world focused on Jesus, to come and be challenged. The spirit is asking us to be courageous with our witness in the world.”
- “That’s a point that just going to have to be made from around the world [outside of the US], which LGBTQ+ couples will make. There are powerful statements being made by some bishops that LGBTQ+ couples can be blessed. There are those who are pushing the limits. It’s a great sadness that those in our community cannot celebrate their sacramental love. It’s the same way that the divorced Catholics started speaking up – ministry to divorced Catholics really got started here.”
- “There are other aspects I can explore and be challenged by that there is dimensionality to our identities as people who do not identify as heterosexuals or cisgendered people. I hope we feel comfortable sharing those identities. I hope it doesn’t turn into a “don’t ask, don’t tell” situation. I hope there is a diversity of thought that we can bring to the table. I think the pastoral approach is allowing people to enter and explore their faith on their own terms and it doesn’t have to be a foregone conclusion.”
- “Some LGBTQ+ members invited to Mass feel a distance between themselves and the church. That hurts our welcome because we want the diversity of the community to be reflected within our community as well. We are open to them, but they are not necessarily staying. How do we pastorally outreach? “

**We close with the prayer and sentiment eloquently expressed by one participant: “It couldn’t be more important than it is now to listen to one another, and we need the Holy Spirit’s help to make that possible.”**