

OIKOUMENE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMISSION FOR ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY, NY

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 1 (MAY 26-JUNE 5, 2022 = ASCENSION-PENTECOST (NOVENA FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY))

*OIKOUMENE IS GREEK FOR "HOUSE" "FAMILY" "PEOPLE" "NATION" "OPEN TO OR PARTICIPATING IN THE WHOLE INHABITED WORLD" AND IS THE SOURCE OF OUR WORD "ECUMENICAL," BUT HAS A BROADER SENSE. [PER ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA]

"From the Desk of the Director"

Dear Clergy, Religious & Lay Friends,

Pope Francis launched the 2023 Synod on October 10, 2021 to allow two years for each parish/diocese to conduct listening sessions on the theme--For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission. In addition to the Vicariate gatherings, there are other groupings doing listening sessions and in that spirit, at the suggestion of the national office (CADEIO), I sent a questionnaire to select members of the ecumenical & interfaith communities to help ascertain what the "other" thinks of our Catholic community. What follows is their responses

SYNOD QUESTIONS FOR NON-CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS:

1. WHAT EXPERIENCES OF 'JOURNEYING TOGETHER' IN FRATERNITY AND COLLABORATION WITH CATHOLICS BRING YOU JOY AND HOPE?

- Our 35-year-old covenant between the Cathedral of All Saints and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Personal friendships with Roman Catholic clergy and theologians. The personal pastoral ministry of Bishop Scharfenberger to give as a witness to the Apostolic Faith in the face of persecution by my own church. (The Very Rev. Dr. Leander S. Harding, Dean of All Saints/Ecumenical Officer, Episcopal Diocese of Albany)
- We are very grateful for any visits to us by Catholic leadership – local priests, Diocesan representatives, Cardinal Dolan, and other such leaders. We join in the March for Life in DC with Catholics and others, and enjoy the friendships with Catholic orders, Focolare, Catholic Worker, etc. (Martin Johnson, The Bruderhof, Ulster Park, NY)
- Sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom. Fellowships around Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Studying the Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit together. (Rev. Jay Francis, President, Capital District [Evangelical] Ministers Fellowship)
- Working with Fr. Jim Kane for many years. Witnessing the Baptisms, especially of the Ecumenical Witnesses of Baptism program of the Capital Area Council of Churches. Ecumenical Good Friday worship. (Kitt Jackson, CROP WALK)
- I have always felt that my call to ministry as a Protestant Clergywoman, has been respected and that a place has been made for me in conversation, worship and shared witness to the Gospel. Our shared collaboration in serving the poor and oppressed and often in witnessing to social justice, such as in the work of dismantling racism, gives me hope. Perhaps my greatest joy was the year or so that Immaculate Conception RC Church, Hoosick Falls, came to the Presbyterian Church I was serving, because they needed a place to worship during structural repairs. I would arrive on Sunday a.m., see parishioners and my colleague Fr. Tom Zelker, and know that God had already been worshipped in the sanctuary before our service began. When I met with Bishop Scharfenberger to express my thanks, he received me very graciously. I have a deep appreciation for serving as Protestant Observer on the Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Commission and for the long years of faithful service of Fr. Jim Kane. I am keenly aware that the spirit of ecumenism in the Capital District is particularly strong, and I experience it as a personal gift and

grace. (Rev. Donna Elia, Executive Director, Troy Area United Ministries, Ecumenical Officer, Presbyterian Church, Albany)

- Our mutual dialog has been ongoing since 1984. This process might be viewed from two perspectives, one less symbolic of journeying together than the other. The first perspective would be a genuine journeying together focused on drawing the two of us closer. This would entail a process of not just increasing understanding, but also concrete steps in that direction. Steps ahead include a mutuality in witnessing to baptisms, confirmations, and matrimony. It would also entail a full recognition of PNCC marriages. The second perspective is what seems to exist currently, less a journeying than a clearinghouse for grievances and a deafness to problems your side of the dialog does not want to deal with. This existing perspective posits a legalism one direction, toward the PNCC, while refusing to live by the same legalistic standards. Some Roman Catholic bishops have published anathemas against PNCC parishes which are inconsistent with our current mutual understanding and that in the CIC. A source of joy and hope would be concrete movement toward organic unity. This will require a sincere effort on the part of the Roman Catholic Church aimed at rethinking its list of sine-qua-nons. It comes down to the work of the Kingdom, being the *ekklesia tou theou* we were always meant to be. This reconnection to the Pristine Church, not as a nicety or a reminiscence, but as a manner of fully living as God's communal body, is key to our witness where we gather and throughout the world. (Rev. Jim Konicki, Holy Name of Jesus Polish National Catholic Church)
- Note: There were NO Responses from the Orthodox Christians.

2. IN YOUR EXPERIENCE DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WITNESS EFFECTIVELY TO THE TRUTH, GOODNESS AND BEAUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH?

- Indeed, yes on the whole, though the fidelity to the deposit of the Apostles varies more within than between confessional communities. (The Very Rev. Dr. Leander S. Harding)
- We appreciate the witness of such leaders as Archbishop Cordileone (San Francisco), the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (CFR), Sisters of Life, and such witnesses! Also, the Catholic Worker we know and love. These and others are leaders in witness to Christian faith, for us. (Martin Johnson)
- In general, yes. Form and structure can be limiting reaching 2022 culture for Christ. We all must be among the people as Jesus was a "strict preacher." Thank you for your Pro Life standard. (Rev. Jay Francis)
- I think some local parishes do, but I don't have connections with a lot of them. (Kitt Jackson)
- This is a tall order for any denomination, and all of us do so imperfectly. I find much that is true, good, and beautiful in Roman Catholic faith—the liturgy of the Mass, the commitment of the Church to the poor and oppressed, and when done well, the empowerment of the laity. I also deeply appreciate the Catholic tradition of honoring the saints of the Church as models for Christian faith. I love the reverent expression of attending to word and sacrament. (Rev. Donna Elia)
- (a) The Roman Catholic Church's witness has been particularly exemplary in matters of life and the proper ordering of society (sexuality, abortion, birth control, marriage, human dignity, justice, peace, and many other areas). This great witness is a call for all to see what life in the Kingdom is really like—a place of truth, goodness, and beauty that is beyond just the here and now or momentary happiness. As we know, this witness is being attacked from every direction, certainly from the "world," but also now and apparently from within the Roman Catholic Church by some of its very bishops. This is a dangerous step, for it portends a break not just in the declared unanimity of the Roman Catholic Church, but in its witness to those who still dwell in

the world. Fractured voices to a fractured world and to fractured Churches is harmful. Perhaps this witness seemingly gets derailed when it appears to be very individualistically focused. Are these teachings for the Western worldly ideal of the “person,” or for the person in relationship to their potential place in the Kingdom? Has the idea of a people living in an eschatological moment been lost in this witness? How are we established as apart from the world, a Kingdom distinct and vastly different? Have the words of John (1 John 2:17) and Paul (1 Corinthians 7:31) been lost if the sole focus is on the moment rather than the overall goal for the human person in relationship to the Kingdom?; (b) The Roman Catholic Church’s witness through the beauty of worship and the sacramental life is a great testimony pointing both the believer and the seeker to the mystery and glory of God. There we meet with Christ in the doorway to the sacred. Unfortunately, again, this area of witness has degraded into the landscape of liturgical battle. The Roman Catholic Church’s many expressions of worship (Roman, Gallican, Anglican, Byzantine, East Syriac, Chaldean, Armenian, Alexandrian, and those of the Orders), all stand side-by-side as valid and individualistically beautiful. The PNCC while wholly Western has three Rites to choose from at a pastor’s discretion keeping in mind the catechetical needs of his people. Each expression stands side-by-side as valid and individualistically beautiful. The Roman Catholic Church’s witness to its own people, to other Churches, and to the world is harmed when it fractures itself in an inimitable legalism dictating liturgical sameness while at the same time being inherently in unity without sameness. One cannot define oneself as self-contradiction; (c) The third area of effective witness is in the great working of charity carried out by the Roman Catholic Church. These works have called many to engage in their own Spirit-led efforts as well as to join in with the Roman Catholic Church’s charity ministries. This witness is perhaps the best call in which many can join without consideration of boundary, one in which Christ is declared as a single Body, by the many, living and working as one in the Kingdom. (Rev. Jim Konicki)

3. WHAT CAN BE DONE BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO ACHIEVE ORGANIC UNITY THAT JESUS PRAYED FOR BETWEEN PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC CHURCHES?

- Joint teaching about Christian basics – continued apologetics which address the Biblical warrants for distinctive Roman beliefs. A daring proposal – joint Eucharistic Adoration. (The Very Rev. Dr. Leander S. Harding)
- We are all so very different in our various churches, the main thing we can do is to pray continually for this unity which surely brings some results. (Martin Johnson)
- Psalm 133 and John 17 share God and heart for unity among His children. We each need to enter each other’s “world” and find greater love, friendship, and appreciation. I enjoy EWTN. (Rev. Jay Francis)
- Continue to participate in dialogues and local grassroots ecumenical groups. Pray that we all may be one! (Kitt Jackson)
- I believe shared Eucharist would be a vital part of bringing about unity. It seems to me the Roman Catholic liturgy bears witness to this. When the people say, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only say the word...”, I believe that other Christians could claim that Christ does say the word to forgive and include us. While there may have been a time when Catholics and Protestants thought they were the only true expression of Christian faith, I believe there is now a deeper respect for one another. With God’s help, we are making progress. (Rev. Donna Elia)

- As previously developed herein, the most concrete step toward unity begins in a self-assessment of one's sine-qua-nons. It is not without anxiety that I look to the status of Anglican Use parishes. These parishes have become mere deathbeds for the patrimony they were designed to house, support, and grow. Within a few generations or less, their married clergy will disappear, they have no bishops of their own (yes, married, and of their own foundation) to preserve this patrimony. They will over time simply pass away. This does not bode well for others seeking unity without feigned uniformity. The grafting of one to the other is not as some would understand, an organic unity where the main branch simply transforms the grafted branch into itself (that is for Christ Himself in His action upon us), but instead the grafting creates something quite different—an organic unity we might call new life, life forward for the *ekklesia tou theou*. We must mutually grasp our call and hold onto it, move forward with love, not with just a business-like romance, and never allow ourselves to end at a sudden realization that all is in vain. (Rev. Jim Konicki)

SYNOD QUESTIONS FOR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE JEWISH FAITH:

1. WHAT EXPERIENCES OF 'JOURNEYING TOGETHER' IN FRATERNITY AND COLLABORATION WITH CATHOLICS BRING YOU JOY AND HOPE?

- The continuing growth of friendship and knowledge of heritages and observations of individual celebrations. (Mrs. Phyllis Silverman, past Co-Chair of our Jewish-R.C. Dialogue Committee)
- Standing together, both for each other and for others, against hatred and intolerance; Sitting together on interfaith committees; Gathering for interfaith programs; Seeing our clergy speak at each other's houses of worship; Learning together. (Robert R. Kovach, Pres. Jewish Federation of NENY)
- We have teamed to share and care deeply. We have gathered in friendship at times of crisis. We have transcended artificial boundaries to create deep and lasting interfaith commitment, and what we call "mitgefeel" true empathy. (Orthodox Rabbi Moshe Bomzer)

2. IN YOUR EXPERIENCE DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WITNESS EFFECTIVELY TO THE TRUTH, GOODNESS AND BEAUTY OF THE JEWISH ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY?

- In my experience, yes. In the larger world, there is much work to be done. (Mrs. Phyllis Silverman)
- This is a tough question to answer, as I am neither a practicing Catholic nor a student of Catholic teachings. I cannot competently speak as to how Judaism is technologically taught within the Church. Having said that, I appreciate the positive framing of the question and the sincerity by which it is asked. (Robert R. Kovach)
- In many years it is with awe and appreciation that I have listened to true appreciation and respect to our religious roots and they have borne fruits of theological partnerships while respecting uniqueness and difference. (Orthodox Rabbi Moshe Bomzer)

3. WHAT MORE CAN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH DO TO STRENGTHEN UNDERSTANDING AND TIES BETWEEN CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS AND JEWS THAN HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

- Continue to travel and teach. Work with the religious schools and have teaching programs. (Mrs. Phyllis Silverman)
- While gatherings focusing on commonalities are important to foster unity and friendship, real understanding comes from learning more about our differences. The next step will come when we

can come together as friends for more in-depth learning about the uniqueness of our own understandings and practices. (Robert R. Kovach)

- Education, education, education – from every age to every person; Vocabulary; Calendars; Focus on humanity – hand in hand trench work. (Orthodox Rabbi Moshe Bomzer)

SYNOD QUESTIONS FOR OTHER NON-CHRISTIANS:

1. WHAT EXPERIENCES OF ‘JOURNEYING TOGETHER’ IN FRATERNITY AND COLLABORATION WITH CATHOLICS INTER-RELIGIOUSLY BRING YOU JOY AND HOPE?

- Trusting relationship. (Imam Abdul Rahman Yaki, Islamic Center of the Capital District)
- All of the experiences confirm for us that follow the Sikh faith, that the human race is indeed different patches of the same single fabric. That is actually a key tenet of the Sikh religion. We are all one and the same in the eyes of our Creator. (Dr. Paul S. Uppal, President, Guru Nanak Darbar Sikh Temple, Niskayuna, NY)
- Social work and social righteousness. Care of needy, working toward eliminating hunger. (Mussart Chaudrey, Muslim-Catholic Dialogue Member)
- When we observe and celebrate issues we share, such as the environment, empowering the poor, racial equity, and human rights. (Paul Naamon, Tendai Buddhist Institute)

2. IN YOUR EXPERIENCE DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WITNESS EFFECTIVELY TO THE TRUTH, GOODNESS AND BEAUTY OF YOUR FAITH?

- Yes. (Imam Abdul Rahman Yaki)
- Yes, absolutely. Although we have different histories, scriptures, and methods of worship, our respective faiths are remarkably interwoven. Truth is the eternal victor, there is innate goodness in humanity, and the nature around us, created by the Creator, is beautiful, and we are in awe of it. (Dr. Paul S. Uppal)
- Yes. Sharing of faith and reflection on values in our faiths increases dignity and respect and brings us closer as friends and human beings. (Mussart Chaudrey)
- People of faith share values and aspirations that are consistent and enduring. (Paul Naamon)

3. WHILE BEING FAITHFUL TO OUR BELIEFS AND TRADITIONS, WHAT MORE CAN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH DO TO FOSTER BETTER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN VARIOUS RELIGIONS?

- Catholic Church is doing its best. Perhaps more communication about our common heritage. (Imam Abdul Rahman Yaki)
- I would say that the Catholic Church should motivate itself to reach out and get to know other faiths and perspectives. Actually, that can be said for our own faith as sound advice. The more we come to mix and know other groups and faiths, the richer we will be and more rounded in our understanding of the creation around us. (Dr. Paul S. Uppal)
- Interfaith understanding, while being faithful to our own faiths, increases love, hope and brotherhood leading toward social justice. (Mussart Chaudrey)
- Join together in programs, educational efforts and actions that promote our common values of gratitude, humility, service to others, and harmony. (Paul Naamon)

4. WHAT CAN WE DO TOGETHER IN THE FACE OF WORLDWIDE RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?

- Speak out against injustice anywhere and everywhere. (Imam Abdul Rahman Yaki)
- The Sikhs believe that persecution should be confronted with love, mercy, and moral force. The evildoers must be challenged to face their evil, and provided an opportunity to renounce their hatred and bigotry. Resorting to arms can and should be considered as a last resort, but moral force and appealing to the better nature of everyone should be exhausted because it often triumphs over evil. (Dr. Paul S. Uppal)
- Visibly stand up against oppression and injustice around the world, especially religious persecution. Should be more vocally cooperative with members of countries being effected to get attention of our elected representatives to effect change locally and around the world. (Mussart Chaudrey)
- Continue to meet and collaborate on issues that emphasize our common values. (Paul Naamon)

I hope you were as pleasantly surprised as I was with the above responses and the positive perceptions of “the other” on our Catholic Church: a refreshing ‘counterpoint’ to all the negative media on our Church/Diocese (2)

PRAYER FOR THE SYNOD:

“...Holy Spirit....Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right...”



OFFICE OF ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

Tel. (518) 453-6660, Fax (518) 453-6793 email: ecumenical@rcda.org

DIRECTOR: Rev. Fr. James Kane

SECRETARY: Lisa Petrocelli

DIOCESAN COMMISSION:

CHAIRPERSON— Mr. David Amico

Mr. David Amico—Liaison, Office of Lay Ministry & Parish Faith Formation

Deacon Walter Ayres—Liaison, Peace & Justice Commission

Mr. Peter Crasto-Donnelly

Mrs. Kathleen Kerrigan Duff—Liaison to Jewish-Catholic Dialogue

The Rev. Donna Elia—Protestant Observer

Mr. Edward L. Falterman

Mrs. Audrey Hughes—Muslim-Catholic Dialogue

Mrs. Joan Lipscomb

Rev. Fr. David Mickiewicz—Liaison to Orthodox Dialogue

Mr. Frank Pell— “Our Neighbors’ Faith”

Sr. Betsy Van Deusen, CSJ

Mrs. Lynn Waterman