A Synodal Consultation Report From the USA Regions of Wheaton Franciscan Community and Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) Community

Context: The Wheaton Franciscans and IBVM’s hosted and facilitated three Synod Listening sessions over Zoom. The sessions were open to anyone interested in dialogue and sharing on the synodal journey. Each session was scheduled twice a week to allow greater participation. Session dates were February 8, 12, 22, and 26; March 8 and 12. Each of the three sessions built upon the other. Fifty-five people participated in the Synod Listening Sessions.

Session one: The common theme was a desire for church/Church that is radically welcoming of all God’s children with special emphasis on those who have been consciously excluded or pushed to the margin;

Session two: The common themes expressed the importance of prayer and ritual that is inspiring, challenging, and relevant in today’s world, within a community that is supportive in the challenge of living the Gospel.

Session three: Recognizing the desire for a church/Church that is radically welcoming and the importance of prayer/ritual, and community, the final session focused on specific ideas, actions, and ways of being that each of us can do to create the church/Church we long for. Responses were categorized in three broad areas to support action and mutual responsibility.

NOTE: Suggestions classified under “People of God” also belong in the other two categories. Likewise, the suggestions under “local” church apply to the “hierarchal” Church.

Synthesis of concrete recommendations that

- **the People of God** can do to create the church we long for
  - Be non-judgmental and inclusive - invite and welcome all people.
  - Do not be passive. Continue to learn, explore one’s own spirituality, participate in social justice, be willing to speak for the voiceless. Live Catholic Social teaching
  - Actively look for a life giving and spiritually satisfying group wherever that may be. Don't sit around and wait for something to happen ... work to make it happen.

- **the “local” church** can do to create the church we long for
  - Be more welcoming. Help individuals feel comfortable; accept all who come without judgement. Create a culture of greeting, listening, and connecting with every visitor, stranger and member with sincere warmth and love. Welcome back those who have been cut-off from the church. Treasure the innate goodness of all people of God. Extend love to one another without judgement.
  - Is to not discriminate against those who may be marginalized by society or by the church (includes LGBTQ+, divorced persons, persons of other faith traditions, etc.).
  - Extend “church” outside of mass....be visible/get involved in the local community. Walk the talk..... show who we really are. Actions speak louder than words.
  - “catholic” should mean “universal”, not “exclusive”

- **the “hierarchical” Church** can do to create the church we long for
  - The Church loses the moral high ground when it denies that women have a spiritual calling to the priesthood. The Church needs to include and enthusiastically support women’s leadership and talents and recognize and value women’s and men’s differences and unique gifts.
  - Promote leadership by women and former priests in the church community and the Church, including the liturgy.
  - Improve Seminary training to become more applicable to the times. The faculties at seminaries need to have a broader representation of women and more diverse backgrounds from different cultures and theologies. Seminary training needs to include stronger and more relevant preaching, living a Gospel centered life; developing a personal spirituality. Require and Improve ongoing formation for priests at the Diocesan level.
  - Be transparent, listen to the people, hold Church leaders accountable for their actions, decisions, etc. and when necessary, work for healing and reconciliation within the community.