

# Becoming a Missionary Synodal Parish Community Project 2024-2028

A Project of the Loyola Institute for Ministry, New Orleans and  
NCCL (National Community of Catechetical Leaders)  
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Guided by the Catholic Church's *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission* worldwide initiative, the Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) and the National Community of Catechetical Leaders (NCCL) are partnering to lead the *Becoming a Missionary Synodal Parish Community* Initiative to revitalize 400 Catholic parish communities in 40 dioceses with the spirit, theology, and practices of *For a Synodal Church* by developing parish lay leadership teams. For Catholic parishes to thrive and serve the needs of the parish community and engage in mission to the world, lay leadership is essential. Working together, LIM and NCCL will equip, support, and resource lay leadership teams of 10-12 people of all ages, in 40 diocesan cohorts of 10 parishes, engaging over 4,000 lay leaders.

The *Becoming a Missionary Synodal Parish Community Initiative* is guided by the three theological convictions from *For a Synodal Church*.

- *Communion*. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God's call for his people.
- *Participation*. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit in baptism. In a synodal Church the whole community is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will.
- *Mission*. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world. (<https://www.synod.va/en/what-is-the-synod-21-24/about.html#>)

The priorities that have emerged from the *For a Synodal Church* consultations in 2022 and 2023 inform The *Becoming a Missionary Synodal Parish Community Initiative*:

- Forming people in the processes of listening and interpreting the needs of the community, and in the spirituality of discernment.
- Recognizing the mission of all the baptized and discernment of how baptismal co-responsibility for the Church's mission should be appreciated and achieved.
- Addressing the unity and communion of the Church in the midst of various kinds of polarization and division, so that local Churches are better able to promote the ecclesiology of communion, rooted in baptism and nourished by the Eucharist.
- Welcoming those who feel excluded from participation in the life of the Church in a manner that is authentic and faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic faith. Welcoming and serving the wounded

and isolated in the world and in the Church is an essential aspect of the mission given to us by the Jesus.

- Moving the Church out to the peripheries – to the marginalized, to the poor, and to the ostracized (*North American Final Document for the Continental Stage of the 2021-2024 Synod*)

The *Becoming a Missional Synodal Parish Community Initiative* seeks to develop lay leadership teams in Catholic parishes that are equipped, resourced, and supported to implement the priorities of *For a Synodal Church* in the life of their parish community. The focus on lay leadership teams, supported by the pastor and parish staff, is urgently needed in the Catholic Church today. Today's Catholic parish is often led by one priest – the pastor – who has more pastoral responsibilities than in previous eras. Today's pastor is often leading more than one parish due to parish mergers and new configurations of the local church. In the mid-size Catholic parish (up to 1000 households), the pastor works with a small, often part time, parish staff of ministry leaders. In the small Catholic parish (500 households or smaller), the pastor is usually the only professional staff person. *If Catholic parishes are to thrive and serve the needs of the parish community and engage in mission to the wider community, lay leadership is essential.*

*Becoming a Missional Synodal Parish Community* is an action-learning process that engages parish lay leadership teams in revitalizing their parish ministries by:

- 1) Discovering how the parish community and its leadership understand the mission of the Church and their local parish, and how they see the mission being lived out today.
- 2) Analyzing the social-cultural context of their community and naming the challenges and opportunities for ministry today, with special attention to those who are marginalized and excluded.
- 3) Leading a whole community action-learning process on the essential practices of the Christian faith and how they are lived personally and communally; and discerning how the parish community can more faithfully live its mission through a focus on Christian practices.
- 4) Engaging all ages in a listening and discernment process to discover their gifts, abilities, and resources; and equipping them as individuals and teams for ministry and service in the parish and in the world.
- 5) Developing new expressions of the parish's mission by addressing new challenges and opportunities, and mobilizing the gifts of the whole community for missional action.

*Becoming a Missional Synodal Parish Community* seeks to apply the Synod's vision and theological insights by developing lay leaders who can engage their parish communities in responding creatively to the needs and hungers that emerged from the Synod's consultation process and from the people in parish communities.

## Major Project Elements 2024-2028

Over a 5-year timeframe the *Becoming a Missionary Synodal Parish Community Initiative* seeks to revitalize 400 Catholic parish communities in 40 dioceses with the spirit, theology, and practices of *For a Synodal Church* by developing parish lay leadership teams. For Catholic parishes to thrive and serve the needs of the parish community and engage in mission to the world, lay leadership is essential.

The *Becoming a Missional Synodal Parish Community Initiative* will develop two groups of 20 diocesan cohorts – one of which will start in the 2024-25 program year and the second which will start in the 2025-26 program year. Each cohort will involve 10 parishes with 10-12 members on each parish team. Each cohort will be led by a Trainer-Consultant from the Initiative who will parishes in becoming a synodal missionary community.

*Becoming a Missionary Synodal Parish Community Initiative* will undertake the following activities over the five years of the project.

1. Develop cohorts of 10 parishes in 40 dioceses across the U.S.
2. Develop the curriculum for the one-year lay leadership formation program to be conducted by the Project Consultants in each of the cohorts.
3. Develop the curriculum for the community-wide formation program on Christian practices to be conducted in parish communities.
4. Develop the community gifts discernment process and the process and tools for creating new expressions of the parish's mission.
5. Conduct leadership formation workshops with parishes in their first year in the Project.

*Workshop #1*

- Explore the biblical and theological foundations of a missionary synodal Church.
- Reflect on the mission of the Church and the mission of the local parish.
- Identify how the parish is living its mission today.

*Workshop #2*

- Analyze parish culture and vitality, and identify areas for growth and development.
- Analyze the social-cultural context of the community and name the challenges and opportunities for ministry today, with special attention to those who are marginalized and excluded.

*Workshop #3*

- Explore the theological foundations of Christian practices and how Christian practices are a path toward personal and parish renewal.
- Prepare for leading a whole community action-learning process on the essential practices of the Christian faith and how they are lived personally and communally; and discerning how the parish community can more faithfully live its mission through a focus on Christian practices.

*Cohort Meetings on Zoom*

6. Conduct a yearlong community-wide formation in Christian practices in the second year of a parish's involvement in the Project, using the curriculum and resources developed by the Project.
7. Develop new expressions of the parish's mission and mobilize the gifts of the community for action by guiding parish teams in applying a discernment process to discover the gifts, abilities, and resources of the whole community, and using the synodal process for developing new expressions of the parish's mission by addressing new challenges and opportunities for ministry in the parish and in the community.