



SUMMARY REPORT OF

ST. KATHARINE DREXEL PARISH SYNODALITY SESSION

1 INTRODUCTION: RESPONDING TO THE SUMMONS TO SYNODALITY

Consciously placing himself before the Holy Spirit, Pope Francis has summoned the entire People of God to a synod—to listen prayerfully to the Holy Spirit, who *makes* the church; to reflect together as ecclesial subjects on our common journey as we follow the Lord Jesus who is “the way, the truth, and the life “ (John 14:6), to engage attentively and sincerely in “mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn;”¹ to speak with one another in love and courage with open hearts and minds.

Synodality is *for* the mission of the Church. That mission is *not* about ecclesial prestige *or* power, *not* about ecclesial self-preservation *or* self-protection, *not* about ecclesial solvency *or* security. *The Church’s mission can only be the mission of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ*—the proclamation of the coming and salvific reign of God. The Church, *ekklesia theou*, the assembly or household of God, strives to carry out this mission in a manner consistent with and in imitation of Jesus’ openness, fidelity, and radical self-giving to the reign of God. All baptized members of the *ekklesia theou* share in that mission and *are responsible for and to it*, and are exhorted “to lead lives worthy of [that] calling” (*Ephesians* 4:1).

Saint Katharine Drexel Parish **willingly, gladly, and humbly shares in and assumes responsibility for and to** this mission as “a Black Catholic community of believers celebrating and rejoicing in the love of God” (Parish Mission Statement, <https://stkdp parish.org>). Heeding the call of the Spirit to walk in the ‘way’ that Jesus taught, members of the parish have taken up the call and challenge to engage the world, scrutinize “the signs of the times” and interpret them in light of the Gospel, striving to recognize and understand the world and its longings as well as its many and often startling, contradictory, and conflictual shifts and changes (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4).

Participants in the synod session listened to one another express thoughts and feelings about their **lived experiences** *not so much as members who belong* to a geographically bounded and canonically erected parish, **but as church, as the household of God**. For baptized women and men are called to be “a spiritual house and a holy priesthood,” (*Lumen Gentium*, 10). Thus, St. Katharine Drexel Parish *is who the members are* and *are becoming*—missionary disciples of

¹ Pope Francis, *Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops* (17 October 2015) https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

Jesus gathered in his name for prayer and worship, service and witness through times of joy and sorrow, hope and struggle.

2. SUMMARY OF REFLECTIONS GLEANED FROM LISTENING SESSION

The summary that follows emerges from prayerful mutual listening and reflective sharing of members who participated in the synodal listening session. The fruit of the session is arranged around key questions that focused on the purpose of the synod—communion, participation, and mission.

2.1 What empowers us, parishioners of St. Katharine Drexel, a Black Catholic Community, to speak up courageously, candidly, and responsibly When and how do we manage to say what is important to us?

Participants in the session expressed gratitude for **pastoral leadership**. The engagement of a pastor (Father Oscar Pratt II) who, above all, is committed to Jesus Christ in his own life of prayer and service. Father Pratt's pastoral leadership is creative and pro-active, theologically and societally knowledgeable in providing **direction** and **guidance** through (1) personal conversation and pastoral visits; (2) pastoral counseling; (3) homilies that are uplifting, that are instructive, that relate lectionary readings to real-life situations, that invite members to reflect more deeply on the Word of God and to act in justice and mercy in their circumstances; (4) through **encouragement** to deepen faith formation (e.g., courses and lectures at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies of Xavier University of Louisiana, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry); and (5) **empowering members** to take on ministerial service to one another and to the wider community.

Participants in the session expressed gratitude for **opportunities** and **occasions** for **spiritual, intellectual, and cultural nourishment**. Members willingly and regularly reflect upon and share faith journeys, study Sacred Scripture together, read and discuss history and theology—learn together. Members research, design, and plan events that further spiritual formation (e.g., retreats, revivals, etc.); research and prepare presentations for cultural and historical commemorations (e.g., The Parish Bulletin's weekly 'Cultural Corner,' Black History Month, Women's History Month, Juneteenth, the Fourth of July, etc.).

Participants in the session frequently expressed gratitude for **live streaming** Sunday Eucharistic celebrations during the lockdown during the pandemic and for **regular virtual (ZOOM) meetings** in which members prayed together and shared concerns, joys, and various happenings.

Participants in the session frequently expressed gratitude for **mutual emotional support**—for warm and appropriate displays of affection and comfort, not only in times of grief and sorrow, but also in times of celebration.

2.2 How is “journeying together” (lived experience) happening today in St. Katharine Drexel Parish? The Spirit is inviting/asking us, parishioners of a Black Catholic Community, to consider which possibilities/actions in order to strengthen our “journeying together”?

Participants in the session expressed gratitude for working together as a **community of believers in unity as a Christian family**. Participants frankly stated that members of the parish did not always agree on every issue; at the same time, members clearly pointed to the commitment of the whole community to mutual respect, encouragement, correction, and cooperation as Christian believers to preserve a familial atmosphere infused with Christian love (*agape*). Members of the parish, personally and communally, strive to live out the statement on the parish website, “All are welcome in this place.”

Participants in the session expressed gratitude for **liturgical ministries that understand and appreciate African American, Caribbean, and Nigerian aesthetics**. These ministries nurture soul, heart, and mind, for beauty plays a significant function in cultivating morality and in motivating right action for justice and the common good in our world. In answer to the baptismal call to service for the ‘reign of God,’ members exercise our baptismal ordination to ministry as Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, Altar Servers, Sacristans, and Ushers. Members also offer their Spirit-infused gifts through Music Ministry, Art and Environment, Hospitality, Prayer Ministry, and Preparation for Sacraments.

Participants in the session expressed gratitude for **organizations** that inspire and support Black Catholic identity, including the Associates of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the Knights of St. Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary, the Archdiocese of Boston Black Catholic Choir.

Participants in the session expressed gratitude for the **generosity** of members in consistently engaging in **collective responsibility** in the civic community through (1) contributing ideas and questions to the development of the ‘Parish Strategic Plan;’ (2) committing to the tasks that emerged and expanded during the pandemic lockdown; (3) generating innovative ideas for physical and spiritual care of members—e.g., weekly committee work, generating innovative ideas for physical and spiritual care of members, etc.; (4) reaching out to other parishes within the Archdiocese to invite their participation in special liturgical and festive celebrations—e.g., the annual Eucharistic Celebration for Black History Month, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Breakfast), sending letters and notes of condolence or congratulations to parishes experiencing loss or distress—e.g., letter to St. Katharine Drexel, New Hampshire, etc.; (5) participating in programs developed by the Social Justice Committee; (6) cooperating with other Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities of faith to improve the lives of our co-citizens in the Greater Boston Area, particularly in affiliation with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO).

2.3 What hinders us, St. Katharine Drexel Parish, a Black Catholic Community, to speak up courageously, candidly, and responsibly?

Participants **expressed frustration and sorrow** at the Archdiocese’s lack of understanding of the situation of Black children, women, men, and elders in the Greater Boston Area and lack of recognition of the Black Catholic community.

Chief frustrations include:

(1) The elimination of the Office of Black Catholics.

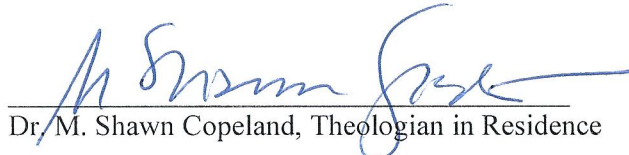
(2) The failure to grapple with anti-Black racism in a sustained and programmatic way. In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, the Archdiocese identified members of St. Katharine Drexel to take the lead in addressing racism. While members cooperated in this endeavor, they pressed for the inclusion of other White Catholic laity to share in confronting this sin and evil—and some laity and clergy stepped forward. Sadly, the response of the Archdiocese has proved transitory. A synod, **with sustained preparation, sustained theological reflection, the development of a plan for fostering communal and personal transformation**, on racism is sorely needed to address the on-going racism that defaces the Body of Christ.

Historical and penitential consideration of the roots of racism and white supremacy is a first step on the path to liberation and reconciliation. As Church, as the Body of Christ we must publicly acknowledge and publicly confess ecclesial complicity in racist sins against Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Indigenous persons. We cannot and must not live in ignorance of our past; to do so allows us to persist in *willful* ignorance that must be overcome.

Moreover, it is important and necessary to distinguish between *guilt* and *responsibility*. Contemporary White Catholics and citizens of the United States are *not* guilty of the historical sins of genocide and slavery, with their accompanying crimes and sins of physical and sexual abuse. Yet, as members of the Body of Christ, forming and sharing in the mystical communion with all believers (those in centuries past and those who shall come after us), we must take responsibility for the continuing and compounded structural injustices that past crimes and sins have caused. Guilt may be ascribed to those who *historically* engaged in or were complicit in acts of racism or acts of racial and cultural oppression, violence, and injustice. Contemporary White American Catholics incur guilt when *actively engaged in* or *passively complying* with acts of racism or acts of racial and cultural oppression, violence, and injustice. Nonetheless, *all White American Catholics share responsibility* for the present situation that has been constructed through individual and collective acts of racism and acts of racial and cultural oppression, violence, and injustice in our history. Our Church has the responsibility to change the present situation in order to work for the flourishing of all God's people.

It is our *hope, as church, as the household of God* in this time and this geographic location, we members of St. Katharine Drexel Parish pray for the cultivation of love, of moral and social virtues among ourselves and among all members of the Archdiocesan community, that with the help of divine grace we may all become artisans of a new humanity (*Gaudium et Spes*, 30), *laboring for* the realization of relationships that are fitting, right, and just.


Father Oscar J. Pratt II, Pastor


Dr. M. Shawn Copeland, Theologian in Residence

19 July 2022