

SUBMISSION FROM
SAINT KATHARINE DREXEL PARISH
ROXBURY (BOSTON), MASSACHUSETTS (USA)
ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS (USA)

ISSUES FOR SECOND ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Saint Katharine Drexel Parish **willingly, gladly, and humbly shares in and assumes responsibility for** and **to** the mission of Jesus as “a Black Catholic community of believers celebrating and rejoicing in the love of God” (Parish Mission Statement, <https://stkdparish.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).

1.2 Parishioners of Saint Katharine Drexel enthusiastically engaged in the **diocesan phase** of the Synod (October 2021-April 2022), listening attentively to one another as each person expressed thoughts and feelings about their **lived experiences**. Moreover, they did so *not so much as members who belong* to a geographically bounded and canonically erected parish, **but as Church, as *ekklesia*, as the household of God**. For all baptized women and men constitute “a spiritual house and a holy priesthood” (*Lumen Gentium*, 10). Thus, Saint Katherine Drexel Parish **is who the members are and are becoming**—missionary disciples of Jesus gathered in his name for prayer and worship, service and witness through times of joy and sorrow, hope and struggle.

2. INTRODUCING

“A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION: SYNTHESIS REPORT”

2.1 The dynamic quality of parish involvement in the **diocesan phase** of the Synod required that the results of the first part of the **universal phase** of the Synod be engaged as soon as practically possible. Rather than wait until the Lenten season’s faith and theological formation discussion series, the “Synthesis Report” was made available to parishioners for reading, study, reflection, and conversation. (December 10, 2023). The Advent session supported parishioners in grappling with the “Synthesis Report,” giving special attention to understanding and practicing “Conversation in the Spirit,” differentiating it from ‘talking merely to talk or speak’ or ‘talking or speaking determined to overpower or dismiss the questions or thoughts of others.’

3. RESPONDING TO

“A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION: SYNTHESIS REPORT”

3.1 At the **first Lenten session, February 25, 2024**, parishioners reviewed the Synod’s inception, initiation, development, challenges, and goals. This session related the Synod’s goals to those found in the “Pastoral Plan” prepared by the XIIIth meeting of the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC), July 20-23, 2023. Because many parishioners attended the NBCC meeting, it was important to identify salient connections **between** the Synod’s emphasis on **differentiated co-responsibility in mission and** the Congress’ emphases on responding actively

to the call to evangelize, to live a life of prayer and growth in personal holiness, and to give voice to the concerns of Black Catholics and other marginalized peoples.

3.2 During the **second Lenten session, March 3, 2024**, parishioners discussed what it means to **participate** actively and concretely in the **mission**, for as the “Synthesis Report” declares, “the Church ‘is’ mission.” Further, *as Church*, we are sent under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to **co-operate** in preparing the way for the coming Reign of God (see, “Synthesis Report,” Part II All Disciples, All Missionaries, Section 8; *Lumen Gentium* 5). Parishioners affirmed the **equality of all human beings**, female and male, as made in the image and likeness of God; endorsed the need for women’s full participation in Church ministries; and maintained the necessity as followers of Jesus to **combat clericalism**.

3.3 Parishioners continued to probe the meaning of **participation in mission** during the **third Lenten session, March 10, 2024**. Members reflected on and discussed the Christian call to vocation for **mission**, strategized how to engage young people in the life of the parish, and considered the implications of digital media use in parish life.

3.4 Parishioners humbly acknowledged during the **fourth Lenten session, March 17, 2024**, just how we *as Saint Katharine Drexel Parish* strive to function as an *ecclesial family* who **cooperates** in the **mission** of Jesus and yearns to grow the ‘Beloved Community’ within and beyond our parish walls.

Our **ongoing formation for participation in mission** includes regular personal and communal prayer and spiritual devotions or practices, along with personal and communal study and reflection on Sacred Scripture, history, and theology. Saint Katharine Drexel’s **participation in mission** is grounded in **Eucharistic hospitality**. Our **parish maxim** articulates this decisively: “*All are welcome in this place!*” Hence, we *seek to live up to and to live out of* Eucharistic hospitality as we **participate in mission of Jesus** through concrete practical assistance to migrant families, and to homeless children, youth women, and men; through principled commitment to mutual respect, encouragement, correction, and cooperation in **communion with one another** as followers of Jesus, maintaining a familial atmosphere infused with Christian love (*agape*); and through understanding and appreciating the diverse cultural traditions, customs, and aesthetic expressions that nurture and bond us as an ecclesial family committed to **communion, participation, and mission**.

4. PERSISTENT CONCERNS

4.1 For a Synodal Church, the 2023 *Instrumentum Laboris* instructed us to listen to the people’s concerns as a matter of faith and practice, thus, the **Social Teaching principle of participation requires listening** to the robust contributions of the faithful as the Spirit is leading us at Saint Katharine Drexel to discern what it means to walk with and to work together in our local and global ecclesial communities mindful of a preferential option for women and people belonging to marginalized communities.

4.2 Parishioners welcomed the “Synthesis Report’s” recognition that given the conflictual, even contradictory complexity of global living, “it is appropriate for the Church to engage decisively in education, in the culture of dialogue and encounter, combatting racism and xenophobia,

especially through pastoral formation” (Part I The Face of the Synodal Church, 1. “Synodality: Experience and Understanding,” Section 5, Proposals p, and q).

However, parishioners expressed deep dissatisfaction at the **absence of specific proposals** for curricula in seminary education to address racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, and xenophobia. Parishioners continued to stress the lack of cultural, racial-ethnic diversity among ordained clergy in the United States (see *also*, Part II All Disciples, All Missionaries, 8. “Church is Mission,” Section 9, Proposal p).

4.3 Parishioners repeated their **continuing frustration** and **sorrow** at the lack of recognition in the United States of the social, cultural, and structural situation of *all* Indigenous, Black, poor, and marginalized children, women, men, and elders. Again, parishioners called attention to the disheartening lack of recognition and appreciation of the gifts of the Black Catholic community in and by the Archdiocese of Boston as well as in many other dioceses across the United States.

4.4 Specific frustrations and disappointments of parishioners include

- The **elimination of the Office of Black Catholics** (not only in the Archdiocese of Boston, but in many other dioceses in the United States).

- The **failure to grapple with anti-Black racism** in a sustained, programmatic, and structural manner. The need for White (European-American) clergy, religious, and laity to earnestly take responsibility to develop and enact structured programs for laity, seminarians, and clergy that respond comprehensively to the various expressions of racism and xenophobia that deface the Body of Christ.

A sound historical grasp and penitential understanding of the roots of racism and white supremacy compose a first step on the path to liberation and reconciliation. 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. As Church, as the Body of Christ we must publicly acknowledge and publicly confess ecclesial complicity in sins of racism against Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Indigenous persons.

Moreover, it is important and necessary to distinguish between *guilt* and *responsibility*. White (European American) Catholics and citizens of the United States living in the contemporary are *not* guilty of the historical sins of genocide and slavery, with their accompanying crimes and sins of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Yet, as members of the Body of Christ, forming and sharing in 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 spawned. Guilt may rightly 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 (European American) Catholics and citizens of the United States incur guilt *only* when *actively engaged in* or *passively complicity with* acts of racism or acts of racial and cultural oppression, violence, and injustice. Nonetheless, *all* White (European American) Catholics and citizens of the United States *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 that coalesce to shape

our collective, cumulative history. *As Church*, as followers of Jesus in **mission**, as the Body of Christ, we have the responsibility to act to transform and to change the contours and structures of our present situation in order to bring about the flourishing of all God's human creatures.

4. CONCLUSION

As Saint Katharine Drexel Parish, *as Church*, we pray daily for “the just advancement of our neighbors, that through the good things which [God] richly bestows upon all, each human person may be brought to perfection, every division may be removed, and equity and justice may be established in human society. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, [God's] Son, who lives and reigns with [the Father] in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever” (from the *Roman Missal*, Collect for the Votive Mass for the Progress of Peoples). For *us as Church, as the household of God*, in this time in our world, this prayer remains our task, our prayer, and our hope.

On behalf of Saint Katharine Drexel Parish, Archdiocese of Boston, Massachusetts (USA)

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