



Community of Saint Peter
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A Synodal People – Our Listening Session Response

Dear Holy Father Francis,

Thank you for the invitation to share our faith community with you. We, too, strive to be a Synodal Church.

We have prayed over our “gift response” for many months. As stewards and disciples, we are eager to share our Community’s unique spirit and believe it is a viable model for the larger Church. We yearn for “a different church,” grounded in God’s love in so many ways.

The Community of Saint Peter is an intentional Eucharistic community in the city of Cleveland, Ohio. We were born from the closing of Historic Saint Peter in 2010. We had been a vibrant urban parish that was financially sound when the Bishop closed us and fifty other parishes. We were Spirit-led to establish ourselves as a Catholic community beyond the parameters of the diocese. We remain committed to the Gospel and our Catholic heritage.

Our Mission:

We are a Catholic community. Our sharing of the Eucharist and the Word challenges us to live the message of Jesus, love and respect all people, serve the poor, and work for peace and justice.

The Community of two hundred and fifty active members is governed by an eleven-member board of trustees that hires a pastoral team charged with overseeing our liturgical, pastoral, and administrative needs.

As the Body of Christ, we, the Community of Saint Peter, gather at the table and take with us the Spirit of openness and service which moves in and through our Community relationships and out into the world where we encounter Christ again and again.

In our Community, every voice is invited and involved in governance and faith leadership. We see this as essential to keep us on the move, in line with the Spirit of discernment, open and evolving to meet the needs of the Community and all God’s people.

Many of the comments below are the very words that members shared during our Listening Session in May. This summary is divided into several categories.

COMMUNITY

- The Community of Saint Peter (CSP) is called to participate – marked by our gathering around the altar. Church is a place where members can bring their gifts.
- Members feel welcome, know and support one another. The Community is “home,” where members feel safe to deepen relationships at worship, social life, retreats, faith sharing, and small group dinners.
- In the face of predictable and unpredictable change, the Community is a safe place for doubts and questions. What always emerges is a stronger commitment.
- The wisdom of the Spirit is discerned by the Community.

EUCCHARISTIC (a Real Presence experienced during and beyond liturgy)

- The liturgy is truly the work of the people – a work of love. It is sacred, holy and welcoming.
- Our Eucharist is where it all begins. Even the physical space, the set-up of chairs facing each other and gathering around the table, is life-giving.
- One member commented: the liturgy “washes over me.” It starts in the parking lot and continues with relationships. The way we celebrate is not rote, but wholly vibrant. The aesthetics of our liturgy make it very special.
- We use an ancient translation of the Eucharistic prayer, as well as inclusive-language Scripture readings, which we find speaks far more richly in the world in which we live. Language used in liturgy needs to be living.

INCLUSIVE and WELCOMING

- Inclusivity marks our Community.
- All are welcome to share in Communion at our table.
- Community is the bringing together of the many gifts that create the Church.
- All are equal here; all can minister here. We understand that “my participation and my gifts are important. Who I am and the gifts I bring are what is offered with the bread [and wine].”
- Our Community is marked by equality and is lay led.
- Our pastor was called from within the Community to serve. The men and women of the pastoral team work together as colleagues.
- Sacred relationships are enriched during Eucharist as well as when we walk with those on the margins. Members inspire one another and are role models for one another. Love is felt in our Community.

INTENTIONAL

- The intentional nature of our Community is essential. It is “foundational” that members want to be here.
- Many travel long distances to be with one another. Here we each bring our commitment to be the best we can be.
- Intention is rooted in love while obligation (rules and authority) can be rooted in fear. Members come here with intention, not obligation.

FOSTERING SPIRITUALITY (Wonder and Awe)

- As Church, we help one another embrace a living spirituality. CSP is where we can be vulnerable and open to the Spirit. We can share a spiritual intimacy even when we don’t have a human level friendship. This also is the Real Presence.
- The Apostles Creed speaks of a “holy” Church, and that is what we experience as a blessing here. The “catholic” nature of the Church is also experienced in our inclusiveness of membership and our appreciation of various ministries.
- “The awe and wonder of profound religious experience can be found in many places. Truly finding God in the liturgy opens us to sensing the holy all around us, whether at the Grand Canyon or in my art studio.”
- “Awe describes Church, the gift of being here in this Community: listening and yielding to the Spirit who is here and now as we gather, the Circle where I find God.”
- The Community hosts an annual retreat in Lent, often recruiting an author or professor to facilitate a rewarding day of reflection, discussion, and fellowship.

AN URBAN CHURCH WITH STRONG SOCIAL JUSTICE OUTREACH

- We are truly a Church in the City, attentive and responsive to those on the margins. We award annual social justice grants to local, national, and international nonprofits whose missions resonate with our own.
- The Community is committed to its presence in the inner city of Cleveland, Ohio, and has worked to establish ministries that aid the most vulnerable. Our Outreach Ministries include assisting with transitional housing, supporting refugees, serving meals at La Sagrada Familia, providing Christmas gifts for Children and Family Services, volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, supporting students at a local Cleveland Metropolitan School.
- We have an active commitment to Peace and Non-Violence.
- Our Education Programs regularly keep us informed with issues significant to our times. Topics have included world faiths, Gospel justice, refugee resettlement in Cleveland, prison ministry, women’s leadership in the Church, as well as matters in our local neighborhood.

LEARNING – LIVING – GROWING – CHANGING

- The Church Community is a place to learn – a place for spiritual seekers, a place to grow.
- The Community is “always on the move,” never really satisfied with where we are, challenged by the Gospel while challenging ourselves to change. We are willing to engage change and grow from it.
- We strive to be faithful to our calling.

PRESERVING AND RENEWING A LIVING TRADITION

- We have confidence in what we know to be the way of Church. “We trust the path we are on.”
- Our pastor was married, raised a family and therefore understands rather than stands apart from everyday life.
- It has been demonstrated that celibacy is no longer a required charism in the larger Church.
- We honor the Spirit and allow her to draw us forward.

OUR HOPES FOR THE LARGER CHURCH

- It is time for a new model of shared leadership, inclusive community, and mutual respect in Catholic parishes. It’s time for women to be recognized as the leaders they are and not just associates.
- Reaching potential younger members is important. They often show a deep spirituality that the Church ought to seek to understand and foster.
- It’s time to get rid of harmful teachings on our LGBTQ+ sisters and brothers and exclusionary practices at the Eucharistic table.
- Intentional Eucharistic Communities can be the model for a new way of being a Catholic faith community.
- May this be a time when we come together to hear and support each other, to strengthen us in living the Beatitudes.
- We pray that you, Pope Francis, not only hear our message, but respond in a way that Catholic teaching and pastoring change in our lifetime.

In preparation for our Synod Listening Session on May 21st, we held an Evening of Prayer four days before we gathered. The communal prayer and offerings of hope for genuine sharing clearly allowed for the gifts shared above.

Continued blessings!

Your sisters and brothers in Christ,

The Community of Saint Peter, Synod on Synodality Committee