

Ursuline Companions Host Synod Listening Sessions

In late March, the Ursuline Companions, a dedicated group of laywomen in Cincinnati, Ohio, chose to answer the Synodal invitation to “Walk Together as a Church with the Holy Spirit” by hosting two listening sessions titled “Women’s Voices for the Synod.”

The Companions were formed on Oct. 4, 2021, after almost three years of preparation and echo the directive of St. Angela Merici, the Ursuline foundress, to meet the needs of the times. The group was founded with encouragement from the Ursulines of Cincinnati to explore an alternative vision for the future, a way to pass on the legacy, ministry and charism of St. Angela.

On March 23, a virtual session was conducted via Zoom, with 15 attendees. An in-person session was held on March 26, with 34 attendees. From the total of 49 participants, 11 were African-American women. As directed by the preparatory documents and guidelines provided by the Vademecum, both listening sessions served as a forum for articulation and examination of the main Synod theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Preparation and Ministry.”

Discussions were prompted by the 10 “thematic nuclei” referenced by Pope Francis: Companions on the Journey, Listening, Speaking Out, Celebration, Shared Responsibility, Dialogue, Ecumenism, Authority, Discerning and Forming Ourselves.

When participants were asked “Why are you here?” the responses included personal hope of speaking candidly to Church hierarchal structures, expressing a longing for their singular voice to be heard and to bear an impact on the future direction of the Church. Perhaps the most significant topic explored during the Companions’ sessions was that listening informs and influences all other themes. Participants noted that while the Second Vatican Council recognized the role of the laity, the Catholic Church of today is out of touch and not listening to the people in the pews.

Those gathered felt there is an overwhelming sense that the pastoral ear of the Church has been turned off. In frustration, the Catholic faithful have, in turn, stopped listening. Examples cited by session attendees included marginalization of key populations of the faithful, such as women, BIPOC members and LGBTQ individuals.

In conclusion, the Holy Spirit inspired participants to attend the Synod sessions and powerfully share their “walking together” experiences as members of the Catholic faith who have been frustrated at previous failed attempts to be heard. All in attendance at the sessions expressed their sincere hope that their feedback would be heard to facilitate change.

The report from the Companions’ listening sessions has been sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod.