Saint Leo’s Parish as a Synodal Church

21 May 2024

WORKING DRAFT – for discussion only

BACKGROUND TO THIS STATEMENT

Pope Francis has asked the entire Church to reflect on our faith and our future. We are involved in a multi-year process of listening, faith-sharing and discernment. In response to the Pope’s invitation, a group of people at Saint Leo’s are creating a statement to contribute to the process going on in Rome. We understand that we speak for ourselves and not for Saint Leo’s Parish or the Diocese of Santa Rosa.

PART ONE: A SYNODAL CHURCH LISTENS

1. We believe that a synodal parish first and foremost respects the baptismal gifts of all its members. Baptism is a vocation to a life of service to the Church and to the world. Ministry is rooted in baptism.
2. St. Leo’s, therefore, must grow in awareness of the baptismal gifts and calling of all her members. Reflection on the meaning of our baptism must be on-going. This is not a simple, straightforward process. All those who serve the Gospel at Saint Leo’s, women and men, Spanish speaking and English speaking, young and old have been baptized into one body in Christ Jesus. We are a community of faith first and foremost. All ministries, including the ordained ministry of our priests, are rooted in our common baptism. Though our baptism, Saint Leo’s is a part of the Diocese of Santa Rosa and the world-wide Church.
3. In baptism, we have all received a personal call to holiness. We believe the Holy Spirit provides all the Church needs to be faithful to the call of the Gospel. This includes the celebration of the sacraments, the service of the poor, the promotion of justice, the faith formation of children and adults, and protection of the earth, our common home. Each of us must pledge to examine how we may best serve our parish community and how we are called to serve the world.
4. Therefore, we commit ourselves to listening. We pledge to open our minds to the whispering of the Spirit around us. We pledge to recognize and support the baptismal dignity and gifts all, including the least and most marginal among us. We pledge to listen without judgement to another’s words and to pause before answering in order to discern the working of the Holy Spirit.
5. We also pledge to commit ourselves in solidarity to the support of all members of our faith community. We pledge to work humbly with one another, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This includes all our activities as a faith community, but especially service to our youth, the care of our elderly, accompanying the immigrant, support for the needy and protection for the planet.
6. Furthermore, we commit ourselves to support small faith communities devoted to prayer and faith-sharing, service to the community, the study of scripture, and other forms of discernment. Face to face listening is essential to being a synodal church.
7. We expect our leaders to listen prayerfully to the entire community in the process of discernment. This has not always been the case in the Church. We are committed to faithful waiting in the Spirit with the aim of holding opposing points of view together until the Spirit brings forth a vision for moving forward.

PART TWO: LEGISLATING SYNODALITY

1. We urge Pope Francis to legislate policies that will protect and promote the baptismal dignity of all. This will require discernment about the proper leadership ordained ministers give to local parish communities. We need better programs for recognizing leadership in the Church and supporting it.
2. Pastoral assemblies should be mandatory at the parish and diocesan levels. Pastors assigned to parishes must be properly trained and vetted for their ability to lead a local synodal Church effectively. Local parishioners must be free to communicate with their bishop about the success or lack of success in their parish.
3. Local Churches (parishes and dioceses) should be encouraged to foster theological conversations representing diverse viewpoints. But no local Church should be held hostage to theologies that are not well supported in the tradition or ideologies that serve existing structures of power, clerical or otherwise. We also recognize that there is only one Spirit that raises up the Church in multiple, locally enculturated ways.
4. The Gospel’s call to the promotion of justice must constantly be discerned anew in a synodal Church. This includes justice both within and outside the Church, justice for the marginalized and justice for the earth, our common home. As a people of faith, we need to study the social teachings of the Church as well as the prophetic witness of the Bible and discern how these teachings help us to discern what the Gospel requires of us today.
5. We encourage the Synod on Synodality to reflect on the need to encourage processes for moral discernment in the Church. This will require the pope and the Roman curia as well as the Office of the Synod in Rome to support structures of consultation at the grassroots level regarding the Church’s moral teachings with the aim of reforming its canon law and its pastoral practice. The experience of the faithful and the wisdom of pastors must be incorporated into this process of reform. Areas of specific concern include (1) the Church’s ministry to the divorced, (2) to LGBTQ people, (3) to women who have terminated pregnancies, and (4) to those whose human dignity has been violated in any way. The Church must always go to the peripheries in order to accompany the marginalized and learn from their experiences with humility.

PART THREE: BECOMING A WELCOMING, MERCIFUL CHURCH

1. St. Leo’s Church is a community of sinners striving, by the grace of God, to walk humbly with our God. We believe that, in the promised Kingdom of God, justice and mercy will finally embrace. As a synodal Church, we pledge ourselves to open our hearts with mercy and kindness to those who have been marginalized, despised and excluded from society and from the Church.
2. We pledge solidarity with “the widow, the orphan and the stranger in your land” (Dt. 10:18). The welcoming of immigrant people is a special priority for Saint Leo’s parish. We recognize that the majority of us who assist in the mass at Saint Leo’s prefers to worship in Spanish, not English. We are one community of faith which needs to respond to the needs of all, no matter what language we speak. In a special way, our community has the responsibility to raise up and support leaders eager to serve the Spanish speaking members of our parish.
3. The Church as a global community of faith needs to give special attention to the dignity of women and the importance of their service to us. The Holy Spirit is always raising up leaders among the baptized. Cooperating with the Spirit will require us to think in new ways about the role of women in the Church. As a first step, women should be included in the service of deacons. The leadership of women need to be supported at all levels of the Church’s work.