



Remade for Mission

Synod Report

St. Matthew's, Voorheesville – October 18, 2025 – Foundation and Vision

St. Lucy/St. Bernadette's, Altamont – November 18, 2025 – Transparency and Truth

Christ the King, Westmere – December 18, 2025 – Spiritual Growth Within

St. Thomas the Apostle, Delmar – January 15, 2026 – Bringing Christ to Others

Led by:

Fr. Rick Lesser

Fr. Matt Duclos

Ann Hodgson

Beginning in the fall, members of St. Matthew's Church in Voorheesville, St. Lucy/St. Bernadette's in Altamont, Christ the King in Westmere, and St. Thomas the Apostle in Delmar gathered together to be guided by the Holy Spirit in a discussion on how we are fulfilling **the Mission of the Church - to make Jesus Christ present who offers us the fullness of life and the salvation of souls**. The participants ranged from almost 70 at the first session to about 35 at the last session. Each meeting began with an introduction and prayer by Fr. Rick Lesser. Ann Hodgson then led us through the synod procedure and a guided meditation to begin the small group discussions. Facilitators worked with groups of 4-8 participants to discuss the topic of the day. Fr. Matt Duclos closed the sessions with reflection and prayer.

Session one focused on who our neighbors are and how we are interacting with them now. We also thought about ways we could better connect with them. Participants all had a list of all the ministries of each parish in our network and talked about what is working and what is not being utilized as it should. The groups consisted of a mix of members from each parish in the network.

In the second session at St. Lucy/St. Bernadette's participants were grouped by parish where they discussed the financials of each parish. Members were happy to hear a thorough explanation of the financial reports and were able to have productive conversations as a result. We also talked about where each parish stands pastorally.

The third session approached the topic of spirituality as it pertains to each person individually and also within each parish as a whole. Members explored what growing closer to God means to them and how to get there. We also took a look at how the parish is supporting the spiritual growth of the members and how to strengthen that faith. The gist of these conversations seemed to be that we are doing wonderful things but where we fall flat is putting out general asks rather than each of us personally welcoming and inviting individuals to join/participate, etc.

The last session asked participants to ponder and discuss all the ways we are making Christ present in the world around us. We talked about all the wonderful things we are doing now and who our partners are for those ministries, as well as who our potential partners could be and what more we could be doing in our community. Fr. Rick expressed a strong desire to see a St. Vincent de Paul Society developed in our vicariate where we could have volunteers from all professions and walks of life available to help those in need.

The summaries from all four sessions are included in this report.

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Synodal Listening Session #1

Summary

Step 1 – Who are our neighbors?

Parishioners we haven't seen in a while:

- Young people and families with children who come to receive their sacraments and then don't come back until it's time for the next sacrament
- Elderly parishioners who are homebound or in nursing homes
- Those hurt by the church or who feel unaccepted

How do we interact with these neighbors now?

- ✓ Church Signage
- ✓ Walks
- ✓ Sports Games
- ✓ Sacrament Anniversary Cards
- ✓ Concerts
- ✓ Travel Experiences
- ✓ Home Visit Ministry/Pastoral Care
- ✓ Welcome Cards

How can we better connect with them?

- ❖ Hospitality
- ❖ Generations of Faith
- ❖ School Activities
- ❖ Social Media
- ❖ Newsletter
- ❖ Kids Book Club
- ❖ Personal invitations

Parish Network and Vicariate

- Most people are aware of the other parishes in our network but say that the opportunities for the parishes to be brought together are occasional or infrequent.

How do we interact with these neighbors now?

- ✓ Penance Services
- ✓ Book Clubs
- ✓ Picnics
- ✓ Faith Formation
- ✓ Spirituality Groups
- ✓ Midnight Mass

How can we better connect with them?

- ❖ Network Communication Service
- ❖ Hospitality
- ❖ Social Media

Business

- Restaurants
- Grocery stores
- Preschools
- Banks
- Mechanics
- Gas stations
- Hardware stores

How do we interact with these neighbors now?

- ✓ CTK ECEC
- ✓ Ad Space in Bulletin

How can we better connect with them?

- ❖ Partner for Hospitality

Colleges

- SUNY Albany
- Siena
- Russell Sage
- Maria

How do we interact with these neighbors now?

How can we better connect with them?

- ❖ Newsletter
- ❖ Social Media
- ❖ School activities
- ❖ Sporting events

Hospitals

- Albany Med
- St. Peter's
- Ellis
- Sunnyview

How do we interact with these neighbors now?

- ✓ Pastoral Care
- ✓ Visits and anointing

How can we better connect with them?

- ❖ Newsletter
- ❖ Social Media

Other religions – churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.

- Methodist
- Presbyterian
- Ohav Shalom
- Zahra Center

How do we interact with these neighbors now?

- ✓ Ecumenical Thanksgiving
- ✓ Ecumenical Witness at Baptism

How can we better connect with them?

- ❖ Newsletter
- ❖ Offer space for meeting
- ❖ Social Media

Residents who are not parishioners (neighborhoods, senior living facilities, etc.)

- The Summit
- Peregrine
- Avila
- St. Sophia
- Hamilton Parc
- Pine Bush
- Daughters of Sarah Kingsway
- Our Lady of Mercy
- Feura Bush Sr. Apartments
- Shaker Place
- Beverwyck
- Teresian House
- Family Promise

How do we interact with these neighbors now?

- ✓ Senior Soup Distribution
- ✓ Senior Luncheon
- ✓ Love bags for the homeless

How can we better connect with them?

- ❖ Ask – “How can I pray for you?”
- ❖ Offer rides to church

Organizations/Community Groups

- Red Cross
- AA
- Board of Elections
- Food Pantry
- VFW
- Fire Departments
- Historical Society
- Senior Services
- Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts
- Knights of Columbus
- PTA
- Libraries

How do we interact with these neighbors now?

- ✓ St. Matthew’s is a polling site
- ✓ Social Hall is used for various school events
- ✓ Emergency meeting place for Voorheesville Elementary
- ✓ St. Matt’s houses New Scotland Community Food Pantry

How can we better connect with them?

- ❖ Join groups
- ❖ Newsletter
- ❖ Social Media

Where do people in our community gather?

- Sporting events
- Fire Department events
- Parades
- Parish Picnics
- Restaurants
- School
- Parks
- Rail Trail
- Library

What opportunities exist to meet more of our neighbors?

- Partnerships with organizations
- Visibility in Community
- Family Promise
- Consolidate Parish Picnic
- Letters/Food Baskets
- Senior Lunches
- Library Functions
- Let outside groups know about facilities and ministries
- Blood Drives

How are we striving to make the church the center of people's lives and seen as a "beacon of hope?"

- Church Signage
- Welcome All- "Come as you are"
- Invite
- Church events in Newspaper
- Be Individual Ambassadors
- Pray for people and let them know we're praying for them
- Email blasts
- Not liberal or conservative
- Make all people, cultures and backgrounds feel at home and loved

Can we partner with other faiths/organizations to meet the needs in our community?

- Food Pantry
- Grassroot Givers
- Thrift Stores
- Rescue Missions
- Mother's Groups
- Seder Dinner

Ministry Evaluation

Successful ministries

- Home Visit/Pastoral Care
- Hospitality – well attended but hard to get volunteers
- SL/SB Children's Liturgy of the Word – use as example
- Combined Ministries St. Matthew's and CTK– Brother's Walking with Christ, Women's Spirituality Group, Book Club
- Prayer Shawl – can go out to community organizations

Unsuccessful Ministries

- Walking with Moms in Need – Gabriel Project – Volunteers trained and ready but not utilized. Is there a need in the community or are we not making it known/accessible?

Can we join with other neighbors to minister to those in need?

- Similar ministries within network parishes could combine (i.e., Prayer Shawl, Respect Life, Alzheimer Care Team, Family Promise, Generations of Faith, Hospitality Events
- Food Pantries
- St. Vincent de Paul Society

Where could we refocus resources and volunteers toward new ministries?

- Youth and big families - we're "competing" with sports

Opportunities for spiritual growth offered for current parishioners in our network?

- Men's and Women's Spirituality Groups, Eucharistic Adoration

What do we offer those who are not parishioners?

- Newsletter, send cards to those on prayer lists

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Synodal Listening Session #2

Transparency and Truth – Summary

Theme: *Where are we right now? What fruits and obstacles do we see from our current initiatives?*

Comments/Concerns/Suggestions based on the Financial Data

After Mike Markham’s account of the financial data, some people said it would be helpful to have that sort of explanation given with the data, either written or via a talk after Mass.

<p><i>St. Thomas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>All parishes operating in the red except SL/SB</i> • <i>Parishioners don’t understand financial status</i> 	<p><i>St. Matthew’s</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increased offertory & additional collections</i> • <i>Venmo/ E-Giving/ QR Code as giving options</i>
<p><i>Christ the King</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Talk about tithing</i> • <i>Fundraising for a specific purpose</i> • <i>Sell reusable coffee mugs to bring back and forth to hospitality</i> • <i>Increase offertory/decrease staff</i> • <i>Venmo</i> • <i>Shift Early Childhood Education Center to outside entity</i> 	<p><i>St. Lucy/St. Bernadette’s</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Building is in good shape</i> • <i>Good fiscal management and transparency</i> • <i>Concerned about bankruptcy’s impact on parish</i> • <i>Declining offertory</i> • <i>Diocesan appeal not being met</i> • <i>Would like to increase online giving and add Masses</i>

What has been your experience with the parish being transparent about finances, decision-making and pastoral priorities?

All parishes reported that the information is made available but many parishioners don’t read it or understand it.

<p><i>St. Thomas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The parish is transparent but parishioners think the parish is in better fiscal shape than it is</i> 	<p><i>St. Matthew’s</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Annual report gives good information – make finances more specific/broken down</i> • <i>Publish reports more frequently</i> • <i>Acknowledge wrongdoings and make amends</i>
<p><i>Christ the King</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Financial data is published but people aren’t seeing how it effects them</i> • <i>Parishioners are unaware of decision-making & pastoral priorities</i> 	<p><i>St. Lucy/St. Bernadette’s</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Parishioners would like to be included in decision-making in regards to Mass times</i> • <i>The food pantry is a priority</i> • <i>Annual report helps with transparency</i>

How can we best raise awareness and engage parishioners in the life of the parish?

<p><i>St. Thomas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Monthly feature in bulletin of how money is being used/results of fundraising</i> • <i>Talk from pulpit – ask for help</i> 	<p><i>St. Matthew's</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Go door to door, 2 by 2 with cookies and a “we miss you” card</i> • <i>Bring a friend to Generations of Faith</i> • <i>Hospitality</i> • <i>Have a table at Back to School Night</i> • <i>Share Pastoral Council meeting minutes with parish</i>
<p><i>Christ the King</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>State of the Parish videos</i> • <i>Frequently rearrange bulletin to keep it interesting</i> • <i>Invite new members to get involved in ministry</i> • <i>Compile a list of parishioners with special skills to help with functions</i> • <i>E-mail bulletin</i> 	<p><i>St. Lucy/St. Bernadette's</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Online mailings- unsuccessful</i> • <i>Head counts at Mass</i> • <i>Personal invitations</i> • <i>Make bulletin available online</i> • <i>Present opportunities for parishioners to get involved</i> • <i>Children's Liturgy of the Word</i> • <i>Meals</i> • <i>Ministry/Advent Wreaths/Pancake Breakfasts</i>

How can we help parishioners to understand and prepare for the effects of the priest shortage?

<p><i>St. Thomas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Make them aware of what the priest do daily</i> • <i>Invite them to help in ways they can</i> 	<p><i>St. Matthew's</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>More Parish Life Directors</i> • <i>More family discussions – talk to kids about the priesthood</i>
<p><i>Christ the King</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Let parishioners know the ages and number of priests in the diocese</i> • <i>Make them aware of Sunday Service in the absence of a priest</i> • <i>Lay leadership for facilities and finances</i> • <i>Merge services within network – i.e., Mass, Confession, Faith Formation and Ministries</i> 	<p><i>St. Lucy's/St. Bernadette's</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Looking for solutions from diocese/Vatican</i>

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Synodal Listening Session #3
Spiritual Growth Within – Summary

Individual Growth

What does “growing spiritually” mean to you?

- Developing a deeper relationship with God in various ways
- Recognizing Him in daily life
- Looking to Him for guidance
- Becoming more Christ-like

What has helped you to do so?

- Prayer
- Adoration
- Friends
- Family
- Music
- Priests homilies
- Ministry/Serving others
- Retreats

What may have hindered you?

- Busyness of life
- Family/Personal/Worldly Problems
- Selfishness

What would be helpful to you now?

- More prayer time
- Faith sharing with others
- Spiritual Books
- Retreats/ Intentional quiet time

Growth within the Parish

How does your parish support spiritual growth of its members?

- Hospitality
- GoF/FFF
- Retreats
- Liturgy/Music
- Pastoral Care/Home Visits
- Children's Liturgy of the Word
- Baptisms/OCIA Rites during Mass
- Prayer Chains
- Priest/Deacon Engagement
- Adoration/Daily Mass/Rosary
- Men's/Women's Spirituality Groups
- Faith Sharing/Bible Study

What can be done to strengthen faith and spiritual life within the parish?

- Personal invitations to ministries, small groups, etc.
- Youth activities
- Social Media/Weekly Updates
- Individual Ambassadors
- Have priests speak about what the priesthood involves with the intention of educating young men about the possibility of a vocation. Either from the altar or on a special weekend or evening for those interested

Are we doing things that fail to achieve the desired results?

- ❖ General asks instead of **personal invitations**

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Synodal Listening Session #4
Bringing Christ to Others – Summary

What are we already doing in the local community and beyond?

- **Food Pantries/Thanksgiving Meals/Christmas Gifts/Personal Item Bags**
 - *Partner with Town of New Scotland and Guilderland and Hilltown Resource Center/ Catholic Charities*
- **Senior Soup Meals for pickup or delivery**
 - *Partner with FUMCV and Teen Baking Ministry*
- **Senior Luncheon**
 - *Partner with Town of New Scotland/Albany County LifePath*
- **Advent/Giving Tree/Baby Bottle Boomerang/Father's Day Diaper Drive/Mother's Day Baby Shower**
 - *Partner with Mary's Corner, CMS, Birthright, Christ Child Society*
- **Provide temporary housing and meals for homeless families**
 - *Partner with Family Promise of the Capital Region*
- **Lunch Bunch**
 - *Partner with St. John's/St. Ann's*
- **CYO Basketball**
 - *Partner with Guilderland School District*
- **Confirmation and First Communion Service Projects for homeless**
 - *Partner with City Mission & Joseph's House*
- **Pastoral Care/Home Visitation Ministries/Prison Ministry**
 - *Partner with local Nursing Homes and Hospitals and Prisons*
- **Men's Association/Knights of Columbus – Service Groups – Fundraisers, Scholarships, etc.**
- **Prayer Shawl Ministry**

Corporal Works of Mercy

Faith Formation

- **OCIA – Order of Christian Initiation of Adults**
- **Generations of Faith**
- **Family Faith Formation**

- **Men's and Women's Spirituality Groups/Book Clubs**

What are some other opportunities to make Christ Present?

- St. Vincent DePaul Society
- Needs Assessment
- Supports for kids in school
- Volunteer days
- More ecumenical gatherings within our network and with other faiths
- Increase services to the homebound – grocery shopping/rides to church, etc.
- Voorheesville Village Summer Camp
- Be a resource for Walking with Mom's in Need in schools and community
- Design programs in leadership and conflict resolution for youth

Who are potential Partners?

- Schools
- Professional Organizations
- Village to Village
- Volunteer Programs
- Senior Outreach
- Catholic Charities
- Medical Groups
- Merrilac Center
- Community Caregivers
- Other Local Churches
- VFW/ American Legion
- Girls Scouts/ Boy Scouts
- Hospice
- Blood Drives in Altamont
- Disabled housing
- Living Resources
- Town of New Scotland and surrounding towns
- Village of Voorheesville
- Local Businesses as Donors and Marketers

What obstacles might we face?

- Separation of Church and State
- Youth involvement
- Time
- Fear of Divisiveness
- Lack of Volunteers
- Money
- Identifying people who need help
- Obtaining Commitment – New Blood
- Overcoming competition for time
- Legal obstacles
- Protect vulnerable adults
- “We've never done that” and/or “That will never work”
- Ownership – “This is how we do it.”
- Willingness of partners to promote/accept