

PASTORAL NOTE - AUGUST 2025



# **EVER ANCIENT, EVER NEW**

THE SYNODAL JOURNEY  
OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

By Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila

In the words of St. Augustine, our hearts remain restless until they rest in God, who is ***ever ancient, ever new***. This truth, which has echoed throughout the ages, came alive anew for the Archdiocese of Denver as we embraced the invitation of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, to embark on the synodal journey. In this journey, the Church of Northern Colorado sought to listen intently to the Holy Spirit, who never ceases to renew the Church in every age and place.

Our synodal process was not an exercise in novelty for its own sake, nor a platform for human agendas. Rather, it was a humble pilgrimage of hearts returning to the ancient and unchanging truth of the Gospel, seeking new ways, in our apostolic age, to proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ to a world in need of healing, unity and hope. As stated in the Final Document of the Synod of Bishops, we sought to be a church, “who listens, prays, meditates, dialogues, accompanies, discerns, decides and acts.”<sup>1</sup>

In sharing our experience, I hope to provide an example of one expression of synodality that followed the guidelines set forth by Pope Francis and bore great fruit. I can see how a church that embraces and learns to practice a synodal spirituality is better equipped to navigate our mission in changing times. Certainly, our process has room for improvement, but I pray that it will be a light to other churches as they seek to discover the will and plan of God, which he reveals through prayer, Scripture and Tradition.

---

1 Francis, Final Document, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Oct 26, 2024.

---

## **A Synodal Process Rooted in Prayer and Apostolic Mission**

Before the synod was ever announced, the Archdiocese had begun discerning how to live out the Gospel in a culture that no longer reflects a Christian worldview. We recognized that our times resemble those of the apostles — a minority faith community called to proclaim Christ boldly in a society often indifferent or hostile to the Gospel. This awareness shaped the spirit in which we approached the synod: not simply as a listening exercise, but to equip the Church for mission.

We began with two clear goals: to re-acquire a biblical worldview and to listen to God. In the months preceding our parish and archdiocesan discernment gatherings, we invited the entire Archdiocese to a communal retreat, preached through homilies on the kerygma — the basic proclamation of the Gospel — so that our ears and hearts would be opened to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Path of Discernment: Listening as a Church**

Our synodal process unfolded in parishes, small groups and an archdiocesan-wide discernment event, involving hundreds of the faithful across our diverse communities. At each stage, the focus remained fixed on prayerful listening: silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, shared reflection on Scripture and dialogue rooted in charity.

The questions we posed were straightforward but meaningful: What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church of Northern Colorado about our mission today? How can our parishes live as embassies of Christ's kingdom in a foreign land? What is the mission of the disciple in this apostolic time?

These questions guided parish gatherings, virtual surveys and ultimately an archdiocesan discernment event in Broomfield, Colorado. There, in union with the Holy Father's act of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we consecrated our synodal journey, offering prayers of repentance and renewal.

## **A Gathering of the People of God: The Archdiocesan Discernment Event**

One of the most beautiful and grace-filled moments of our synodal journey was the Archdiocesan Discernment Event held in March 2022. This gathering brought together 349 faithful from across the Archdiocese of Denver — pastors, parish representatives, leaders of apostolates and movements, religious and lay faithful — forming a mosaic that reflected the rich diversity of our local Church.

This was no ordinary conference or meeting. From beginning to end, it was a sacred assembly: a time set apart for prayer, listening and discerning together as one body what the Holy Spirit was saying to the Church of Northern Colorado. We desired not human solutions, but God's plan. We desired not debate, but true dialogue rooted in prayer.

Our schedule was crafted intentionally to foster this sacred purpose. Each of the four central themes — the mission of the disciple, the mission of the family, the mission of the parish and the mission of the Archdiocese — was explored in a rhythm of proclamation, prayer and dialogue.

Each session began with a short, Spirit-filled presentation that synthesized what had emerged from the parish discernment gatherings and the virtual surveys. These presentations were offered by members of the Synod Team — priests, lay men and women — who themselves had been steeped in prayer and listening. They shared not opinions, strategies or human solutions, but echoes of the Spirit's voice heard through our people.

Following each presentation, we turned first not to discussion, but to the Lord. Thirty minutes or more of silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament marked each session. This was the heart of our synod: listening to God before listening to one another. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we desired to hear Jesus open the Scriptures and set our hearts aflame before we spoke.

In this silence, participants prayed with the specific question posed for discernment: ***What is the Holy Spirit saying today about the mission of the disciple? Of the family? Of the parish? Of the Archdiocese?*** We were reminded again that before we speak, we must hear.

Only after this time of silent adoration did we turn to dialogue. Participants gathered in small groups of about ten, composed intentionally to reflect the diversity of our Church — clergy and laity, men and women, different cultural backgrounds, different apostolates and ministries. In these small circles, each voice was heard. A facilitator ensured that the dialogue remained respectful, prayerful and focused on what had been heard in prayer. A scribe captured the fruits of each conversation.

These small groups were not ends in themselves. After discussion, representatives shared their group's discernment with the larger assembly, creating a communal synthesis of what the Spirit was saying across our Archdiocese. In real time, these insights were submitted electronically, allowing the Synod Team to begin discerning patterns and themes even as the event unfolded.

The event began and ended with the Holy Eucharist, the source and summit of our life and mission. On March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, we opened with Mass, joining the Holy Father and bishops worldwide in consecrating Russia and Ukraine, and indeed the entire world, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This act of entrustment was no coincidence; it was divine providence. We sought Our Lady's intercession for our synodal journey, knowing she always leads us to her Son.

Throughout the gathering, there were moments of repentance, of seeking God's mercy for the wounds of the Church, and of surrendering our plans to his divine will. The Surrender Novena, which many had prayed in the days leading up to the event, shaped our disposition: ***"Jesus, I surrender myself to you. Take care of everything."***

By structuring the gathering in this rhythm of proclamation, prayer, dialogue and synthesis, we avoided the pitfalls of human agenda and debate. The process itself became a means of unity and healing. People came with opinions but left with a sense of shared mission. We were not merely exchanging ideas; we were, together, listening to the living God.

## Testimonies of Grace: How the Holy Spirit Moved Among Us

In crafting the schedule of the Archdiocesan Discernment Event, our desire was simple yet profound: to clear away the noise and give space for the voice of the Holy Spirit to be heard. As we listened together, we witnessed how God's grace worked quietly yet powerfully in the hearts of those gathered. These testimonies remain vivid reminders that when we place ourselves in the presence of the Lord, he speaks, heals and renews.

One such testimony came from a pastor who shared the story of a long-time parishioner known for opposing almost every initiative at the parish. This man, respected in the community but often a source of tension, entered the parish discernment gathering with his usual skepticism. Yet after the period of silent adoration, he lingered in the chapel for ten minutes longer than the group. When he finally rejoined the conversation, his eyes were filled with tears. He had encountered the living Christ. From that moment, his posture changed. The pastor shared how their relationship was transformed: what had once been marked by friction became a bond of mutual respect and cooperation. This is the fruit of listening first to God.

Another moving testimony came from a lay participant at the Archdiocesan Event. At the start of the weekend, he eagerly expressed his opinions to a Synod Team member — opinions about everything he believed was wrong in the Church and exactly what needed to change. Rather than engage in argument, the team member gently invited him to take all



those concerns to the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The man did so. When he emerged from prayer, he approached the team member, tears streaming down his face. “I told Jesus everything I told you,” he confessed, “and then I waited for him to respond. The first words I heard were: ***‘Would it even matter?’***” In that moment, he recognized how pride had clouded his vision, how he had never really listened to the Gospel. He shared that he felt convicted by the Lord to follow him and not his own ideas. His heart softened, and he became open not to his plans, but to God’s.

We also witnessed how the Spirit worked within families. Two parish representatives, a married couple, attended the Archdiocesan gathering and were struggling deeply in their relationship. The busyness of life, the weight of responsibilities and unresolved hurts had created division between them. But during the event, as they prayed side by side, the Lord began to heal their wounds. In the months that followed, they testified to how praying together became a regular practice in their marriage, bringing newfound peace and forgiveness. What had begun as a simple invitation to listen became a wellspring of grace for their family.

In another instance, two parish representatives from different communities met during one of the early training sessions for the synodal process. Over time, through their shared participation in the gatherings and their common desire to serve the Church, they discerned a deeper calling. By God’s providence, what began as collaboration in the synod blossomed into love — and they are now engaged to be married.

Parishes, too, acted upon what they discerned. One parish, after hearing the Spirit's invitation to foster deeper community, immediately formed small faith-sharing groups. Nearly two hundred people signed up without hesitation, eager to grow in fellowship and discipleship. This was not a program imposed from above, but a response that welled up from prayerful listening.

Through these testimonies, we saw that the synodal process was more than dialogue — it was an encounter with the living God. When we created space for God to speak, he did not disappoint. The Spirit moved hearts to repentance, reconciliation, conversion and mission. It was clear: this was not our work, but the Lord's.

## The Voice of the Spirit: Key Themes

From this prayerful discernment, clear themes emerged — echoes of the Spirit's guidance.

**Divine Intimacy and Personal Mission:** The Lord called each disciple to abide deeply in him (see John 15:5), to let our relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit truly transform us. We heard the Spirit remind us: ***“You are my plan; rest in me and it will be done.”***

**The Eucharist as the Soul of the Parish:** The centrality of the Eucharist was reaffirmed. Our parishes must be places where the Eucharistic Lord is encountered and shared. As Venerable Fulton Sheen said, ***“You will win the war before the Blessed Sacrament.”***

**Healing and Unity:** Healing must begin with repentance and reconciliation, flowing from clergy to laity, from parishes to communities. We are called to be agents of Christ's healing, acknowledging past wounds and building bridges across divides of culture, language and history. Unity is not a superficial harmony, but a supernatural communion rooted in truth and love.

**Mission of the Family:** Families are called to be domestic churches, places of healing and formation, where parents are equipped to be the primary formators of their children in faith. We heard the deep desire of families for accompaniment and support in living this vocation amid today's challenges.

**Accompaniment and Equipping:** Our parishes must be communities where all are welcomed as beloved children of God, where accompaniment is not a program but a culture. We must equip the laity, who are the protagonists of mission in the world, to know their gifts and charisms and to use them boldly for the Gospel.

**Return to Our First Love:** Above all, the Spirit invited us to rediscover the simplicity of discipleship: to love God and neighbor with undivided hearts. ***“Do less and you will do more,”*** the Lord seemed to say. Let us not lose sight of the one who is the source of all mission.

## **The First Fruits of the Journey**

What did we see as fruits of this synodal journey? First, the process itself bore fruit: through prayerful discernment, personal agendas gave way to a shared sense of the Spirit's guidance. Unity and healing began to take root where division had reigned.

We witnessed conversions: individuals reconciled with one another, their pastors and the Church. Couples found healing in their marriages. New friendships formed; vocations were discerned; and small faith communities sprang up to deepen fellowship and mission. Rather than seeking human plans, the plan of God in Scripture became the priority. The ways of God were sought and not those of the world.

Parishes took immediate steps to embody what they had heard: forming small groups, creating opportunities for family accompaniment and fostering a culture of welcome and hospitality.

Above all, we saw that when we surrender to the Holy Spirit — when we let him be the planner — the Church comes alive anew. The ancient truth of the Gospel found new and creative expressions, suited for this apostolic age.

## Ever Ancient, Ever New

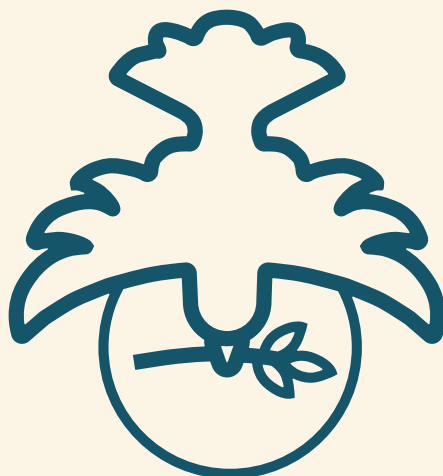
As we look ahead, we know that this synodal journey is only the beginning. The work of healing, unity and mission continues. We are committed to ongoing discernment, formation and action, always seeking to be faithful to what the Spirit is saying to the Church of Northern Colorado. “[We keep] our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2). We know in faith that when we abide in Jesus, we will bear fruit as he has promised (John 15).

The words of St. Augustine continue to guide us: ***“Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new.”*** May we, the Church of Denver, love him anew each day, and proclaim his beauty with boldness in this time. Let us walk together, with hearts renewed, as his witnesses in this apostolic age.

Given in Denver, Colorado, at the Archdiocesan Curia, the St. John Paul II Center for the New Evangelization, August 28, 2025, the Memorial of St. Augustine.



+ Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.  
*Archbishop of Denver*



For additional reading visit  
**[archden.org/our-archbishop/writings](https://archden.org/our-archbishop/writings)**



[archden.org](http://archden.org)