

Congregation of the Resurrection Appreciation Dinner April 2024

Good evening everyone, and Tim, thank you for the very kind invitation. When I read your email inviting me to this gathering, I was on holiday and maybe, because I was in a more reflective mood, and, to be honest, I was half way through the first afternoon gin and tonic, it got me to thinking about the Congregation of the Resurrection and the many ways so many of you, still with us and those with the Lord, have been woven into my story and my life over the past forty-three years.

As a young priest and a new immigrant to Canada, your community and the priests serving in parishes and in education in the diocese, were a great example of what Vatican II could look like in pastoral ministry. You were not afraid to be creative, read the signs of the times, and try to find ways to be a missionary church, often pushing the boundaries a little.

A year or two after beginning my own life as a priest in a parish, I remember meeting three or four of you at Notre Dame in Indiana for the annual liturgy conference and, over a beer or two in the evenings, engage in lively, exciting conversations about what we were hearing and what it was possible to do with what we heard when we were back home.

Many years later in 1995, I was the first diocesan pastor at St. Aloysius in Kitchener, founded by your community from Resurrection College across the park. Everything that I experienced in those early years as a priest of your pastoral vision and style, was true when I arrives at St. Aloysius, and it was a joy to follow in the footsteps of the men who made it an active, dynamic, forward focused parish community.

One of the great gifts of living here in Kitchener-Waterloo for twenty years, was coming to know personally so many members of your community as friends, mentors and colleagues, and together, individually and as groups, working on pastoral initiatives.

Over the last few years we have become very familiar with words like; “Missionary church”, “having the smell of the sheep”, “synodality” “going out to the peripheries.” These are not new ideas but in my experience, they are woven through the pastoral approaches that I have experienced from so many of the members of your community. Taking a closer look at those ideas that are now so connected with Pope Francis, you cannot help but notice that, maybe in a slightly different form, they are at the heart of the charisms of the Resurrection community.

The Resurrection story in this community is about taking risks, having a long view, not being afraid to forge ahead, innovate and respond to the signs of the times with confidence. Out of those challenges, your historic footprint on Catholic education in this community is rich and strong. Today, your footprint, bringing creative solutions to hunger and homelessness in the community, lavishly dispensing the balm of mercy and love, is a prophetic act.

If I read the story of your ministry in Canada correctly, you have always been open to what appears before you. The mission and tasks ahead are to be faithful to one’s convictions in an environment that has changed.

This is at the heart of the current two-year Synod of Bishops gathering in Rome with the largest delegation of active religious and lay participation in the history of the church. In many ways, looking at that synodal experience and the changes that are emerging because of it, I hope that you see glimpses of the pastoral insight and creativity that you have nurtured and still continue to foster.

Under Pope Francis’s leadership since 2013, the Church has experienced a paradigm shift, focusing on inclusivity, mercy, and outreach. And, central to his papal agenda is the concept of synodality, a term that, while not new to church tradition, has been reinvigorated by Francis as a foundational principle for the church's pastoral life.

By emphasizing synodality, Pope Francis envisions a church that listens, discerns, and acts collectively, reflecting a community deeply rooted in mutual respect and shared mission. Understanding Synodality, a word derived from the Greek words "syn" (together) and "hodos" (way), refers to the practice of making decisions together, a principle deeply embedded in the life of the early Christian communities.

Synodality under Pope Francis suggests a shift in the Church's hierarchical structure, advocating for a more horizontal approach to governance. This involves bishops and clergy working more closely with the laity in decision-making processes, promoting transparency and mutual listening.

The emphasis is on discernment and pastoral care, moving away from a solely top-down decision-making process. This has implications for how teachings are developed, pastoral care is provided, and decisions are made within the Church.

For the laity, synodality opens new avenues for engagement and participation in the Church's life and mission. It encourages laypeople to actively contribute to discussions, share their experiences, and play a part in shaping the Church's direction. This could lead to more lay-led initiatives, greater involvement in parish life, and a re-evaluation of certain practices to better reflect the needs and realities of today's faithful.

As you know well from your experiences in education, parish life and the many other ministries that you have been involved in, adopting synodality poses both challenges and opportunities for the Catholic Church. On one hand, it requires a cultural shift within the Church, moving away from long-standing traditions of hierarchical decision-making, which could meet resistance. On the other hand, it presents an opportunity to revitalize the Church, making it more responsive to the needs of its members and more reflective of the Gospel's communal spirit.

By emphasizing listening and discernment, synodality has also encouraged a more responsive pastoral approach, where the needs and voices of the local community significantly influence pastoral priorities and initiatives. This responsiveness is crucial in a rapidly changing world, enabling the church to address issues such as social injustice, environmental concerns, and the challenges of evangelization in the modern context.

Synodality has facilitated a deeper engagement with Scripture and the church's tradition, inviting the faithful to reflect on how these sacred texts speak to their lives and the world today. This engagement nurtures a spiritually grounded community that is equipped to witness to the Gospel in diverse contexts.

By advocating for a church that walks together in faith, listens deeply, and discerns collectively, Pope Francis envisions a church that is more vibrant, inclusive, and effective in its mission. Synodality, therefore, is not merely a methodological choice but a theological and pastoral imperative that seeks to reflect the church's nature as the Body of Christ, where every member has a vital role in contributing to the church's life and witness. In this way, synodality stands as a beacon of hope and renewal, promising a future for the church that is rooted in collaboration, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the Gospel.

My dear friends, in this Community and the many communities that you are and have served in, we have already experienced and tasted much of what this new path being set before us, asks of us. I am so grateful that the path of my priesthood has allowed me to walk with you and at many tables, experienced your friendship, wisdom and deep trust that in all things the risen Lord walks with us. Thank you for this invitation, and I am very grateful to be here this evening to say thank you in person.