



COPA leader Mary Litel Walsh addresses a gathering of parish leaders from the Monterey Peninsula area during training on how to engage people to participate in the 2021-2023 Synod "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission."

## Living Synodality: Walking with Those on the Margins

BY BETH GRIFFIN

Pope Francis invited the entire Church to join in a two-year process of listening and dialogue to reflect on the life and mission of the Church in the third millennium. He opened the Synod on Synodality in Rome in October 2021 with the expectation that each diocese will feel welcome to participate in the prayerful journey.

Synods are themed meetings of bishops called to address specific concerns of the Church. Synodality is a concept based on the Greek for "walking together." It builds on the renewal proposed by the Second Vatican Council and hopes to help the Church live communion, achieve participation, and open itself to the mission. Since its inception in response to the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) has used a model of listening and dialogue to identify, lift up, and respond to the needs of people and communities living on the margins. In many ways, CCHD's dignity-affirming processes mirror the Synod on Synodality.

"CCHD is a perfect witness to what Pope Francis is looking for in the synod," says Richard Coll, executive director of the

USCCB Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development. "The CCHD model of engagement and listening enables it to hear the voices of those who are often overlooked," he says.

Richard says that in contrast to earlier synods on topics such as youth, laity, and the Amazon, the Synod on Synodality is "more of a process than an outcome." The Vatican's documents for this synod urge participants to reach out beyond the traditional speakers to hear the voices of those on the peripheries and of those who are challenged economically or socially. Coll says this synod represents the experience of other synods and draws on Pope Francis's writings.

"We are all engaged together and empowered as baptized Christians to have our voices heard," he says. "An objective

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Through the CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (CCHD) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholics and friends of CCHD

across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, the CCHD has contributed over \$400 million to nearly 12,000 low-income led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so CCHD's investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between impoverished and affluent persons.



LETTER FROM

THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

I was intrigued when Pope Francis said he would convene a synod on synodality. I generally think of synods as meetings of the world's bishops to discuss a specific topic, such as youth, or to address issues of a particular region, like the Amazon. Synods are opportunities to reflect on how the Church has manifested the love of God in various situations—and how the Holy Spirit is moving the Church to do more in the future.

The Synod on Synodality almost sounds like a meeting on meetings, but it's not. Although synodality is not a common word, even in Church circles, it's a concept based on the Greek for "walking together." The Holy Father called the synod to engage the entire Church in an important process that begins with prayer and listening. The thoughtful preparatory documents (available at [USCCB.org/synod](http://USCCB.org/synod)) envision a synod experience that builds on the renewal proposed by the Second Vatican Council. It describes a process of journeying together, and then reflecting together on the progress of the journey, to learn which processes help the Church live communion, achieve participation, and open itself to the mission.

If this process sounds familiar, it may be because the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) uses a grassroots-led listening process to identify issues. Our process builds on the actual experiences of the people to help develop solutions. At CCHD, we have been walking together and sharing the journey with those on the margins for more than 50 years.

The synod journey is open to the whole Church, and its success will depend, in part, on hearing the stories of people who may not be in the mainstream of Catholic practice for one reason or another. Their voices are as important as others and will help improve the entire Church.

Other communities of believers will also be welcome in the synod to discuss regenerating and strengthening relationships. The focus on welcoming the marginalized and listening to other believers who do not share our religion is again reminiscent of CCHD. We do the work we do because Christ calls us to walk with the poor. We fund organizations that share our goals and values but are not necessarily Church-affiliated.

In this issue of *Helping People Help Themselves*, you will read about how CCHD partners with organizations that actively listen to their members and strategize to address injustices in their communities. The groups use CCHD funds to promote affordable housing, community safety, and immigrants' rights, among other things.

Please take a close look at the bonus story on page 4. If you are frustrated about the polarization that seeps into every aspect of our lives these days, you will appreciate this article titled "A Better Kind of Politics Is Possible." The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops developed this nonpartisan program before the last national election and recently expanded it to help participants use clarity, charity, and creativity to engage in difficult conversations.

Thank you for supporting the walking together we do at CCHD. As always, I am grateful for your prayers and enthusiasm.

RALPH McCLOUD, Director  
Catholic Campaign for Human Development



AN INITIATIVE OF THE  
CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR  
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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of the synod is to call on the nature of the experience of the participants, allow the Spirit to animate the conversation, and see where the Spirit is guiding the Church.”

He adds, “Taken in the abstract, it sounds idealistic, but it is part of the teaching developed by Pope Francis to reflect on what we’ve learned by traveling together [to] determine how we can do more to respond to the challenges in the world today.”

Richard cautions against predicting the synod’s results, but he says, “Trusting in the work of the Spirit, one of the outcomes might be a greater awareness of how the Body of Christ is now living in various parts of the world and what degree of community exists among people. This could have consequences for the future life of the Church and encourage it to build better communion and be a more complete representation of Christ in the world.”

### CCHD-Funded Groups Support the Outreach Mission of the Diocese

CCHD works closely with local groups of people who know their communities’ challenges and aspirations. Deacon Warren Hoy, CCHD director in the Diocese of Monterey in California, is also the diocesan director of the Office of Life, Justice, and Charity. He says his relationship with Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA) is integral to his ability to help parishioners advocate for their needs. COPA is an organization of congregations, schools, nonprofits, and unions that promotes affordable housing, health-care access, community safety, immigrants’ rights, and economic development. It uses CCHD grant funds for leadership training and community outreach.

“Many of the COPA member organizations are Catholic parishes. They and other members bring issues to COPA board meetings and work on them from the bottom up. COPA is very successful with local and state-level advocacy,” Warren says.

He says COPA worked with the city to install a stoplight and crosswalk to help

parishioners navigate a six-lane boulevard that separated the urban church from a parking area. “It was a small thing, but they got it done for us,” Warren says.

On a larger scale, COPA helped a parish in Salinas, California, turn a vision to provide local health care for low-income undocumented residents into a publicly funded countywide program. Warren says Sacred Heart worked with COPA to launch Esperanza Care, which lets farmworkers access free basic, preventive, and diagnostic care as an alternative to visiting emergency rooms. “With a couple of years of COPA advocacy, the county established a pilot program which is now an ongoing part of the county budget,” he says.

COPA has also built community relationships with the police department in Watsonville, California, an area roiled by unrest at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement. Warren says COPA met with public safety officials on multiple occasions. In response, the police department committed to changing some of its procedures. “They made real strides in helping people who feel targeted,” Warren says. According to Warren, COPA is growing

and is on the verge of adding four or five more member parishes.

The Center for Community Advocacy (CCA), another CCHD-funded group in Salinas, advocates for housing for immigrant farmworkers and used a pandemic grant to send lay health promoters to farm fields and housing camps.

“We could not do the outreach we do in the diocese without the CCHD-funded groups like COPA and CCA,” Warren says. “And we don’t have the funding or staff to push these initiatives through on our own. Without CCHD, it wouldn’t happen.”

### CCHD-Funded Group Extends a Warm Welcome to New Immigrants

In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, another CCHD-funded group builds on the founding vision of a religious sister and the enthusiastic support of local pastors to welcome and incorporate Latino immigrants.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden opened Casa San Jose in 2013 as a resource center. It provides a base of support for English-language learners and helps families, youth, and children access services to



Laura Perkins, emergency response organizer of Casa San Jose, helping two community members with an application for family reunification in 2021.



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better acclimate to their new home. Casa San Jose reflects and expands on the tireless efforts of Sister of St. Joseph Janice Vanderneck to empower underserved immigrants by promoting integration and self-sufficiency.

Casa San Jose executive director Monica Ruiz says the Latino population in Pittsburgh is only 3% but is growing rapidly, and the needs of the people are coming into clearer focus.

Early on, Casa San Jose primarily provided direct services, including help navigating social services and the legal system and reading mail for participants. Based partly on a Latino needs assessment, the center moved into advocacy and education. Its youth program stresses the importance of culture and heritage. A Sewing for Success group brings together women and children to create items for those in need and provide a space for conversation and camaraderie.

general lack of Spanish-language public documents or speakers in professional fields. "There is one Spanish-speaking pediatrician in the county!" says Monica. Nonetheless, Monica is encouraged by Casa San Jose's focus on core values of treating all people with respect, welcoming the stranger, and loving one's neighbor. "The founding principles carry through everything," she says.

Anna Torrance, CCHD director for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, says Casa San Jose has established programs in parishes that are hubs for Spanish-speaking immigrants. "The partnership between Casa San Jose and the parishes is a beautiful collaboration. There is a sense of engaging our Hispanic brothers and sisters in the Church, the parishes, and the faith community," she says. Pastors have welcomed Casa San Jose and offered space for both programs and temporary housing for new immigrants, she says.

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Monica says Casa San Jose works to strengthen relationships among groups in a racially divided city. She started a youth group at a high school whose students are primarily Latino and African American. "We spent time studying each other's history and understanding that we are more alike than different," she says. Monica underscored the message by taking a group of undocumented Afro-Latino students to Selma, Alabama, the birthplace of the civil rights movement, to meet with Black pastors. It was an eye-opening experience, she says, and it inspired the students to feel greater enthusiasm for interracial understanding.

Casa San Jose and the people it serves are challenged by cultural divisions and a

"Casa San Jose seeks to affirm the intrinsic values of human dignity. It works with subsidiarity and solidarity. It strengthens families, empowers immigrants, and educates about the responsibility of community members," Anna says.

"As our diocese engages various groups for the Synod on Synodality, we are fortunate to have Monica and Sr. Janice and Jorge Vela [director of the Hispanic apostolate] to help us make sure the Hispanic community is engaged in the dialogue and can plant seeds about how we can move forward together," Anna says.

*Note: For more information on the Synod on Synodality, go to [USCCB.org/synod](https://USCCB.org/synod). The materials are available in English and Spanish. ☪*

## A Better Kind of Politics Is Possible



Facing a polarized Church in a divided nation, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops developed a seemingly simple program to answer Pope Francis' call in *Fratelli Tutti* for "a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good" (no. 154).

Called *Civilize It*, the program launched in November 2019 before the presidential election and rebooted in September 2021. Its primary focus is to help Catholics counter polarization and division in the Church and society by following the example of the Good Samaritan and being a neighbor to all.

The first step is to pledge to clarity, charity, and creativity in conversations. Emily Schumacher-Novak, USCCB assistant director of education and outreach, says the pledge and additional materials will "empower individuals, families, and communities to become bridge-builders across perspectives."

The process will also help people "engage in difficult conversations and discover new solutions in our society," she says. To date, 80 launch partners and 50 dioceses are participating, and 1,269 individuals have taken the pledge.

Emily says the nonpartisan program is going very well. "People are hungry for community right now, so any resource we can provide for them gives an opportunity for them to recover the sense of being part of one human family," she explains.

"In his reflection on the Good Samaritan in *Fratelli Tutti*, and also through the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis is calling us to something that can be truly transformational right now. It can sound very simple but be very hard to achieve," Emily says.

*Note: For more information on Civilize It: A Better Kind of Politics, go to [USCCB.org/CivilizeIt](https://USCCB.org/CivilizeIt). The materials are available in English and Spanish.*