

The Paulist Fathers

Listening Sessions

Pre-Assembly 2025
General Assembly 2026



Message from the President of the Paulist Fathers

Dear Friends in Christ,

As President of the Paulist Fathers, I want to thank each of you for your ongoing commitment and collaboration with the Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle. I want to thank our Paulist Fathers, who faithfully dedicate themselves to the missionary call of Saint Paul and Servant of God Father Isaac Hecker. I also want to thank our Deacon Affiliates, Paulist Associates, and lay collaborators who not only expand our mission impact but also show new ways of living our charism. The Paulist Fathers could not fulfill our mission as impactfully without the presence of each person in our charismatic family.

This Summer we begin a year-long preparation leading up to our June 2026 General Assembly where our community will discern and identify needs and priorities for the next four years. As the Second Vatican Council teaches us, "To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel." (Gaudium et Spes, 4). When we do this well, we will be most effective "in presenting the same old truths in new forms, fresh new tone and air and spirit" (Isaac Hecker, Personal Sanctification of the Paulists," PV, p.125).

We Paulists believe that the Holy Spirit is active and alive in each person. Therefore, including the People of God in a synodal process of discernment is essential. Our 2022 Paulist General Assembly Resolutions stated clearly that "synodality is not just a model for the Church, but a way of being Church, rooted in mutual listening and shared discernment." By gathering and praying together in these listening sessions, we respond to the call to "walk together," fostering a spirit of openness and collaboration that enriches all who participate.

Pope Francis said that, "A synodal Church is a listening Church, knowing that listening 'is more than hearing.' It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn." Continuing this approach, in his first public appearance, Pope Leo XIV said that, "We want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, which always seeks to be close especially to those who suffer".

By hosting and participating in listening sessions, you are helping to strengthen our Paulist missionary society and forging new ways to build a Catholic Church in the United States that is more responsive, missional, and united. Thank you for your prayers, for your generous participation in these sessions, and for your willingness to listen and be listened to as we journey together.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Father René Constanza, CSP". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "CSP" clearly visible at the end.

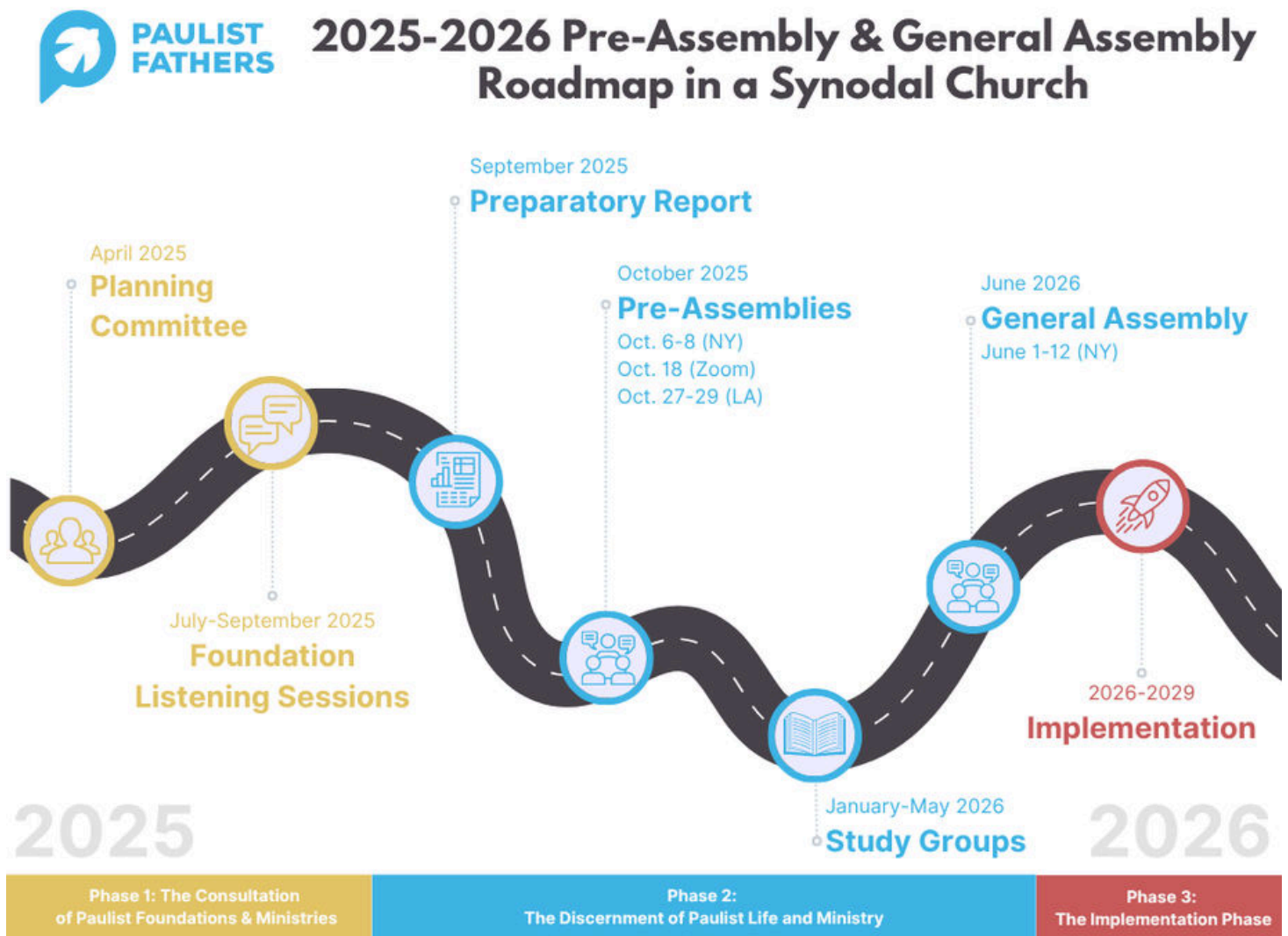
Father René Constanza, CSP
President, Paulist Fathers

Overview of Listening Sessions and Pre-Assembly Process

Every four years, the Paulist Fathers undertake a process of discerning new mission priorities at their General Assembly and preparatory Pre-Assembly meetings. This year, inspired by the synodal style of Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV, the Paulist Fathers are seeking wider consultation from all those who make up the Paulist charismatic family (those who share and live out the charism): Lay Associates and Deacon Affiliates, as well as all lay collaborators at Paulist ministries.

Synodal listening and consultation in our Paulist communities is a transformative process rooted in **attentive, communal discernment**. It is not merely about hearing, but about a **deep, relational listening** that involves the entire People of God walking together and listening to one another, to the Gospel, and above all to the Holy Spirit. This process of listening and consultation is not an end in itself but is oriented toward discernment and conversion, seeking to understand God's will and respond to the joys, hopes, sorrows, and anxieties of the world.

Confident that the Holy Spirit is active and alive today in our culture and in each of the baptized, the Paulist Fathers seek your Spirit-led insights and discernment of mission priorities through this Listening Session process. The roadmap below outlines the year-long process leading up to the June 2026 General Assembly which will promulgate priorities and recommendations for the community.



The Missionary Work of the Paulist Fathers Today

The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle (the Paulist Fathers) was founded in 1858 as a community of missionary priests passionate about bringing Christ to the modern world through fresh, creative, and bold means.

Today, Paulists serve in:

- **Parishes and downtown centers** in Austin (TX), Boston, Chicago, Grand Rapids (MI), Horseshoe Bay (TX), Knoxville (TN), Los Angeles, New York City, Rome (Italy), San Diego, and San Francisco
- **Campus ministries** at UCLA and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville
- **Media and publishing**, including:
 - Paulist Press, the oldest Catholic publishing firm in the U.S.
 - Paulist Productions, an Emmy Award-winning film and TV company
 - Busted Halo, a vibrant online ministry and SiriusXM radio show

In all these ministries, the Paulists seek to **introduce the Good News of Jesus Christ to those beyond the Church walls and to accompany Catholics who feel apart from the Church**. Since 1858, Paulists have been inspired by the zeal of St. Paul and by trusting in the Holy Spirit's presence in every age. Paulists seek to evangelize, reconcile, and engage contemporary culture with the hope of Christ.

A Future Brighter Than Any Past: An Openness to the Spirit

At our 2022 General Assembly, we reaffirmed our founding conviction by reiterating a bold statement by our founder, Fr. Isaac Hecker: *"A future for the Church brighter than any past."*

We embraced this vision as a sign of unwavering hope - hope that sees the sacred at work in the modern world, and hears, even in today's challenges, the stirrings of the Kingdom of God. In 2022, we recognized in the longings of our time - the desire for justice, dignity, and greater communion among people - as the same horizon toward which the Gospel points. At the same time, we named the divisions and polarization in our Church and culture as urgent places for healing, dialogue, and mission.

It was in this context that we made a commitment to Pope Francis' vision of a **synodal Church** - a way of being rooted in the spiritual work of listening, discerning, and walking together. Synodality calls us to trust that the Holy Spirit speaks through each of us, and that genuine, mutual listening has the power to transform individuals, communities, and even the world.

Faithful to our founding charism, we reaffirmed that the Paulist mission is always oriented outwards - beyond the walls of the Church, meeting people where they are in their questions, struggles, and search for meaning. Ours is a mission that aims to create spaces where honest dialogue can flourish, wounds can be tended with compassion, and where the Gospel can be encountered as good news. Faithful to the Holy Spirit, we trust in the Spirit's continual renewal of the Church.

This Listening Session is part of our commitment to that vision.

Listening Session Guide

Shared Norms for Dialogue

adapted from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Synodal Process

In this listening session, we are entering into prayerful & generous conversation, and commit to:

- speak clearly, one person at a time, without interruption
- listen for understanding, with an open mind and without judgment
- be sensitive to differences in communication styles
- be concise, expressing thoughts clearly and briefly to ensure everyone has a chance to participate
- respect confidentiality by not attributing comments to individuals outside the group
- avoid harmful or dismissive language, critiquing ideas, not individuals
- limit distractions by silencing electronic devices and avoid multitasking to remain fully present
- and speak only once until everyone else has had a chance to share

Opening Prayer

Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus (We stand before You, Holy Spirit)

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.

All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reflection (Acts 2:1-8)

Read the following Scripture passage out loud twice, pausing for 1 minute before the second time through

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language?"

(continued)

After the second time through, reflect on one of the following questions and share outloud with your group

Shared Reflection:

1. Imagine yourself in this Gospel scene. Where do you see yourself in this story? How do you feel?
2. Share a word or phrase that stands out to you. What meaning does this word have for you?

Synodal Reflection and Discussion Questions

Discuss each question and draft a group consensus statement after each question

1. What experiences of the Paulist Fathers mission and ministry have been most meaningful or enriching for you and others?

(Think of specific moments, ministries, or people where you've seen or felt the Paulist charism in action. What was meaningful about that experience?)

2. What do you see as challenges or areas of growth for the Paulist Fathers mission and ministry?

(What tensions or limitations might be opportunities for growth or renewal?)

3. What do you hope the Paulist Fathers will focus on or prioritize in the next four years?

(How might Paulists more faithfully live their mission?)

4. What do you believe the Holy Spirit is saying to the Paulist Fathers today?

(Is there a theme that stays with you as you engage with this process?)

Closing Prayer

Almighty and ever faithful God, You spoke your Word to the world in your Son, Jesus Christ, and commissioned St. Paul to bring your word to all nations and to the ends of the earth.

Your Spirit led Servant of God Isaac Hecker to proclaim your word in North America using tools of the modern age.

We ask you to strengthen and renew all members of the Paulist charismatic family—Priests, Lay Associates, Deacon Affiliates, and lay collaborators, to live as missionaries in the line of St. Paul and Father Hecker.

May we burn with passion to give the Gospel a voice so that all may know the mystery of your love.

May we follow the Lord Jesus with the zeal of St. Paul and Father Hecker as we carry on the mission of the Paulist Community.

In the power of your Holy Spirit, we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thank you for participating in this Listening Session! Your feedback will be included in our community's summary to the Paulist Fathers. A synthesis of all the local Paulist Listening Sessions will be provided back to our community in October and shared with all participants at the October Pre-Assemblies and the June 2026 General Assembly for their continued discernment.