

# 2025 East Coast Pre-Assembly Report

October 6-8 | Immaculate Conception Retreat Center, Huntington, NY

Participants: 49 participants (27 Paulists, 21 lay leaders, 3 Paulist Associates, 1 Deacon Affiliate)



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# From the Paulist President

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Allow me to extend my deepest gratitude for your presence and collaboration at our three Pre-Assembly meetings on the East Coast, West Coast, and on Zoom. It is always such a joy when Paulists have time to be together. In a particular way we were blessed by the presence of our lay staff and collaborators. One of the most recurring comments I have heard from my brother Paulists was how enriching and life-giving the Pre-Assembly was because of the participation of so many gifted and generous lay leaders. To our lay collaborators: thank you for your collaboration and for your co-responsibility in living out the Paulist mission.

It was a particular joy at our Pre-Assemblies to experience synodality together. The synodal mission of the Church is especially aligned with our Paulist mission and charism, first, because it relies on trusting the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of each person, ordained and lay. Second, because Spirit-led listening moves us outward toward our mission of evangelization. As Pope Leo has said, the goal of synodality is "to help the Church fulfill its primary role in the world, which is to be missionary, to announce the Gospel."

This report is one of the many fruits of our gathering under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This Spring, we will continue this synodal process by establishing Study Groups on the key topics raised in our Listening Sessions and Pre-Assemblies. These Study Groups will gather data and prepare a report for the delegates who will participate in the June 2026 General Assembly. Please keep them in your prayers.

Throughout this process we continue to pray through the intercession of Servant of God, Fr. Isaac Hecker, to intercede for us in our discernment and for your intentions and those of your family, and community.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Father René Constanza, CSP".

Father René Constanza, CSP  
President, Paulist Fathers



# From the Committee

Dear Paulist Fathers and Collaborators,

Thank you for participating in the East Coast Pre-Assembly! As we look back on the Pre-Assembly process this past Fall, our committee is grateful for each of our three gatherings both for the warmth of conversation and community, as well as the prayerful discernment and insightful reflections.

Two themes that our Committee regularly received feedback on at each of the three Pre-Assemblies has been 1) the positive and insightful presence of the lay participants and 2) the benefits of creating a more synodal environment--including the listening sessions, preparatory report, and using the Conversations in the Spirit process for for more prayerful table conversations. Thank you for each of your contributions for making the Pre-Assemblies a fruitful time of prayer and discernment moving us forward toward the General Assembly.

As we continue in our synodal process you can find an electronic version of this document and other resources and reports at [paulist.org/assembly](http://paulist.org/assembly).



## -Pre-Assembly Planning Committee

*[Fr. John Ardis, Fr. Bob Cary, Fr. John Hurley, Heather Kinney, Jonathan Lewis, Fr. Dan Macalinao, Dr. Susan Timoney (not pictured), Fr. Rich Whitney]*

# Participants

- Andrea Sirek – St. John XXIII University Parish (Knoxville)
- Fr. Bill Edens, CSP – Cathedral of Saint Andrew & Catholic Information Center (Grand Rapids)
- Bob Byrns – Paulist Press (New Jersey)
- Fr. Charles Kullmann, CSP – Senior Ministry (San Diego)
- Fr. Dat Tran, CSP – Cathedral of Saint Andrew & Catholic Information Center (Grand Rapids)
- Dr. Dave de la Fuente – St. Paul the Apostle (New York)
- Fr. Dave Dwyer, CSP – Presidential Board & Busted Halo (New York)
- Deborah Heimel – The Paulist Center (Boston)
- Fr. Donald A Andrie, CSP – St. Austin & Missions (Austin)
- Fr. Ed Nowak, CSP – Vocations Office (Washington, DC)
- Fr. Eric Andrews, CSP – St. Paul the Apostle (New York)
- Ernie J. Garrido – Vocations Office (Brownsville, TX)
- Fr. Evan Cummings, CSP – Busted Halo (New York)
- Fr. Frank DeSiano, CSP – Senior Ministry (New York)
- Heather Kinney – Formation Team (Washington, DC)
- Fr. James DiLuzio, CSP – Paulist Associates & Interfaith Liaison (New York)
- Jen Sawyer – Busted Halo (New York)
- Fr. Joe Ciccone, CSP – Senior Ministry (New York)
- Fr. John B Ardis, CSP – Presidential Board (New York)
- Fr. John Duffy, CSP – Senior Ministry (Boston)
- John Sweitzer – Paulist Associates & St. John XXIII University Parish (Knoxville)
- Jonathan Lewis – General Office (Washington, DC)
- Deacon Joseph (Drew) Dickson – Deacon Affiliates (New York)
- Kami Crary – Office of Mission Advancement (New York)
- Fr. Kenneth Boyack, CSP – Senior Ministry & Cathedral of Saint Andrew (Grand Rapids)
- Fr. Larry Rice, CSP – St. John XXIII University Parish (Knoxville)
- Marge Giesken – Paulist Associates & Cathedral of Saint Andrew (Grand Rapids)
- Mark Mann – Catholic Information Center (Grand Rapids)
- Fr. Michael Kallock, CSP – Formation Team (Washington, DC)
- Fr. Michael McGarry, CSP – Senior Ministry (Boston)
- Fr. Paul Huesing, CSP – Holy Cross Parish (Vero Beach)
- Paul McMahon – Paulist Press (New Jersey)
- Fr. Paul Rospond, CSP – Senior Ministry (New York)
- Paul Snatchko – Media Office (Orlando)
- Fr. René Constanza, CSP – Presidential Board (New York)
- Fr. Rich Andre, CSP – Old St. Mary's (Chicago)
- Fr. Rich Whitney, CSP – St. John XXIII University Parish (Knoxville)
- Fr. Rick Walsh, CSP – Paulist Center (Boston)
- Fr. Ronald Franco, CSP – Mother House (New York)
- Fr. Ryan Casey, CSP – Cathedral of Saint Andrew (Grand Rapids)
- Samantha Cotroneo – Paulist Press (New Jersey)
- Fr. Seán Foley, CSP – Senior Ministry (New Jersey)
- Shirley Onacilla – St. Paul the Apostle (New York)
- Fr. Steven Petroff, CSP – Formation Team (Washington, DC)
- Susan Rutkowski – Paulist Center (Boston)
- Dr. Susan Timoney – Lay Advisory Board (Washington, DC)
- William McLean – Office of Mission Advancement (New York)

# Mission & Charism

Across the table discussions, there was clear agreement that the Paulist charism is fundamentally about helping people encounter Jesus Christ. Participants affirmed evangelization and conversion as the Paulists' central identity but noted the need for clear, simple language that communicates who the Paulists are and Paulist values.

Participants highlighted the need for this mission to be rooted in each person's personal conviction and holiness which then calls others to conversion. Participants identified the necessity of "going out" beyond the comfort of "preaching to the choir" to effectively evangelize. Finally, participants also named the importance of reflecting more deeply on St. Paul and Fr. Hecker's founding vision for the community.



# Mission & Charism

## Table discussion quotes:

- “Evangelization remains central to our charism.”
- “Seekers today are ultimately seeking Christ himself.”
- “While the phrase ‘zeal for souls’ may feel dated in 2025, it points to something still essential: a passion for personal holiness that overflows into mission and the desire to bring others into relationship with Christ.”
- “We invite people to experience Christ in a very welcoming and joyful way.”
- “The conversation consistently returned to the conviction that the Paulist mission is not simply about broad spirituality but about explicitly proclaiming Jesus Christ—both to ourselves and to the world—with humility, zeal, and openness to ongoing conversion.”
- “A shared concern was whether Paulists (and the wider Church) are willing to go beyond the comfort of preaching to the ‘choir.’ True fidelity to our charism means stepping outside our walls and engaging seekers where they live, work, and struggle.”
- “Paulists have neglected Hecker and America. What is true patriotism from a Catholic perspective?”

## Questions for further reflection:

- Pre-Assembly participants struggled to distinguish between the language of charism, spirituality, and mission. How can we best clarify the Paulist mission, Paulist charism, and Paulist spirituality?
- What insights does the founding vision of Fr. Hecker as well as the development of the Paulist mission over the years offer to our present moment?



# Lay Leadership & Lay Collaboration

One of the most common takeaways from the Pre-Assembly meetings was the importance of having so many well formed lay leaders speaking and preaching throughout the week, especially lay women. This reinforced the importance of lay leadership and lay collaboration as priorities for the Paulist Fathers. There was resounding agreement that lay leadership is not about filling gaps or doing work Paulists “don’t want to do,” but about shared responsibility for the mission.

Participants named the need for structured formation of lay employees, Associates, and ministry leaders in Paulist spirituality, mission, and charism. Lay leadership was also linked to growing mission impact, financial growth, and creating a culture of vocations. Collaboration and co-responsibility with laity, and women in particular, is seen as a place where Paulists could become leaders and examples for the wider US Catholic Church.



# Lay Leadership & Lay Collaboration

## Table discussion quotes:

- “A cultural shift is needed so lay Catholics can say, ‘I can do that.’ The mission to proclaim Christ belongs to every baptized person, not only clergy or religious. Empowering and equipping laity for this task is critical to the Paulist mission.”
- “Lay leadership and collaboration increase the opportunity for mission.”
- “Lay leadership is not doing the jobs the Paulists don’t want to do.”
- “There needs to be more of an emphasis on lay formation...learning the Paulist charism.”
- “Education is important for the community and for the associates.”
- “It’s one thing to say we value women’s leadership, another to seek it out and invest in it.”
- “What does Paulist ministry look like with more lay leadership and how does Isaac Hecker’s spirituality evolve in this new dynamic?”

## Questions for further reflection:

- How can the Paulist Associates and Deacon Affiliates support Paulist foundations and promote the Paulist mission and charism in a more coordinated way?
- What are the best practices in how other men’s and women’s religious communities are forming and empowering laity, especially women, for leadership?



# Community Life

Across the Pre-Assembly conversations, Paulists reflected with honesty and hope about the blessings and challenges of community life today. While it was clearly stated that the Paulists do not approach community life in a monastic way, there is strong affirmation that shared life—prayer, meals, presence, friendship, and mutual care—remains essential for sustaining the personal and communal evangelizing mission of the community.

There was affirmation that Paulist community life today is supportive in times of difficulty for individual Paulists. Opportunities emerged for how community life can support Paulists in the day to day prayers, works, joys and challenges of life, not only in times of crisis. As an increasingly smaller community, opportunities moving forward include coming together as a whole community for prayer and retreat and to know each person in the community more personally.

Paulists acknowledged ambiguity and inconsistency in how community life is understood and practiced across Foundations. Expectations vary widely—generationally, culturally, and between large and small houses—leading some to feel disconnected or unclear about what “authentic community life” requires. While some Paulists named the value of creating more clear and consistent formation and expectations around community life, others mentioned that community life is not a one size fits all, and that individuality for each Foundation is required.

Participants expressed hope that a renewal of community life can animate mission, deepen mutual knowledge and care, and strengthen the Paulist witness of communion to the wider Church.



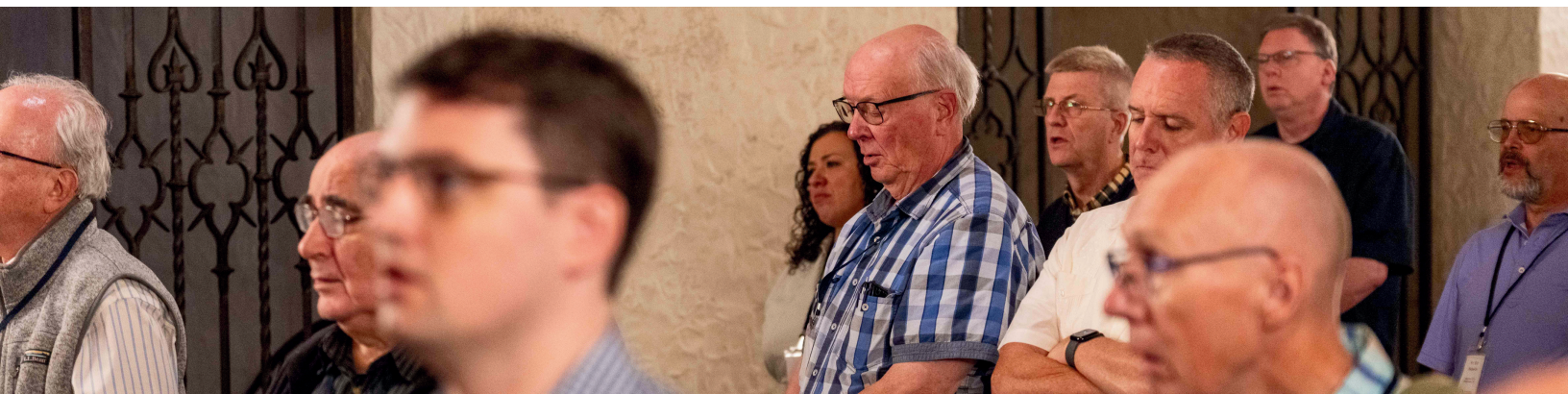
# Community Life

## Table discussion quotes:

- “Community life helps divide sorrows and increasingly, there is a growing capacity to double joys.”
- “There is a desire for greater clarity, intentionality, and joy in living community together, so that it may truly sustain the evangelizing charism of the Paulists.”
- “As a new superior and a newly assembled community, I need guidance from the larger community for expectations. Expectations for family time seem to be very different from Paulist to Paulist, especially generationally.”
- “I need some ongoing formation on what expectations of community life are. We haven't discussed this since I was in formation 14 years ago!”
- “We need a common understanding of what is good authentic community life. But given the differences from house to house, is a communal understanding reasonable? There seems to be a generational gap in our expectations. Men in community more than 40 years see how community life has improved. Those here less than 30 years don't think the bar is high enough.”
- “We live in a society where more people are alone—feel alone and live alone. Learning to live together is a ‘school of empathy’ and is a witness to the wider world”
- “It used to be that the most important room was the Common Room. Not true anymore. Now everyone has a TV in their room”

## Questions for further reflection:

- Is the 1994 Community Direction Statement still relevant to the needs of the community today? Are there opportunities to make updates and utilize this more?
- How might we better navigate generational differences in expectations about prayer, presence, personal sharing, and shared space?
- How can we learn from women’s religious communities, especially regarding elder care and sustaining vibrant communities across life stages?



# Vocations

Across the Pre-Assembly conversations, Paulists expressed a renewed urgency and hope around cultivating a culture of vocations. Participants emphasized that vocation promotion is not primarily about one-off recruitment but about building a culture of vocation—something embedded, relational, joyful, and sustained across ministries and local communities. This includes planting seeds early, communicating a compelling vision of the Paulist charism, engaging laity as partners, and creating environments where young people can encounter Christ and discern their call.

There was consistent recognition that contemporary vocational discernment is occurring in a very different landscape from prior generations: weakened Catholic cultural supports, digital saturation, increasingly individualistic norms, and a culture of instant gratification. Yet participants expressed that in the midst of these challenges it is important to not let fear of smaller numbers lead us, but rather that smaller numbers can open up new possibilities for the community. Additionally, there is strong confidence that vocations are present; the task is cultivating the right conditions for hearing and responding. Storytelling, especially the diverse and compelling stories of Paulists themselves, emerged as one of the most effective tools for this work.

Creating a culture of vocation will require clearer articulation of the Paulist mission today, intentional partnership with laity and families, and greater collaboration across houses to ensure consistent practices of invitation and accompaniment.



# Vocations

## Table discussion quotes:

- “Promoting vocation is less about recruitment and more about creating a “culture of vocation,” similar to building a culture of philanthropy—something embedded, shared, and sustained. This includes asking: What resources are needed? What partnerships can be strengthened? What best practices can be adopted?”
- “The mission is central to vocations”
- “How do we communicate and make the mission of the Paulist Fathers accessible to a contemporary audience?”
- “What is unique about the Paulists and are Paulists willing to live that?”
- “Communicating Fr. Isaac Hecker’s vision remains powerful today.”
- “This conversation also unveiled and reinforced the beauty of each Paulist’s vocation story, and that these stories are tremendous assets, and that stories are key to fostering vocations.”
- “Not a default behavior for the Paulist Fathers to welcome men for supper or for the weekend.”
- “Each house has a responsibility to work on this. The Superior should be responsible for keeping men in the house accountable to conversations, outreach, etc.”

## Questions for further reflection:

- How can we cultivate a true culture of vocations across all Paulist Foundations, with shared language, practices, and expectations?
- How can storytelling—especially Hecker’s vision and Paulist vocation stories—be more intentionally integrated into vocational outreach?
- How do we balance openness to new candidates with clear standards of suitability, formation capacity, and alignment with the Paulist charism?
- What support does the vocation director most need from the broader community?





# Mission Fields & Priorities

*Due to limitations in time, this table discussion period also included opportunities to reflect upon specific mission fields and priorities that were raised up during the Listening Sessions, namely, “Polarization and Prophetic Witness” and “Innovations in Media”.*

Across the Pre-Assembly conversations, Paulists discussed the need to clarify who among the people of God the Paulists are specifically called to serve (e.g. practicing Catholics, spiritual but not religious, progressive Catholics, etc.). This is helpful both in prioritizing pastoral priorities but also in identifying future ministries, media platforms and outreach, and missionary activity.

Participants expressed a strong desire to reclaim a creative, outward-facing missionary spirit that engages the culture, rooted in Isaac Hecker’s vision. This can include the creativity of Paulist individuality in outreach.

Participants noted that parishes can be hubs for missionary activity if they are intentional about doing so. It was emphasized that the Paulist mission today requires moving beyond traditional “pull” models of ministry toward intentional, outward-facing “push” strategies that reach people outside the parish property and on the peripheries. Participants affirmed that Paulists have long flourished in the space where faith meets culture but questioned whether the Paulists are doing that today or are equipped to do so. One opportunity in this area is to increasingly partner with lay experts in the area of media ministry.

# Mission Fields & Priorities

There was a recurring theme that the Paulists should find ways to collaborate more among foundations. Collaboration among the Paulist media ministries was also mentioned as an opportunity to amplify Paulist outreach. Collaboration will ensure there is not a duplication of efforts but instead an amplification of the mission. There was also an emphasis placed on the value of creating external partnerships with organizations who share common goals. Overall there was mention of the need to find ways to improve external communications and PR to promote the Paulists.

Collaboration with the local diocese was also a topic of conversation, particularly in places where the Paulist are perceived as a Catholic alternative to the local Catholic Church rather than an integrated member of the local church.

The discussions also underscored that prophetic witness and healing polarization are not opposites; they are mutually reinforcing when rooted in Catholic social teaching and genuine dialogue. Addressing polarization is valuable if it leads to more effective prophetic witness and if it forms missionary disciples with the pastoral skills needed to share the Gospel in a complex and divided nation. In all of this work Paulists advocating for unity is an expression of our reliance on the Holy Spirit.



# Mission Fields & Priorities

## Breakout room discussion quotes:

- “There is strong energy around finding creative ways to reach people on the peripheries. This includes moving beyond ‘pull’ models of waiting for people to come in, toward ‘push’ models of going out, as Hecker envisioned.”
- “The usual dichotomy between ‘parishes’ and ‘specialized ministries’ is nonsensical today. Our parishes must be creative.”
- “We must constantly return to Isaac Hecker's vision and spirituality and adapt these to our contemporary society. How does our mission relate to the preaching of the gospel? Is our mission at the crossroads of faith and contemporary culture/society?”
- “All throughout history Paulists have been good at starting conversations--what conversations are important to Paulists?”
- “The charism and mission of the Paulist Fathers should always be at the crossroad of faith and culture.”
- “Media isn’t the goal, it’s the channel for the message”
- “Need for more professional support, being willing to admit what we don’t know”
- “Works to heal toxic polarization and works of justice (prophetic witness) are not mutually exclusive—authentic witness can flourish when it is expressed through tools that heal division rather than deepen it.”
- “Partnership - not only within Paulist ministries, but looking at the prophetic voices that are already there, and connecting with those who are in line with the Paulist charism.”

## Questions for further reflection:

- How can Paulist foundations and national ministries collaborate more together?
- In what ways are Paulist parishes operating as missionary communities? Where are there opportunities for increased missionary identity and outreach?
- Is the Paulist charism rooted in engaging contemporary media? If so, how can we do that in this current media landscape?
- What new forms of missionary activity might Paulists experiment with?

# Additional Themes

*Though not the top themes for Pre-Assembly conversations, the topics below reflect additional themes that surfaced across multiple tables throughout the Pre-Assembly as well as in the final table discussion:*

A first theme relates to governance and planning. Participants raised questions related to governance given the practical implications of becoming a smaller congregation, specifically, whether existing governance structures e.g. size of the General Council or the length of the President's term, etc. serve the mission most effectively moving forward. Financial topics, including lawsuits and their long-term impact, prompted questions about institutional stability and planning. Related to planning, campus ministry, long seen as a hallmark of Paulist identity, emerged as an open question: Are the Paulists still committed to it, and if so, what does it look like in an era where ministry increasingly happens beyond traditional college settings?

A second theme involved widening the circle of participation and partnership. There was a repeated comment to name communities who are missing from Paulist ministry (especially Hispanic/Latine Catholics and wider communities of color) and to strengthen ministry among them. This is especially true for Hispanic Catholics who make up a majority of youth and young adult Catholics in the USA. At the same time, lay collaboration was celebrated as both a current strength and a future frontier. While lay collaboration was discussed in a separate session, the topic of the Associates and Deacon Affiliates was repeated emphasizing that deeper common formation, clearer roles, and more intentional models of partnership could unlock even greater mission impact.

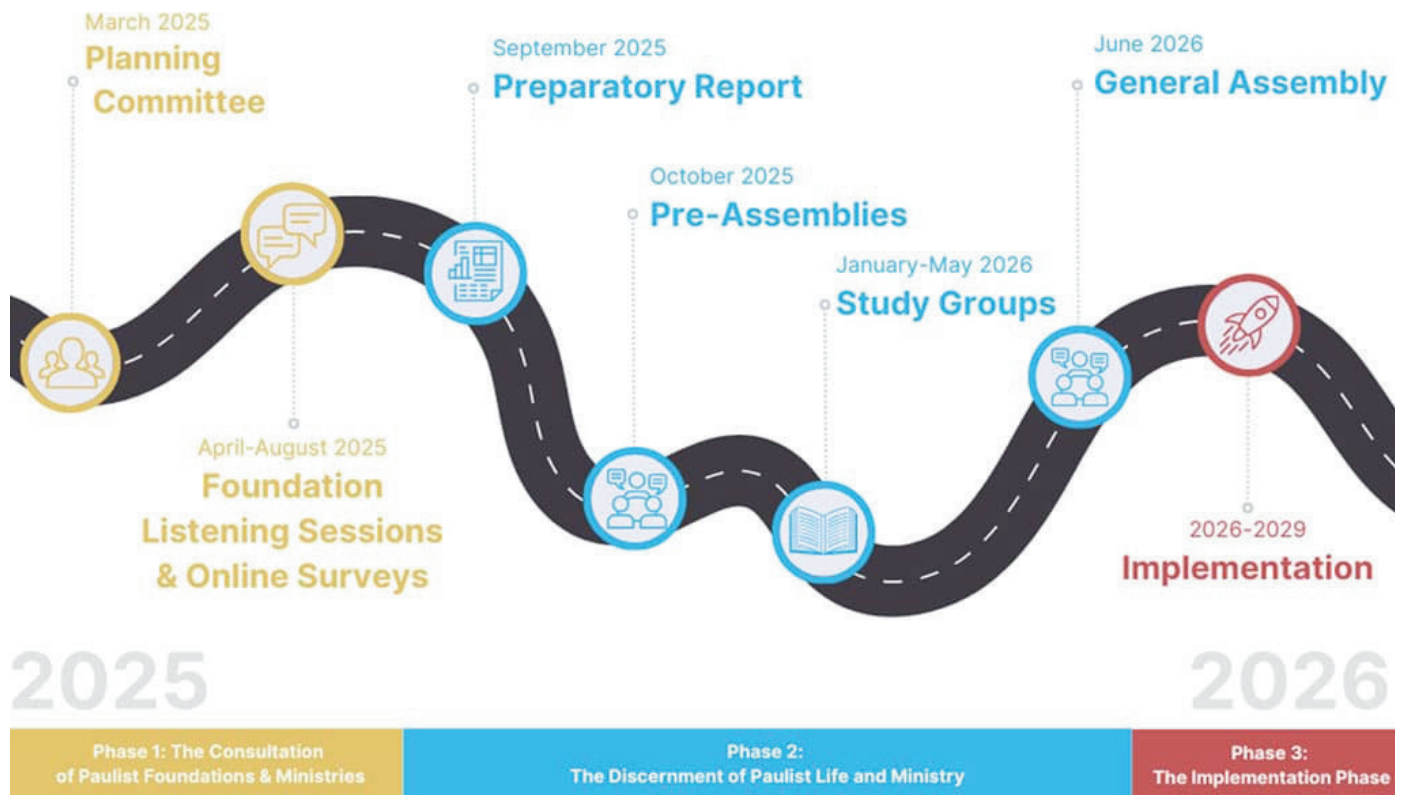
# Additional Themes

## Table Discussion Quotes

- Governance:
  - “With a smaller community size, there is a need to reassess the governance structure: size of General Council and term for the President.”
- Finance:
  - “Lawsuits and their impacts raise serious questions about resources, stability, and planning for the future.”
- Campus Ministry:
  - “Clarification is needed on whether Paulists remain committed to campus ministry as a priority for our mission.”
  - “What is the commitment to campus ministry as an identity marker for Paulists? What does this look like when we’re not on a college campus?”
- People of Color:
  - “Need to continue to interrogate who is missing from the conversation (reiterating absence of Hispanic/Latine Catholics)”
  - Opportunities in “serving communities of color”
  - “The changing demographics of the United States: the new reality of the Church.”
- Paulist Associates and Deacon Affiliates:
  - “Better utilize Paulist Associates, Deacon Affiliates, and collaboration by expanding those dimensions.”
  - “The gifts that lay leaders and affiliates bring to the Paulist mission.”
  - “Recognizing the growth in lay collaboration that has already taken place is a positive sign of hope.”
  - We need a “vision for Paulist Associates”
  - “Is it time to reimagine how we work with our collaborators--convergence of associates, collaborators, affiliates--more common formation...more intentional conversion?”
- Holy Spirit
  - “What does the Holy Spirit mean to the Paulists?”
  - “Make Holy Spirit more of a focus--as a unifier”

# What's Next?

## 2025-2026 Pre-Assembly & General Assembly Roadmap in a Synodal Church



### January-May 2026: Study Groups

- Small groups of Paulists and lay leaders
- Study Groups will develop landscape reports and recommendations on key themes prior to the General Assembly

### June 2026: General Assembly

- The General Assembly will take place at Immaculate Conception Retreat Center in Huntington, NY beginning June 1, 2026
- Elections for Assembly Delegates begin Spring 2026
- The two-week General Assembly will take up the ideas and themes that have emerged throughout the process, as well as other topics, and deliberate to develop resolutions guiding the community for the net four years



# PAULIST FATHERS

“Our power will be in presenting the same old truths in new forms, fresh new tone and air and spirit.”

-Servant of God Isaac Hecker

