

# 2025 Virtual Pre-Assembly Report

October 18 | 12:30-4:30pm EST

Participants: 38 (21 Paulists, 16 Lay leaders, 8 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 Virtual 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 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

- Andrew Ouma, CSP – Hecker House (Washington, DC)
- April Greer – Old St. Mary’s (Chicago)
- Carol A. Wagner Williams – Paulist Associates (Tucson)
- Fr. Dave Dwyer, CSP – Presidential Board & Busted Halo (New York)
- David Rooney – Paulist Associates (Iowa City, IA)
- Deacon Michael Berstene – Paulist Deacon Affiliates (Tolland, CT)
- Fr. Frank Sabatte, CSP – Lake George/Opening (New York)
- Fr. Joachim Lally, CSP – St. Andrew’s Cathedral (Grand Rapids)
- Fr. Greg Apparcel, CSP – St. Patrick’s Church (Rome)
- Heather Kinney – Formation Team (Washington, DC)
- Jim Haley – Immaculate Conception (Knoxville)
- Fr. John Ardis, CSP – Presidential Board (New York)
- John Chicca – St. Gregory the Great (San Diego)
- John Hurley, CSP – New Evangelization Strategies (San Jose)
- Jonathan Lewis – General Office (Washington, DC)
- Joseph Solomon, CSP – Hecker House (Washington, DC)
- Judy Roitz – St. Gregory the Great (San Diego)
- Kate Meany – Office of Mission Advancement (New York)
- Marvin Ruano, CSP – Hecker House (Washington, DC)
- Mary Ann Keough – Paulist Associates (Pataskala, OH)
- Mary Susan Burnett – Paulist Associates (Timberville, VA)
- Fr. Matthew Berrios – St. Patrick’s Church (Rome)
- Patricia Macy – Paulist Associates & St. Austin’s (Austin)
- Fr. Patrick Johnson, CSP – Paulist Center (Boston)
- Paul Snatchko – Paulist Media Office (Orlando)
- Fr. René Constanza, CSP – Presidential Board (New York)
- Richard Allegra – Paulist Associates (Palm Springs, CA)
- Fr. Richard Sparks, CSP – Paulist Community (Vero Beach, FL)
- Fr. Robert O’Donnell, CSP – St. John XXIII University Parish (Knoxville)
- Fr. Robert Cary, CSP – Old St. Mary’s (Chicago)
- Fr. Ruben Patino, CSP – St. Paul the Apostle (Horseshoe Bay, TX)
- Stephen Macy – Paulist Associates & St. Austin’s (Austin)
- Sue Gotimer – General Office (New York)
- Susan Santos – Paulist Associates (Boston)
- Dr. Susan Timoney – Lay Advisory Board (Washington, DC)
- Fr. Terrence Ryan, CSP – Old St. Mary’s (San Francisco)
- Fr. Thomas Holahan, CSP – Paulist Motherhouse (New York)
- Fr. Tim Sullivan, CSP – Immaculate Conception (Knoxville)
- Fr. Tom Ryan, CSP – Paulist Center (Boston)
- Yvette Ballard Duncan – General Office (New York)
- Zachary Turner, CSP – Hecker House (Washington, DC)

# Paulist Mission & Charism

The final round of conversations in the spirit consensus emphasized three areas for deeper exploration in the Study Group phase: (1) expanding mission formation and programming for Paulist Associates; (2) clarifying the distinction and relationship between the public “Paulist Fathers” brand and the broader “Paulists” identity; and (3) discerning what it would look like in tangible ways to integrate Isaac Hecker’s spirituality more deeply into Paulist life and ministry. Together, these insights point toward a desire not merely to refine language, but to strengthen formation, identity, and mission for the future.

## Breakout room discussion quotes:

- “What would Isaac Hecker be doing today? WWHD? (What Would Hecker Do?)”
- “Do we have a ‘progressive’ identity? What does that mean when added to ‘Catholic’? Is there a danger in identifying with ‘one group over another’? Is there a danger to ‘getting into identity politics?’ BUT, must we retain the sense of joyful welcome to all people from all walks of life?”

## Questions for further reflection:

- What would it look like concretely for the Paulist community to integrate Hecker’s spirituality more deeply?



# Lay Leadership & Lay Collaboration

The conversations underscored a growing urgency to move from goodwill between clergy and laity toward concrete structures that enable shared mission. While participants affirmed the value of collaboration and the strong presence of lay leadership in many Paulist ministries, the recurring insight from the final table centered on the need for intentional, system-level supports that connect and empower the wider Paulist family.

Priority areas for the Study Group phase include strengthening structural connections among Paulist parishes/ministries/centers, as well as in the places where Paulists are not physically present but Associates are active. Participants also emphasized increasing the visibility and integration of Associates, alongside sustained formation for Associates, lay leaders, and collaborators rooted in Paulist mission and Hecker's spirituality. Together, these themes point toward a deepening, moving from informal collaboration to intentional empowerment—clarifying what lay leadership entails and ensuring the tools, formation, and structures are in place to support shared leadership.



# Lay Leadership & Lay Collaboration

## Breakout room discussion quotes:

- “Collaboration is great but my mind collaboration without empowerment will not get us where we need to be.”
- “We have a very thriving lay leadership community in terms of men and women leading ministries and working in collaboration with our pastor, but there are shortfall in terms of integrating the Paulist mission into the various ministries.”
- “[I] joined the Associates and have felt lost for years because I have this desire to be helping and desire to be involved with the mission but don’t know how to actually do that because I’m a member of a church that is not a Paulist foundation—so what do I do?”
- “We [associates] need some material on Hecker and some way of presenting him as a person and using that to inform/instruct people about the mission. Focusing on the person of Isaac himself that might be an avenue to help people understand within our distinct parishes.”
- “Should the Paulists be actually doing more ‘actual ministry work’ with Paulist Associates? (Have the Paulist Associates move beyond praying for the Paulists.)”
- “People need to be given the charge [like Paul gave] to go forth and to know that the tools, support and resources are there to do that.”

## Questions for further reflection:

- How can the Paulists concretely move from permissioning to commissioning lay leadership?
- How well are we integrating Hecker’s spirituality into leadership development and ministry life?
- What tools or resources are needed to form lay leaders and Associates?
- Should the community invest more Paulist personnel and funds into lay leadership training?

# Community Life

The Community Life conversations affirmed that while overall satisfaction with Paulist community life is strong its vitality depends less on uniform structure and more on sustained intentionality. Across diverse foundations and life stages participants named the need to consciously “re-configure” communities whenever members join or leave, attend to intergenerational dynamics, and ensure that practical habits—shared meals, prayer, hospitality, and celebration—remain central. The final discussion highlighted concrete priorities for the Study Group phase: strengthening support systems that allow senior men to remain in local houses with appropriate medical coordination; fostering a culture of intentional hospitality when Paulists visit other foundations; and naming responsibility within each house for community-building practices, such as celebrating milestones and creating regular opportunities for shared “family time.” Together, these insights point toward community life as a practiced discipline—one that requires clear ownership, ongoing adaptation, and explicit support at both the local and national level.

## Breakout room discussion quotes:

- “Strong community life is important to attracting vocations.”
- “Community life depends on each foundation; intentionality is key; we are not monks but we are not diocesan priests where we each do our own thing; freedom for each community to identify its own community life and to be open and intentional about that.”
- “Most people come into religious life looking for community. But it is easy to think that the local community can fulfill all your needs, but that is not the case.”
- “Used to be the case that early in priesthood you would be living with someone closer to your age. This doesn’t happen now. Differences in age and formation experience.”
- “How can we as seminarians practice community life when each foundation has their own community life? And to help us be able to integrate into other communities.”
- “All of us change when a new member enters the community. We have to take care to re-configure the community when new people enter or leave.”

## Questions for further reflection:

- How are we forming men, seminarians and professed, to live healthy community life across generational, cultural, and foundational differences?
- Where do we rely too much on “good will” instead of named leadership or shared accountability?
- Do we see our community experience as living and working together and not just being part of the parish team?

# Vocations

The notes from the Vocation discussion group were limited to the following three quotes.

## Breakout room discussion quotes:

- “Paulist Fathers should continue the good work of acknowledging the sign of the times by accepting diverse applicants into the church and reflective of society”
- “Establish a vocation culture where Paulist Fathers, Paulist Associates, lay people, etc are the poster for the good work of the Paulists”
- “In lieu of scarcity, deficit thinking, fear we should focus on passion, vision, and love”

## Questions for further reflection:

- How can the Paulists more effectively create a culture of vocations?



# Paulist Mission Field & Mission Priorities

The conversations converged on a shared conviction that the Paulists must more clearly discern with the Holy Spirit and claim their specific mission priorities that flow from the founding vision of Isaac Hecker and the community's charism. The final discussions emphasized three core priorities for the Study Group phase: (1) discerning the concrete realities of the evolving mission field in the USA and naming which of these the Paulists are specifically called to engage; (2) leveraging the life and writings of Isaac Hecker as a compelling entry point for ministry in the USA; and (3) better articulating and clearly communicating that vision for the wider Paulist family which will lead to greater mission impact.

## Breakout room discussion quotes:

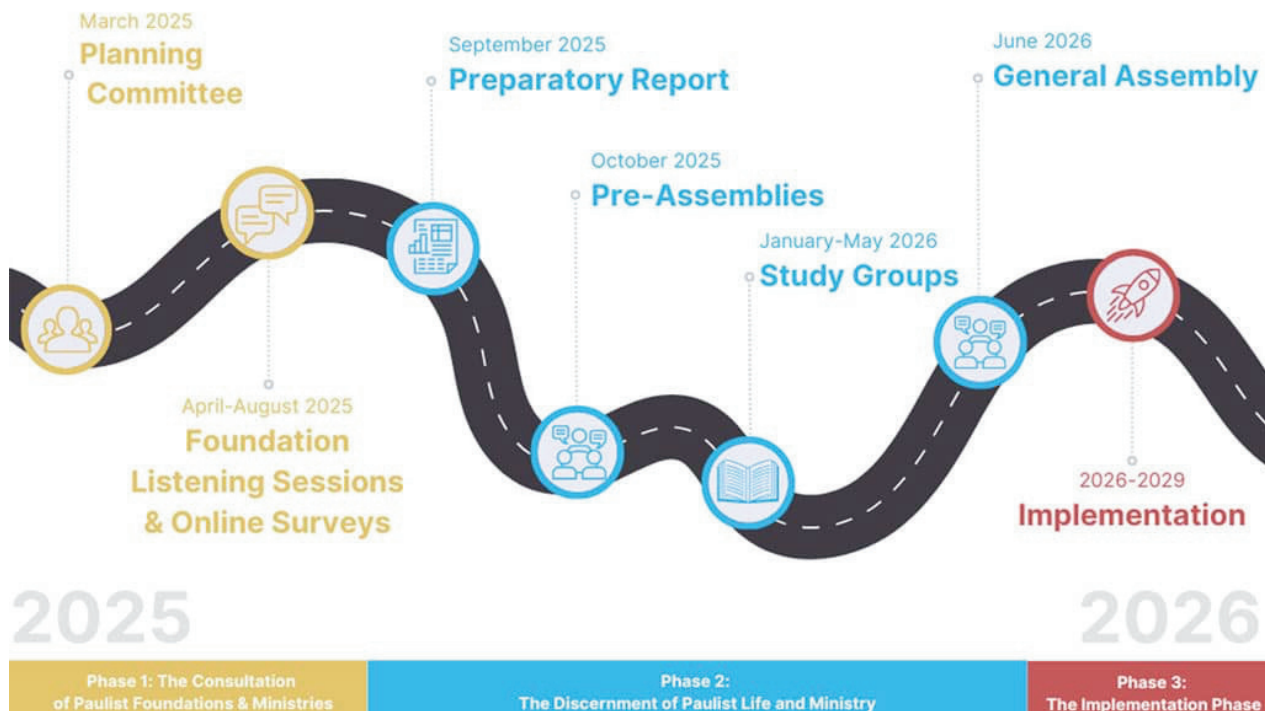
- "We need to better articulate the mission who the Paulists and the Paulist charismatic family then we need to educate and better communicate that."
- "Importance of discernment around mission field: What does the Holy Spirit want me to do? What is my role?"
- "What is the role of a parish in the life of missionary work: Is the parish a hub/home base? A springboard? Both?"
- "There is a need to understand Hecker's dream of being Catholic in America and especially in today's society, there is need for father Hecker's intercession to preserve our democracy as a way of a really bringing together a lot of these different topic areas."
- "How to use media for evangelization: attending to the who - Paulist and/or lay - of both content and technical expertise (ex. media at Hecker House)."

## Questions for further reflection:

- How are Paulist parishes, campuses, and centers living the missionary charism? What would it look like for Paulist foundations to do this in a new or more radical way?
- What insight does reflecting on the life and ministry of the Paulist founders offer us today?

# 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 next 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

