

2025 West Coast Pre-Assembly Report

October 27-29 | Mary and Joseph Retreat Center, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA

Participants: 45 (28 Paulists, 16 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 West 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.



-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

- Fr. Bart Landry, CSP – St. Gregory the Great (San Diego)
- Fr. Ben Chisholm, CSP – University Catholic Center at UCLA (Los Angeles)
- Fr. Bruce Nieli, CSP – St. Austin Catholic Church & Paulist Preaching Apostolate (Austin)
- Caitlin Goodrich – St. Austin Catholic Church (Austin)
- Fr. Chris Lawton, CSP – St. Paul the Apostle (New York)
- Fr. Christopher Malano, CSP – St. Austin Catholic Church (Austin)
- Fr. Dan Macalinao, CSP – Old St. Mary's (Chicago)
- David Moore – Paulist Productions (Los Angeles)
- Fr. Dave Dwyer, CSP – Presidential Board & Busted Halo (New York)
- Deacon Patrick Murphy-Racey – St. John XXIII University Parish (Knoxville)
- Fr. Edward Nowak, CSP – Vocations Office (Washington, DC)
- Ernie Garrido – Vocations Office (Brownsville, TX)
- Fr. Frank Desiderio, CSP – Senior Ministry (New York)
- Fr. Gilbert Martinez, CSP – St. Paul the Apostle (Los Angeles)
- Heather Kinney – Formation Team (Washington, DC)
- Fr. Ivan Tou, CSP – Old St. Mary's Cathedral (San Francisco)
- Fr. Jamie Baca, CSP – University Catholic Center at UCLA (Los Angeles)
- Jennifer Kozakowski – Paulist Associates & St. Paul the Apostle (Los Angeles)
- Fr. Jerry Tully, CSP – St. Gregory the Great (San Diego)
- Fr. Jimmy Hsu, CSP – St. Austin Catholic Church (Austin)
- Fr. John Ardis, CSP – Presidential Board (New York)
- Fr. John Geaney, CSP – Senior Ministry (Boston)
- Jonathan Lewis – General Office (Washington, DC)
- Lisa Wellik – Paulist Associates & St. Paul the Apostle (Los Angeles)
- Fr. Mark Villano, CSP – St. Paul the Apostle (Los Angeles)
- Mary Martin – Catholic Information Center (Grand Rapids)
- Maryann Cushing – Paulist Associates & Old St. Mary's (Chicago)
- Michael Harkins – University Catholic Center at UCLA (Los Angeles)
- Fr. Mike Cruickshank, CSP – Cathedral of Saint Andrew (Grand Rapids)
- Paul Snatchko – Media Office (Orlando, FL)
- Fr. Peter Abdella, CSP – St. Paul the Apostle (Los Angeles)
- Rachael Smit – Old St. Mary's Cathedral (San Francisco)
- Fr. René Constanza, CSP – Presidential Board (New York)
- Fr. Rich Whitney, CSP – St. John XXIII University Parish (Knoxville)
- Fr. Ricky Manalo, CSP – Missionary (New York)
- Fr. Robert Cary, CSP – Old St. Mary's (Chicago)
- Rosie China Shawver – Lay Advisory Board (Los Angeles)
- Fr. Steve Bossi – Old St. Mary's Cathedral (San Francisco)
- Fr. Steven Bell, CSP – Preaching Apostolate (Los Angeles)
- Tara Cevallos – St. Austin Catholic School (Austin)
- Fr. Ted Vierra, CSP – St. Paul the Apostle (Los Angeles)
- Fr. Thomas Hall, CSP – Senior Ministry (Los Angeles)
- Fr. Tom Gibbons, CSP – Paulist Productions
- Viviana Morales – Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (Knoxville)
- William McLean – Office of Mission Advancement (New York)

Mission & Charism

Many lay collaborators and leaders who are familiar with, work alongside, or worship at Paulist-led ministries shared that there is something instinctive and recognizable about the Paulist charism. Yet table groups identified a need for Paulists to articulate a more clear and compelling mission statement that speaks to the realities and challenges of the present moment. Many participants referenced the three pillars of the Mission Direction Statement from the 1980s as providing a clear and repeatable focus for the community over the years (evangelization, reconciliation, ecumenism). However, others recognized that while the emphases of these three pillars continue to shape Paulist identity and mission, there is a sense that the community would benefit from revisiting the articulation of our mission today so that it fully captures the realities of present and future Paulist ministry.

Several participants noted that re-engaging Fr. Isaac Hecker's writings, particularly his call to attentiveness to the Holy Spirit in the modern age, could be a potent source of renewal as Paulists discern a renewed articulation of mission and charism. Participants reflected that throughout the history of the community, Paulist mission has flourished most clearly when it has been grounded in attentiveness to the signs of the times and expressed through a Spirit-led missionary response.

Participants shared that a more clear and succinct articulation will also assist vocations work and lay collaboration. There is a growing hunger, especially among younger generations, for language that is concise, Christ-centered, and hopeful, without reducing Paulist spirituality to a formula or a nostalgic return to the past.



Mission & Charism

The Holy Spirit and virtue of hope emerged as recurring themes, a hope that is prophetic, courageous, that dares to preach boldly, listen deeply, innovate freely, and pivot missionally as the Spirit leads. The fruit of the conversation points toward reclaiming the “why” of the Paulists as missionaries to the United States, animated by the Holy Spirit, meeting people where they are, while discerning how to express that charism in language and structures that inspire collaboration, guide decisions, and rekindle missionary zeal for the Church and world today.

Table discussion quotes:

- “In a lot of ways the mission is clear to people in the pews and is felt, but we need to try to say it.”
- “There is hope in the lay collaborators. We see using their gifts even more in the future.”
- “There are things we need to reclaim as Paulists—St. Paul, Fr. Hecker, and the Holy Spirit.”
- “We dream of a church that is prophetic, unifying, and hopeful.”

Questions for further reflection:

- “What do we do uniquely different from other priests?”
- “What resonated for our founders and what can be drawn upon presently?”
- “What does it mean to be a community of missionary priests whose mission setting is North America?”
- “How can we effectively contribute to the religious discourse in the United States that can both challenge and bridge-build?”



Lay Leadership & Lay Collaboration

In lieu of table discussions, lay collaborators and leaders paired up into groups of two or three for walking conversations.

Overall the conversations around lay leadership and lay collaboration identified two distinct audiences: 1) of lay staff and volunteers and 2) Paulist Associates.

Lay Staff and Volunteers: Conversations surfaced a renewed recognition of what has long been affirmed by Vatican II: the essential active role of the laity in the life and mission of the Church. Participants framed collaboration not simply as a functional necessity due to a declining number of priests, but as a baptismal calling to shared leadership and responsibility for mission. This raised a deeper question for both Paulists and lay collaborators alike: how can each Paulist ministry better promote lay leadership and shared responsibility within the ministry's missionary work?

While Paulists are widely experienced as welcoming and supportive of lay leaders, there are opportunities for growth around the awareness and sensitivities of the concrete responsibilities of lay life, including family obligations, financial pressures, and commitments outside of work, compared to vowed religious life. Finally, participants emphasized the need for intentional formation of lay ministers that integrates Paulist spirituality with practical leadership and ministry skills so that lay leadership is fruitful and sustainable.

Paulist Associates: Multiple individuals and later table conversations honed in specifically around the role of Paulist Associates, naming that there is currently a lack of clarity of their role. Others shared that there is an opportunity for clearer goal setting, increased formation and funding, and stronger engagement in mission. One person shared that the Associates program should consider new ways to "fill the space between occasional Sunday zoom meetings and applications e.g. something like a Paulist year of service to empower the next generation of associates?"

Lay Leadership & Lay Collaboration

Questions for further reflection

- How can Paulist ministries empower and structurally support lay leadership and co-responsibility?
- How can we “cultivate the next generation of lay leaders in the Church” and “empower the next generation of associates”?
- How can the Paulist Associates best live out and support the Paulist mission and charism in the coming years? What assistance is needed to make that happen?



Community Life

Table conversations affirmed that community life is foundational to the Paulist vocation and exists for the sake of mission, in a mutually enriching way. Many commented on the desire to continue to embrace community life, recognizing the helpful ways community life has grown over the years. While many joined the Paulists primarily for mission, participants named practical and spiritual ways that community life has been a gift to them, reinforcing their vocation and mission work.

At the same time, participants named significant pain points and tensions. Experiences of community vary widely across houses, generations, and stages of life, with particular concern for the dignity, inclusion, and care of senior Paulists, many of whom feel underutilized or marginalized. Several participants surfaced the impact on local communities of individual personalities, the work of community assignments, communication, and shared responsibility more important.

In the renewal of community life, some mentioned the need for deeper spiritual renewal. The topics of vocations and retention were also named, recognizing that many discerning religious life seek strong community, clear mission, and a robust spiritual life, highlighting the urgency of attending to how community is actually lived and witnessed.

Participants named that although the apostolic nature of the Paulists values individuality and flexibility, there is a danger that these values can drift toward isolation, especially in retirement, if not balanced by practices of mutual care and accountability. The fruits of the conversation point toward the need for ongoing formation in community life, greater attention to spiritual health, and intentional local practices that foster friendship, vulnerability, and shared conversion so that Paulist community itself becomes a credible, life-giving witness in a world deeply hungry for authentic belonging.



Community Life

Table discussion quotes:

- "Community for the sake of mission should not minimize importance of community life."
- "Community directive statement - what does it look like now?"
- "As we get to smaller numbers, every person makes a difference."
- "Spiritual renewal, inner conversion are needed to go where our community wants to go."

Questions for further reflection:

- "What do we communicate to men who are thinking about our life when it comes to community and our expectations of it?"
- "Do we consider how we match people to maximize what community life looks like?"
- Are there clear, shared expectations of Paulist community life in each house? Nationally?



Vocations

Overall the discussions demonstrated the vital importance of vocation ministry and surfaced plenty of energy amongst participants to try new things that support Paulist vocations outreach. Participants spoke candidly about the declining number of active Paulists as a real source of concern and anxiety for the community. At the same time, the conversation identified a genuine opportunity to cultivate a broader culture of vocations, one that invites every Paulist, as well as lay collaborators and leaders, to share responsibility in fostering and encouraging people to discern a Paulist vocation. Rather than framing vocations primarily as a numerical challenge, participants emphasized reimagining vocations as the work of building relationships rooted in prayer, accompaniment, and active mission. Participants noted that a number of recent Paulist vocations emerged through personal invitation, authentic Paulist witness, and thoughtful, effective communication.

Of note, many recent Paulist vocations have emerged at the local level through interaction with an individual Paulist or Paulist ministry. This highlights the need for each foundation to see themselves as a nexus for Paulist vocations, and the need to take increased ownership with regard to vocations promotion and outreach. Some participants asked specifically how lay leaders can take a more active role in promoting vocations, perhaps in a similar way as the Annual Paulist Appeal. Providing more formation and training to the laity on discernment could be helpful in this area. Additionally, participants stressed that young men are drawn to both impactful ministry and genuine community life, and that a perceived lack of authentic fraternity amongst Paulists can undermine vocational credibility.

A renewed focus on mentoring, apprenticeship, and accompaniment was named as essential in this work, as was offering multiple entry points into discernment. Given the growing practice of more traditional piety or devotions, table groups recommended that the Paulists be open to men with diverse spiritual practices and engage more traditional practices with an attitude of curiosity instead of judgment. Overall, working with young men who are discerning must be mutual, patient, and grounded in openness to formation rather than fear, urgency, or scarcity.

The group also highlighted the need for greater clarity and visibility of the Paulist charism, supported by thoughtful communication and modern media. Multiple tables mentioned the importance of telling the history of the Paulists and highlighting the

Vocations

example and work of Fr. Hecker in marketing materials to promote the community's American Catholic identity. Table conversations invited the Paulist community to trust that communicating its strengths will attract young men to the community. These include: living the mission with joy, articulating the distinguishing charisms of Paulist priesthood, and fostering a Church-wide culture of vocation that helps all people, ordained and lay, recognize and respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings.

Table discussion quotes:

- "We need to be able to show them ministry and community because guys are looking for both."
- "Vocation ministry most often happens on a local level with local guys rather than national ministry."
- "Not a ministry of recruitment, but discernment"

Questions for further reflection:

- "Where young people are today - Eucharistic Adoration, devotions; how do we meet this particular culture, and what are we inviting them into?"
- Where are the untapped opportunities in US Catholic life for a deeper Paulist presence to promote awareness of the Paulist charism and Paulist vocation?
- What would it mean to boldly promote a culture of vocations?





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."

One table reflected on the distinctive Catholic revival underway in the U.S. Church, particularly among young people. Another recalled how the early Paulists courageously built new ministries in unfamiliar places, often without the stability of an established community, relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Another commented on the particular eucharistic dimension of Paulist ministries noting that wherever Paulists move to or start new ministries that Paulists build up a eucharistic community there. This highlights the helpful balance between national ministries and a local parish community. Overall these insights raised a shared question: where is the Spirit leading us now, and how are we being called to look forward with boldness rather than backward with nostalgia?

Regarding the topic of polarization and prophetic witness, one table shared that they "love that Paulists have changed the polarization project wording to The Communion Project. We as a Church need to model something that our country is not doing. Paulists have a role in providing an example of how to address this, and this can be grounded in Jesus." Another noted they "need training for skills for overcoming polarization including listening skills" and that "people are hungry to be listened to." Relatedly, there were comments made that promoting communion should not come at the expense of prophetic witness. The Gospel message itself can be divisive at times. Finally, one table identified "campus ministries as places where the seeds for the future of peace and dialogue can be planted."

Mission Fields & Priorities

The discussions of “innovation in media” included some skepticism as to whether or not the Paulists are at the forefront of innovation in this space today, noting that in many situations there is a “Paulist history of one guy doing a special thing and it dies with him.” One person shared that “we can’t just assume [young] priests and seminarians want to do this” and that media ministry is an area where Paulists can collaborate with the laity who are skilled and interested in doing it. While people most commonly think of Paulist national ministries when it comes to media, some participants encouraged doing more to engage with the resources of local media ministries and initiatives. Finally, one table also noted that the emerging landscape of technology and AI open up opportunities to both leverage technology for ministry (including online relationship-building), as well as counterbalance technology overload by emphasizing human relationships, skills, and practices. Overall, there is confidence that “media is a way to call people into relationship with people and with Christ, through the Church” where the Paulists should continue to be present.

Breakout room discussion quotes:

- “There is a huge opportunity that has been dropped on us. How do we rise to the moment? People are coming back to church in some areas of the country. We might not fully know why, but we need to do something.”
- “We cannot be looking or evaluating places we are at by asking questions that refer to legacy. If we are missionary, we go from one place to another, setting up and moving up. We are entrenched because we are dealing with people – supporters and those who love us. If we are truly apostolic, we go where the Spirit leads us.”
- “Local parish life is where many innovative Paulist ministries began. Look at a ‘show and tell’ approach where we show how to interact at our foundations and use our national platform to tell others about it.”

Questions for further reflection:

- How are Paulist parishes already living a missionary identity? How could parishes be more radically missionary?
- What is the next horizon of Paulist mission territory – in person and online?

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:

Table discussion quotes

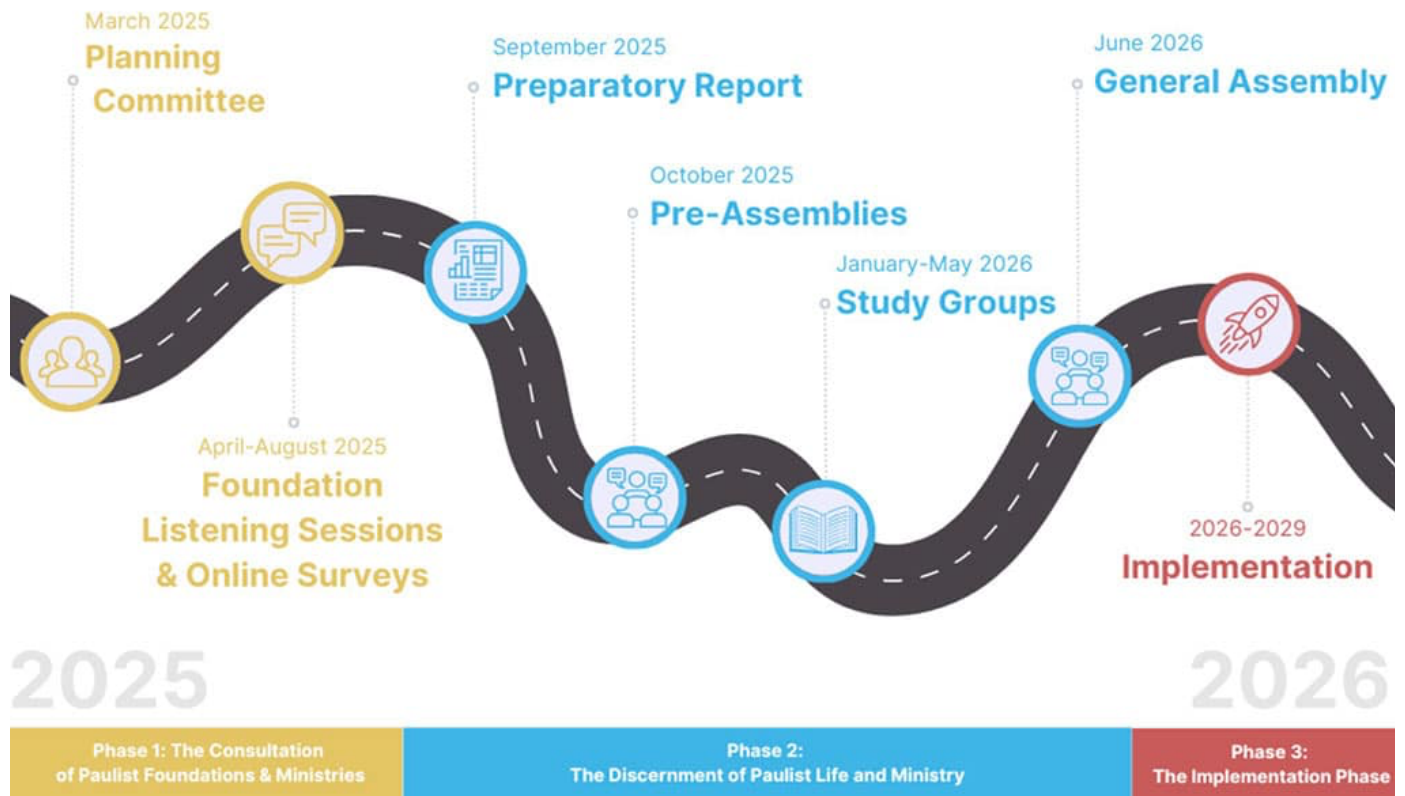
- *Governance:*
 - Multiplied tables discussed that governance issues need to be addressed including the size of the General Council, the length of Presidential Board terms, the possibility of a General Assembly of the whole, etc.
- *Collaboration:*
 - Increase collaboration and “interactions between different Paulist foundations and the synergy that can arise (ex. Paulist foundations with schools, our young adult groups) across Paulist foundations” as well as alignment with other religious communities
 - “How can we create new models of collaboration that put us at the frontier of ministry in the American church?”
- *Hope*
 - “Hecker was about hope.”
 - “Paulist as Missionary of Hope to an age that is dystopian, calling people to a friendship in Jesus”
 - “How can we help the big middle of the Church to be united and hopeful as Christians?”
 - “Like the Missionaries of Mercy, we could be sent as Missionaries of Hope.”
 - “We need to be missionaries of hope to our own community.”
 - “Our vocation outreach needs to have a ‘posture of hopefulness’ not a posture of scarcity or abundance.”
- *Hecker and America*
 - “[Our] tag line was Make America Catholic, then Missionaries to Main Street America. Still like a focus on preaching for the U.S. in the U.S. for ways to affect the U.S.”
 - “We are suffering an identity crisis in America so we need to be clear and more focused.”
 - “Reclaiming of Hecker’s roots of honing it for an American Catholic church.”
 - “Introducing the person of Isaac Hecker and connecting this to American Catholicism”

Additional Themes

- *Young Adult Ministry and College Campus Ministry*
 - Need to focus on “formation of young adult leaders in the Church; cultivate next generation of lay leaders in the Church”
 - Ministry with college students and young adults has shifted with the national and local commitment to college campus ministry. What models do we have for forming and accompanying college students and young adults today? Can we look “for new models of campus ministry and reaching out to the underserved?”
 - “Generally, as a mission for the whole Church, there need to be more campus ministries that serve community colleges and trade schools.”
- *Senior ministry:*
 - How can we better dignify senior ministry with unique ministry opportunities? “We don’t seem to have a systematic approach to supporting the senior priests. The ones who want to keep working, can they have more space or even shared space to continue their work? It seems like they need more of a purpose. Many of them still have gifts to share...Can we suggest a generative outlet that will give them some purpose?”
 - “Are there new models of ‘senior ministerial flourishing’ that can be explored, beyond saying daily Mass? In less than 10 years most of the Paulists will be in senior status, so how can we get ahead of this challenge?”
- *Cultural Diversity*
 - Need to better respond to the diversity of people in our parishes: “We don’t have a lot of Spanish speakers, and in places that have started a Spanish mass it has become the largest mass.”
 - “Who is missing in this conversation: did we just gather the ‘usual suspects’? What other voices would have helped us in this process?”
- *Spirituality and the Holy Spirit:*
 - “We say we’re reliant on the Holy Spirit but what does that mean? How can we communicate ways the community makes me holier? What can we succinctly say about our spirituality and prayer?”
 - Easy to “become so worldly if we don’t connect with the Holy Spirit first”
 - “Reacquaint ourselves with Fr. Hecker, St. Paul and the Holy Spirit.”
 - “Clarity in spirituality, connection with Hecker, Heckerian discernment model”
 - “Paulist Spirituality - personal and communal relationship with the Holy Spirit. Gives space for people who can’t articulate yet a spirituality. Younger people need/want to make our spirituality clearer, but that is not us...it’s so inclusive. This is hard to explain but it is part of what it is - we can feel that spirituality and do we need to put words to it? Maybe we do!”

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

