

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*About 25 years ago, I along with 20 other religious, priests, and laymen accompanied the director of the missions for the diocese of San Diego to the missions in Ecuador.*

*There first hand I saw the poverty of material goods, the spiritual need to preach and teach clearly the gospel, the efforts of the missionaries there in orphanages, parishes, and other places bringing knowledge and love of Jesus to the people of Quito, Santo Domingo de las Palmas, Guayaquil among others.*

*The bug bit me. The Society of St. James refused me out of hand, something I'm not unaccustomed to experiencing since Bishop Robert Brom held up my ordination because several of his deans, priests in charge of local groups of parishes in a diocese, recommended I not be ordained in spite of academic, spiritual, and moral successes. Even after ordination he told me that not all of the faculty voted in favor of my ordination, to which I responded, "Well thank God, because some of them shouldn't even be on a seminary faculty."*

*So you see the problem is not always somebody else. It is me and my attitude!*

*The Maryknoll fathers did accept me. They themselves will definitely brag that they are "meeters", lots of meetings locally and regionally, loving to discuss things, have lunch, dinners, issue papers, etc.*

*Still in their formation of us going to mission, they did teach me some very good things: respect the culture of the people to whom you are bringing Jesus, do not impose your own culture, live among them and like them, to get the "smell of the sheep" on us, knowing their lives, their spiritual needs, and meeting them with Jesus.*

*My good fortune put me in San Pedro Sula, Honduras with several very good priests who built chapels, offered Mass, catechesis, outreach to the poor, all the good things of sanctifying, teaching, and guidance in charity that a priest is called to do. We met briefly over lunch weekly. Our meetings there did NOT take time away from the mission.*

*Back in the U.S. I had rare staff meetings because I was a working pastor, not an administrative one. My parishes were so poor that we never had staff or enough clergy to allow the pastor to hire, employ, or command rather than to work.*

*With my school teachers only 2 were over 65 who knew the faith, so I met with teachers frequently to instruct them the basics of Catholicism. Catechists too met with me once a year to outline their mission and*

*techniques. I visited the classrooms of school, youth group, and catechesis to help continue the mission.*

*Yet in the institutional church meetings abound. If they get to the point and are informative, I pay attention and implement the good ideas. Most were verbose nonsense. Current pastors are lamenting the lockdowns, frequent zoom meetings, etc. One of my successors of a previous parish, a man who always shows up late for the meetings, said, "I'm not sitting next to you anymore because 5 minutes after I arrive you leave." I like him, but since I do not suffer fools well, if the meeting is boring, I needed to get back to work.*

*Yet this meeting structure comes from men who are formed more in a corporate mode rather than an evangelistic one. They have been leaders too long, organizing, commanding, imposing rather than getting the smell of the sheep on them. Because of this, they "know better", at least they think so.*

*George Weigel presents our current church as one in meetings rather than mission, due to the elevation of men formed in a corporate model rather than the evangelistic one.*

*In a recent meeting with the bishop of Venice who grants me limited faculties to serve in his parishes when a pastor requests my help, I told him that I come to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. That is what will bring people into the Catholic Church.*

*Instead of meeting, organizing, strategizing, issuing documents, papers, orders, take a clue from the Nike (Greek word meaning Victory) commercial, "Just Do It!" or get out of the way of us who are trying to do mission.*

***This is not the time for a Church in meetings. The times demand a Church in mission, proclaiming Jesus Christ as the answer to the question that is every human life.***

## **A Church in mission or a Church in meetings?**

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An abandoned church in Italy. (Image: v2osk/Unsplash.com)

On the Solemnity of Christ the King in 2013, Pope Francis

completed the work of the 2012 Synod of Bishops with the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), issuing a ringing call for the entire Church to “embark on a new chapter of evangelization.” Catholicism, the Pope urged, must move from maintenance to mission: “from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry.” And that ministry ought to empower all the people of the Church for mission, for the 21st-century Church must understand itself as a “community of missionary disciples” who are “permanently in a state of mission,” because the Church lives not for herself, but “for the evangelization of today’s world.”

A little short of eight years later, Cardinal Mario Grech, general secretary of the Synod of Bishops, unveiled a complex — some might say, convoluted — **plan for an extensive series of consultations** at the diocesan,

national, continental, and international levels in preparation for the Synod on “synodality” to be held in Rome in October 2023. This two-year process has been described by one enthusiast as “the most important global Catholic project since Vatican II.”

My own hunch — based on the U.S. Catholic “Call to Action” process in 1974-76 and the current German “Synodal Path” — is that **the only people who will be fully engaged in Cardinal Grech’s multitudinous consultative “phases” before the 2023 Synod are people who love to go to meetings** in order to share with like-minded spirits their complaints about The Way Things Are in Catholicism. The rest of the Church, or at least its living parts, will be otherwise occupied, getting about the task to which Pope Francis once summoned all of us: “the evangelization of today’s world.”

**From a Church in mission to a Church in meetings is not a step forward.**

**That the Church must be in mission, including a mission to poorly catechized Catholics who are drifting away from the faith in droves, ought not be in serious dispute. The pandemic has doubtless accelerated the decline of Catholic practice. But that exodus from the pews was underway before the world ever heard of Wuhan virology labs and COVID-19. The exodus reflects in part the corrosive effects of a culture that, in its kinder moments, may**

**tolerate Catholic faith and practice as a lifestyle choice, but which is adamantly opposed to the notion that Catholicism is the bearer of enduring Gospel truths that lead to personal happiness and social solidarity.**

**The exodus is also a by-product of decades of inept catechesis and flaccid preaching, such that in much of the western world today, the most highly educated Catholics in history likely know less about Catholicism — and therefore believe less — than their grandparents.**

Some recent survey data from Italy illustrates the depth of the challenge. In 1995, 41% of those surveyed in Italy professed belief in life after death; 28.6% believe in life after death today. In that same timeframe, the numbers of those who flatly deny that there is life after death almost doubled, from 10.4% to 19.5%. The remainder, presumably, are agnostic on the subject. Think what it means, though, that of these numbers, only three out of 10 Italians firmly believe in life after death.

Anglican biblical scholar N.T. Wright, who has brilliantly defended the historicity of the Resurrection, has also written that there is no evidence whatsoever of any form of early Christianity that did not vigorously affirm that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised to a new and super-abundant form of life — a life available to all those who professed belief in him and lived as his friends and

disciples. What was true two millennia ago is true today: If there is no belief in Easter, or in the resurrection to eternal life of those who have died in Christ, there is no Christianity. Period. And if, by that measure, Italy is a post-Christian society and culture, things are likely even more grim in other sectors of what was once western Christendom.

It is not self-evidently clear how two years of self-referential Catholic chatter in pre-synodal Church discussion groups, conducted under the rubric of “discernment” about a “synodal Church,” is going to chart a path beyond this abandonment of rock-bottom Christian beliefs, which is at the root of today’s rapidly declining Catholic practice. **This is not the time for a Church in meetings. The times demand a Church in mission, proclaiming Jesus Christ as the answer to the question that is every human life.**