

Synod on Synodality Submission

The Universal Church is a force for unity across the world and across cultures ...

The Church should be a beacon of hope that draws the masses, not a spotlight seeking to separate and alienate its children.

Women need sacramental roles in the Church. Denying women the sacraments denies women an opportunity for grace. Can the Church really limit God's love and God's blessings?

Young people want to focus on ideals, on how we should impact the world, shape the world, focus on social justice, but so many parishes don't make space for that.

These are a few of the dreams, hopes, sorrows, and frustrations expressed by those who participated in Voice of the Faithful's (VOTF) in-depth sessions responding to Pope Francis' global call for lay input into the Synod on Synodality.

We provided these sessions to our members and to any others who felt excluded from the diocesan gatherings or lived in dioceses where bishops curtailed the synodal journey or believed their voices were not heard.

To encourage participation in the Synod by members who did have access to diocesan sessions, we distributed informational videos and hosted a webinar on synodality featuring Synod-appointed theologians. In addition, we provided guidance for some parish-based gatherings at their request (see the Appendix C for reports from three of those gatherings).

Responding to the call for Synod participation was not only consistent with our VOTF mission but also continued the synodal path we have traveled during our 20 years. VOTF organized in 2002 in response to revelations of clergy sex abuse and its ongoing coverup by the hierarchy. Our mission and goals (Appendix A) emerged from mutual, prayerful discernment, and the organization quickly grew to international membership. The Synod and its path for the Church of the 21st century offer an invitation consonant with our own Mission: to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.

VOTF Synod input sessions comprised two 90-minute meetings with optional follow-ups. We limited each group in a session to 10 people, including a trained facilitator and scribe, so that each person could participate fully and in depth.

We offered sessions from January through May 2022. Although some groups who used the follow-up options are still meeting, we base this report on the sessions run through May, which included 373 participants from 34 U.S. states and five other nations, plus responses from more than 30 relatives and friends of the attendees who used the questions we asked to obtain input from non-Catholics and departed Catholics.

The topic questions posed during each session (see Appendix B) came from the guidelines and themes sent by the Vatican Secretariat for the Synod. VOTF did not limit questions or the responses to any one theme. With this latitude, and as a result of VOTF's history and

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approach, the primary themes that emerged from our sessions may be broader than those from lay organizations whose Synod sessions focused on directed themes.

In terms of format, each session began with a prayer and a Scripture reading followed by the questions designated for that session. They ended with reflections on the sharing and a closing prayer.

Following each session, the scribes sent their reports to the participants for review and then sent the final version (quoted segments are in italics) to VOTF's Synod Committee. The Committee read and collated all the reports, identified the key themes, and asked facilitators and scribes to review and comment on the discerned themes. Finally, after preparing this final report, we distributed it for review to all the Synod session participants before sending it to the Vatican Secretariat.

To elicit responses to the main question posed in the Synod Preparatory Document and the *Vademecum*, we asked participants to consider what they love, cherish, or dream of for the Church and what saddens or frustrates them. (See Appendix B for the text of the questions asked in each session; see Appendix D for all responses from each session.)

Our discernment yielded seven major themes. Notably, each theme overlaps with others, much as any journey has discrete stages along a path as well as an overall destination. If we were to summarize the message from all the themes, it would be that some Catholics find meaning, welcome, and support in our Church, but too many experience constant obstacles to participating in a Christ-centered Church, open to all, placing Catholic social teachings at the center of parish life, and living together—clergy and lay—in a discipleship of equals. The Church of the 21st century, a Church for all ages, must return to these basic principles, to a synodal discernment, to remain faithful to the path Jesus revealed to us.

- ❖ We yearn for inclusive, Christ-centered local faith communities offering fellowship, spirituality, safety, and moral values, joined in unity with the Universal Church.
- ❖ We yearn for a Church that is welcoming to everyone, especially those on the margins.
- ❖ Celebration of the Eucharist and access to the sacraments connects us all globally. For many, these are the main reasons they cling to the Church.
- ❖ We yearn for implementation of Vatican II reforms, which will help us return to the synodal model of the early Church.
- ❖ We yearn for a Church where lay voices are heard, respected, and acted upon, especially women's voices. The stark absence of women's voices was noted in every session VOTF held.
- ❖ We yearn for priests who really listen to us, practicing humility and modeling servant leadership.
- ❖ We yearn for more preaching and programs that recognize and act on Catholic social teaching in all its breadth.

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Theme:

We yearn for inclusive, Christ-centered local faith communities offering fellowship, spirituality, safety, and moral values, joined in unity with the Universal Church.

In the Universal Church, participants value our common rituals while enjoying the different cultural expressions for such rituals. They take pride in our centuries-old commitment to works of charity, our rich traditions, and “unity in diversity.”

*There is a joy in having a recognizable liturgy wherever you go in the world.
We recognize our connection and sameness.*

The Church’s works of charity in schools, hospitals, hospices, etc., are a source of justified pride.

In local parish communities, some Catholics found parishes that exemplified the traits they identified with the Universal Church’s mission: parishes that welcomed all, encouraged outreach to the needy and poor, held vibrant liturgies, respected their voices, and built bonds that extended “beyond the pews.” However, the gap between dreams for vibrant, welcoming parishes and the lived reality of parish life often was large.

I was lucky to find a dynamic church. I depended on it to find a community and found one that is honest and forthright—it is a community, not an institution.

Should a Catholic be fortunate enough to find a welcoming and inclusive local parish, they fear it may be transient at best. Stories of how a new pastor, and sometimes a new bishop, eliminated all the existing programs in a parish or fired all the staff far outnumbered those describing good parishes.

It took us 10 years to build up a vibrant, diverse, fulfilling community and only about two years and two uninvolved pastors to destroy it.

In the few times that I have been in a well-functioning parish, the dream [fell] apart with the death or change of the pastor.

Commitment to a local church—an “investment” in its community and activities—may not endure in the face of such repeated experiences.

What impressed our facilitators and scribes as they listened to such experiences was the hope people still expressed after finding their dreams thwarted repeatedly. If they did not find the Christian community they sought or did not find opportunities for spiritual growth or engagement in social justice within the parish, they found it elsewhere, in small faith-sharing groups, for example. Some, including many young adults, simply choose other churches—or none.

I am sure they cannot take away my faith, even though they have taken away many of the things that nourished me. I know that if the church fails, then I could have a group of friends in my living room and be nourished.

*I left the Church because ...
... the music was terrible as were the homilies.*

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*... I never felt “holy” enough or “perfect” enough or “sinless” enough to attend.
... tradition and community [once] were important but today there is none.*

During the Covid pandemic, yet another challenge to the traditional parish model emerged: virtual connections where the companionship is virtual and the community an electronic image. Catholics who found more-hospitable parishes online may no longer be willing to listen to boring homilies and bad liturgical music.

Theme:

We yearn for a Church that is welcoming to everyone, especially those on the margins.

The Church has a long history of supporting those on the margins. How could we not, with the example of Jesus before us? But today, especially in the U.S., when we asked who seems marginalized by the Church, the litany of those seen as unwelcome was lengthy and almost all-encompassing. Women, LGBTQ+, People of Color, sex abuse victims, the divorced, the homeless, the poor, people with disabilities, the incarcerated, all indigenous peoples, migrants, immigrants and refugees, young adults, unmarried couples seeking to baptize a child, priests and lay people seeking reform—the list was almost endless.

The Catholic faith now feels more about rules and belittling those who may not fit in a specific mold. I feel shunned by it.

I cannot feel comfortable when all are not welcome (women, LGBTQ+ community).

Yes, it is good that Pope Francis wants to officially recognize the role of women as acolytes, lectors, and catechists. ... But a handful of women cannot change an organization which is sexist to the point of misogyny.

People gathered for the sessions did not blame only the hierarchy or priests; people within parishes also were sometimes deemed unwelcoming to strangers.

Participants in our sessions praised the global vision of Pope Francis and the efforts in his encyclicals to address world problems such as hunger, immigration and refugees, workers, the environment, and more. However, many people asked why their pastors and bishops paid no attention to these encyclicals or to social justice.

We would like our local Church to lead by example rather than remaining silent in the face of injustice.

Theme:

Celebration of the Eucharist and access to the sacraments connects us all globally. For many, these are the main reasons they cling to the Church.

Our participants universally recognized the central importance of Jesus at the center of the Church. They recognized him in the face of their neighbors. They cherished and longed for his presence in the community gathered for worship. They yearned for liturgy that acknowledges his presence in the community, in the Word and in the Eucharist.

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They sought preaching that brought his Word to life for them and sent them forth to live out their Baptism and build a community of love and justice in his name.

For me, the most meaningful aspect of belonging to a parish is to participate in sacramental life.

Other faith communities are more active in social justice causes, but I can't leave because only the universal Catholic Church offers the Eucharist.

They saw the Eucharist as a source of unity, its sharing in Mass a treasure, a gift, and a source of grace. They were profoundly disappointed and frustrated when bishops and pastors used the Eucharist as a political weapon, and by liturgies that deny the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Many decried the rigidity that would deny the Eucharist to such groups as the divorced-remarried or to LGBTQ+ persons. They hoped that following a synodal path might move the Church away from a divisive focus on a rigid and lifeless image of the past and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us toward more a merciful and inclusive future.

[Do not] deny communion to people because of rules that Jesus didn't have in mind!

If you get divorced, you cannot participate fully in the Church—No Communion. If you hurt or kill someone, you can!

Theme:

We yearn for implementation of Vatican II reforms, which will help us return to the synodal model of the early Church.

Attendees in our VOTF synod sessions were all committed to Vatican II. They described it as energizing, revitalizing, and inspiring. Many have studied its documents. They try to live according to its precepts. They believe that implementing reforms based on Vatican II will help bring necessary change for the Church, changes such as respect for and acceptance of lay voices, elimination (or curtailing) of clericalism, a return to synodal governance, and “taking Catholic social teaching seriously.”

In Vatican II we had a whole constitution that spoke about the needs of the time. But today we never talk about these needs. Hardly anyone in any parish is talking about the issues or even praying about them.

We yearn to become a true, Vatican Council II Church ... a Synodal Church at all levels, journeying with God, each other, with other faith traditions, with humankind, and with our planet home.

Some called for following the model of religious orders, especially women's, who have already done much of the renewal work outlined in Vatican II. Others spoke of the great hope and joys that arose from Vatican II. They emphasized the need to educate, or re-educate, the Faithful on the reforms of Vatican II:

Start with practical fixes we can achieve like educating all on Vatican II so we're all on the same page. Provide workshops on Vatican II in parishes and seminaries.

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Many participants reported opposition to Vatican II in their parishes and dioceses, especially in the U.S. Lay catechists and others who have worked faithfully within their communities of faith are dismissed when new free catechetical materials or training programs that emphasize pre-Vatican II attitudes are adopted by a diocese. Young people who experience Vatican II at college cannot find similar parishes when they leave campus. The preference for pre-Vatican II attitudes permeates many of the national programs sponsored by wealthy conservative groups.

The USCCB is influenced when partnering with wealthy educational non-profit institutes that do not support the agenda of Vatican II.

What frustrates me? Pastors and bishops unilaterally undermining Vatican II's liturgical reform and its vision of who we are as a disciple church, the People of God and the Mystical Body, and who lack the Spirit of Pope Francis.

The Synod on Synodality offers hope that Vatican II reforms will now become more broadly accepted and future reforms will emerge from the Church's synodal journey. Thus, efforts of some dioceses to elicit widespread involvement in synodal discernment was greatly appreciated. However, those who felt shut out by their dioceses—and who used VOTF to present their views—noted that opposition to Vatican II reforms often was accompanied by opposition to the Synod.

We have Vatican II and Pope Francis trying to lead the Catholic Church and we have a big group of clergy challenging our Pope and ignoring Vatican II.

I yearn for the Church in the USA to be more responsive to Pope Francis's pleas for a Synodal Church in which listening rather than lecturing is the order of the day.

People in our sessions believe Pope Francis is on the right path with a servant-leadership model that stresses charity and social justice. They see anti-Francis bishops and their pre-Vatican II attitudes as divisive and promoting disunity.

Pope Francis has made the synodal journey his top priority, and yet many priests and bishops undermine his program. ... The American Church is split along political lines, and the problem is getting worse, not better.

Participants also frequently expressed their hopes that the synodal process will continue beyond the Synod meeting in October 2023.

[We hope] we all learn to dialogue with each other, that listening is more important than statements, that we understand what mercy means.

Theme:

We yearn for a Church where lay voices are heard, respected, and acted upon, especially women's voices. The stark absence of women's voices was noted in every session VOTF held.

All our participants agreed that the gifts of all lay people should be recognized, respected, and solicited in the Church. Lay voices have been suppressed for centuries, helping to fuel the clericalism that infects the Church. Some participants reported that their parishes

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encouraged lay participation, but many described parishes where the priest made all the decisions.

Priests come and go, and programs valued by the community wax and wane depending on the priest's attitude toward them, and not on their value to the wider community.

Almost every question that led to conversations about lay voices cited the absence of women as the most obvious problem but noted that male lay voices also are sidelined and ignored.

In [today's] structures, it is especially difficult for women to feel included. Most women feel marginalized in the Catholic Church and are not accepting of this culture.

We believe that it is extremely important to allow ordained women deacons, and ideally ordained women priests; we yearn for more women to preach.

Questioning the lack of women's leadership in the Church, our daughter asked, "What is so bad about being a girl?"

While a few participants called for women to be ordained priests, many thought the priesthood itself is so broken that adding women without reforming it would make little difference.

Participants also noted that parishes are closing because the Church no longer has enough priests and wondered why the logical remedy of pastoral administrators or lay-led parishes was not applied more often. Instead, the bishops import foreign priests or combine parishes, increasing the already substantial workloads of individual priests. Increasing shared leadership by the laity in diocesan and parish activities could help relieve the additional demands as well as return the Church to its roots.

[We need] a collaborative governance structure that requires consulting the laity and engaging the laity in planning and decision-making.

My dream is to go back to the roots, back to Jesus, to his humility and compassion. ... We need more input from laity; the lay need to be valued and acknowledged; we should use the laity to the best of their abilities ...

Faith communities are stronger, groups in our sessions concluded, when the gifts and skills of the laity are recognized and welcomed. When lay voices are not taken seriously, over time those voices stop speaking—a factor that contributes to the grave problem of clericalism permeating the Church.

Theme:

We yearn for priests who really listen to us, practicing humility and modeling servant leadership.

Virtually every participant in the VOTF sessions identified the priesthood as “broken.” They see serious gaps in the training priests receive for functioning in a modern parish. Almost every session heard laments about bad homilies, arrogant priests, pre-Vatican II attitudes, dismissive treatment of women, poor preparation for parish life, and more.

Let lay people preach; they are better skilled than so many priests who preach.

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Homilies are not relevant to a lay person's daily life. ... Homilies emphasize fire and brimstone rather than Christian values, including humility.

Too many priests, especially younger ones, are arrogant, not pastoral. ... [and] priests who harm children should never be protected.

Participants also emphasized the need to support good priests, noting that with a reduced number the isolation within parishes can leave priests without support.

There are today many, committed, faithful, faith-filled, hardworking priests, some isolated, others with support from other clergy, parishioners, friends, family. They remind us that we need to recognize and support these priests.

Most participants identified priestly formation as the cause of the poorly prepared priests they experience, and they believe that the problem will become much worse when the young priests coming out of seminaries today land in parishes.

Seminaries do not teach the students anything about the social or financial aspects of being priests nor do they teach how to tap into the gifts and talents of all those who want to share those assets with their communities.

Young priests have no understanding of Vatican II, no desire to learn about it, and no desire to learn from older priests.

Our seminaries are falling short in providing a balanced preparation for their candidates. These seminarians have little experience in the real world of families and marriages.

The remedies suggested covered all aspects of priestly formation, from choosing the candidates to placing more lay people—especially women—on faculties to closing seminaries altogether. There also was broad agreement that seminarians should serve as interns in parishes for more than just a few months.

Faculty should pay more attention to discerning if candidates for the priesthood have a genuine vocation to priestly service. Women should play a role in the formation in seminaries since women are 50% or more of parishioners.

Reform the way seminarians are taught, emphasizing connections to the world and people they will be serving.

Seminarians should spend time performing service in real community churches before being ordained. ... As much as possible, seminarians should spend a significant amount of time in a parish environment, learning how demanding it is to be a servant of the People of God.

Another common thread was impatience with the Church that married priests are not allowed, and some mentioned that priests who left to marry should be allowed to return. They also noted that married non-Catholic ministers can be ordained Catholic priests.

Why can we have married priests from other faiths, but Roman Catholic priests cannot marry?

Theme:

We yearn for more preaching and programs that recognize and act on Catholic social teaching in all its breadth.

Many participants said they appreciate and are proud of the good works the church does in support of social justice, especially that performed by religious women. Yet many wonder why they hear so little in homilies about social justice and almost nothing about Pope Francis's encyclicals on these needs. Instead, many hear preaching that limits social justice to one or two divisive topics.

Social justice should be a “seamless garment,” not just focused on one specific teaching or another.

They are frustrated and saddened when active social justice programs that have been supported by the Church in the past are terminated and characterized as inconsistent with Catholic teaching. Using the same flawed logic, some dioceses have ended cooperation with ecumenical social justice programs, characterizing them as not *sufficiently* Catholic. Participants often noted a prominent focus on abortion in homilies and public diocesan statements and only limited mention of the needs of poor women and children or other social justice concerns.

Our parish took part in several ecumenical programs to support housing equity and other social justice issues. Our new pastor shut them down because he said they were not “Catholic enough.”

We need to hear more about various social issues (death penalty, racism, immigration, etc.) in homilies. It seems the only social issue addressed is abortion.

Some participants pointed out that before the Church can effectively advocate for social justice, it must acknowledge its own history of exclusivity, including racism and sexism. It must also seek to heal internal divisions.

The Church needs to confront its own racism, classism, and sexism as well as society's.

We need to build a deeper commitment to social justice and diversity. Part of the diversity involves making room in the Church for both those who are more progressive as well as those who are more conservative.

Some participants also cited the strong need to acknowledge blame, finally and fully, for all clergy sex abuse.

Conclusions

The recommendations emerging from the VOTF sessions hold all the Faithful—the laity, the priests, the bishops, and the Pope—responsible for implementation. “We should all ask ourselves, what would Jesus do?” many said. Frustrations felt at local levels generally come from the actions and inactions of the bishops and the hierarchy. Participants universally agreed that resolution requires the laity to become more involved and to obtain greater roles in the guidance and governance of the Church. The clergy and laity must work together in mutual respect for any of these changes to be achieved.

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The Laity need to be included in meaningful ways when selecting new bishops and parish pastors. Parish Councils and Finance Councils need to be selected by the parishioners and empowered to make decisions. Several called for the priest to provide spiritual guidance and for the laity to provide administrative management of the parish and diocese.

Participants viewed the parish as the place to provide both spiritual nourishment and a sense of community. Many believed that their spiritual sustenance was better achieved through small faith communities formed within their parishes or elsewhere. Pastors should encourage the formation of such small faith communities so that the need can be fulfilled within the Catholic Church itself.

Recommendations to ensure a welcoming church, especially welcoming those on the margins, stressed the need for the priests to lead this effort from the pulpit. Participants frequently emphasized the lack of welcome for LGBTQ+ persons and their families and for sex abuse survivors and their families. Homilies that stress Catholic Social Teaching and promote inclusion of all God's children are essential. The Church must move away from judging people by rigid rules and must become more merciful and inclusive.

The feeling that the priesthood is broken was universal amongst the participants, and the initial recommendations to address this included changing seminary education and training as well as providing ongoing spiritual formation and training in homiletics for priests. Seminary training should include education at co-ed Catholic institutions, training in the Spirit of Vatican II as well as the documents, and a required internship in a parish prior to ordination. Once ordained, priests should be required to continue their spiritual formation throughout their lives—perhaps using the practices of some Religious Orders as a model.

All stressed the need for women's voices to be heard at all levels of the Church. As a first step, the Pope must ensure women are in positions of responsibility and authority in all departments of the Curia. Bishops must ensure that women hold positions of authority on diocesan pastoral and finance councils. Parishes must invite women as well as non-ordained men to preach. Women provide a different point of view that can broaden the perspective of those engaged in decision-making. The treatment of women is also a factor in the declining number of priests; many women will not encourage their sons to become a priest in a church that treats women with disrespect.

When considering the pervasive nature and numerous scandals and problems fueled by clericalism in the Church, participants believe priests and bishops must welcome laity into a mutual relationship. Such acceptance will require education and ongoing formation for priests that emphasizes humility and servant leadership. Participants stated that the laity must take steps to break down the notion that "Father knows best" and open meaningful communications with their pastors.

Continuation of the synodal process should be required to ensure we continue to listen respectfully to one another. We must all—ordained and non-ordained—live out our Baptismal responsibilities within the Church, because together we are the Church.

Mission

Voice of the Faithful® is a worldwide organization of Roman Catholics working to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the faithful can participate actively in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.

Our Goals

- To support survivors of clergy sexual abuse
- To support priests of integrity
- To shape structural change within the Catholic Church

Appendix B: Session Questions

Structure of Voice of the Faithful Synod Sessions

The VOTF Synod program included two initial sessions, each 90 minutes long with an optional third as well as additional sessions available should the participants wish. Participation in each group was limited to a maximum of 10, including a facilitator and a scribe, to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to speak in depth and to discern common ideas as well as differences during a reflective period. If groups chose to hold additional sessions beyond the initial two, the members themselves set the dates and times. Attendees also received optional between-session questions they could use to initiate conversations with their adult children, relatives, friends, or other persons who do not count themselves as members of the Catholic Church today.

Each session opened with a prayer, a Scripture reading, and introductions. The facilitator posed questions, eliciting responses from each attendee, and then asked each for their reflections on what they had heard. The session closed with a prayer.

Sessions were generally held on the same day and at the same time in consecutive weeks. Given the worldwide shutdown for the Covid pandemic during the bulk of the Synod period, all meetings were conducted via Zoom, using facilitators and aides trained in utilizing the technology as well as trained in the process of facilitating sharing sessions of this type.

Session Questions

Session 1: The Big Picture

1. Guided by the Holy Spirit, what for me is most meaningful about belonging to a *local faith community*?
 - What are my dreams for the Church? What do I yearn for more of?
 - What frustrates me? What do I wish would change?
2. For me, what is most meaningful about being part of the *universal Church*?
 - What are my dreams for the Church? What do I yearn for more of?
 - What frustrates me? What do I wish would change?

Session 2: Digging Deeper, Moving Towards Action

1. What issues in the Church do we need to pay more attention to?
2. Who is left out or suffering today? Who are at the margins?

Appendix B: Session Questions

3. If I could change one thing in the universal Church that I think would help us all better follow Christ, it would be _____
4. What actions can each of us take and what can we do collectively to make our Church better?

Optional Questions for Use Between Sessions 1 and 2

We know that many former Catholics and our own adult children may not attend Synod sessions despite our invitations. Such invitations are encouraged in the Synod documents, but practically speaking those who feel they are on the margins of the Church or who no longer practice the faith may not accept them. As an optional exercise after Session 1, and a way of hearing other voices, some participants may be willing to have a dialogue between session 1 and session 2 with their adult children or other people close to them. Here are two questions that could initiate that dialogue.

Both participants answer each question. Duration 30 minutes total, 15 minutes each

1. What gives meaning to my life?
2. What effect has the church had on my life? Good, bad, a little bit of both?

Potential Follow-on Meeting After Session 2

1. What should we improve or change in our communities? (This is a repeat of Question 3 in the second session, but it may be a good starter for moving towards action.).
2. Are there additional concerns that have not yet been raised that are important to me?
For example:
 - What are people who attach themselves to other religious expressions looking for that the Catholic Church is not offering? Is it crucial?
 - What can people who have left the Church and those who have no formal religious affiliation teach us about WHY one might affiliate with a church? How can we respond to their spiritual instincts?
3. Which of the concerns/needs are most important right now?
4. What can we individually and together do about it?

Appendix C: Supplemental Reports

Voice of the Faithful included outreach to other groups who, for one reason or another, felt excluded from their own diocese's Synod sessions. We provided a format and guidelines and directed them to additional resources to hold their own sessions. When requested, we also included their comments in our report, and we agreed to present their individual results here, as an appendix to our own report. In this way, the circumstances of their [articular situations can be acknowledged.

The communities presenting their voices in this manner are:

- ❖ Catholics living in the Dallas, Texas, diocese who are concerned that the diocesan submission does not sufficiently address response to clergy sex abuse
 - ❖ Catholics from several parishes in a Charlotte NC whose bishop has encouraged pre-Vatican II practices and resisted efforts to hold Synod sessions. ([page 3](#))
 - ❖ Older Catholics living in a large retirement community in the southern U.S. ([page 9](#))
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Dallas Diocese

Recommendations for meaningful healing of the deep distrust and damage caused by the Church's response to the abuse crisis

1. **Conduct active *and encouraging* outreach to survivors and meaningful steps toward healing.** One example would be to initiative a restorative justice program in the whole Church, designed to bring all stakeholders together to discuss how they've been affected and decide what should be done to heal and repair the harm.

Resource:<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/12/06/can-restorative-justice-help-church-heal-sex-abuse-scandals>
2. **Modify *all* diocesan safe environment practices/policies to be clear, understandable, free of Canon Law jargon, manageable and less “top-down” in nature.** Safe environment policies should be robust, but volunteers report that they either do not read or do not understand all the jargon and legalese and feel it is “CYA” rather than real prevention. Stop lobbying against legal reforms such as limitations-extension periods or “windows” and mandated-reporter laws that prohibit perpetrators from abusing the secrecy of the confessional (see, e.g., Tex. Family Code Section 26.101(c)).

Resource: https://childusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Archdiocesan_Policies_WhitePaper_10-1-20s.pdf

Examples of more understandable policies:

Appendix C: Supplemental Reports

<https://fwdioc.org/safe-environment>

<https://www.archgh.org/offices-ministries/office-of-child-and-youth-protection/safe-environment-documents/>

3. **Improve transparency across the system** – for example, not just some, but all Diocesan lay review panels should publicly identify their members and their professional/personal backgrounds and follow published guidelines for continuing education and “term limits,” so that these important groups are continually refreshed with updated knowledge and new members.
4. **Ensure that all Church personnel who work with this issue, especially those whose jobs involve interacting with survivors, such as Victim Assistance Coordinators, be specifically trained** to be trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive. This would lessen the additional trauma caused when survivors attempt to communicate or participate with the Church, only to be re-traumatized.
5. **Develop a Church-wide process for assignment of priests** to parishes that allows parish lay leaders to hear about the “vetting” of the candidate and make their own inquiries about suitability for pastorship in that parish.
6. **Commission a national Lay Stewards Panel** to receive, track and monitor complaints against bishops, including those that are raised via the U.S. CBAR service.
7. **Strengthen and publicize Church efforts to protect youth and vulnerable adults**, including those who might be subject to abuse of authority, such as seminarians. This may require a more expansive definition of “vulnerable adults,” to include more than simply those who are “physically, mentally or emotionally impaired” (see, e.g., the very limited Diocese of Dallas definition of “vulnerable adult” in its Sexual Misconduct Policy, p. 6).

Resources: https://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_rapporto-card-mccarrick_20201110_en.pdf

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2019/02/16/0133/0027>

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-06/pope-francis-pascite-gregem-dei-church-criminal-penalties.html>

<https://www.cathdal.org/SexualMisconductPolicy.pdf>

8. **Proactively reach out to the lay faithful** for insight, reaction, participation, and guidance. Respond to inquiries and offers of assistance, rather than treat lay input as suspect and unwanted.

Charlotte, North Carolina Diocese

Session 1: January 14, 2022 – Charlotte, NC

1. What is most meaningful about belonging to a local faith community?

- Sharing my faith, my understanding of God, with other people who care about Jesus's message of a love that cannot be exhausted.
- Letting our love for one another be a testament to why we are and stay "Catholic" and not just Christian.
- Working with small groups committed to improving the lives of vulnerable people: people with disabilities, migrants, people of color, members of the LGBTQA communities, the poor, the homeless, people with addictions, people with dementia or Alzheimer's, etc. These vulnerable people are some of God's favorite people.
- Being known by name or at least by face at Church liturgies and activities.

What are my dreams for the Church? What do I yearn for more of?

- Dream for a more welcoming Church.
- Dream for a more ecumenical Church.
- Dream for a more socially active Church.
- Yearn for more faith formation as opposed to faith indoctrination.
- Yearn for more opportunities to care for each other when we are sick, tired, depressed, rejected, or shunned.
- Yearn for uplifting liturgy: vibrant, soul-filling music and singing in the style of the Evangelicals, or in the style of members of religious communities, or in the style of the masters of traditional sacred music (e.g., the Messiah).

What frustrates me? What do I wish would change?

- It frustrates me when priests and bishops guilty of sexual abuse are allowed to continue in the ministry for decades without being penalized; but it equally frustrates me when priests and bishops of integrity are falsely accused of sexual misconduct, deprived of their parishioners' support, and left in a true limbo that threatens to turn into hell. We yearn for bishops whose pastoral talents and willingness to listen and learn from their flock are remarkable.

2. For me, what is most meaningful about being part of the universal Church?

- For me, the Church's unity in diversity is amazing and comforting. No matter where I travel or live, the same eucharistic meal that fed the apostles is served to me. The

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music, garments, and homilies may be stylistically different from those of my local church, yet I can still feel at home.

- For me, the Church's "track record" as an institution for the good of humanity is a source of justified pride. The Church's schools and hospitals have opened their doors to Catholic and non-Catholics alike. Throughout the ages, Catholic men and women have worked long and hard to improve the lives of vulnerable people: the elderly, the sick, the ugly, the marginalized, the grieving, the lonely, etc. The universal Church has been and still is an instrument of peace and harmony.

What are my dreams for the Church? What do I yearn for more of?

- I dream of a less judgmental Church open to LGBTQA people, to people in our families who are non-practicing Catholics, to alienated Catholics, to Protestant converts, to agnostics, and, for that matter, to atheists.
- I dream of a Church that understands that Rome is no longer the center of the People of God. North American and European Catholics will be a relatively minor constituency in the Church. Catholics in Latin America, Africa, and Asia will gradually become the dominant voices in the Catholic world unless they are converted by Protestant Evangelicals able to personalize peoples' relationships with Jesus passionately.
- I dream of a Church in which priests do not have to be celibate males. Although a celibate life may leave more time free for "Church work" than a married life, this is not necessarily so. Many members of the laity use just as much of their time and talent on "Church work" as many priests do. Moreover, confining the priesthood to men alone does not really mesh with Catholics' baptism as priests, prophets, and Kings. The universal Church would be better served if women had as much decision-making authority as men.
- I yearn for a Church that is more ecumenical; that appreciates the insights of non-Catholic religions.
- I yearn for a Church that takes the lead in fighting against all the "isms" that make the world less Christian: racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, nationalism, colonialism, etc.
- I yearn for a less hierarchical Church that levels the "playing field" between the clergy and laity, recognizing that priests and bishops are not necessarily more holy and spiritual than the people they are called to serve.
- I yearn for more careful and caring discussions about the topic of respect for life. Although fetal life is precious, so too is the life of young adults stretched to their limits, or the life of people so demented that they no longer recognize their loved ones. These are all complex issues for which there are no "cookie cutter" solutions.

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What frustrates me? What do I wish would change?

- I am frustrated that many bishops, especially US bishops are not promoting and supporting Pope Francis's synodal initiatives. Vatican II replaced the uniform Latin liturgy with diverse vernacular liturgies nearly overnight, enabling the People of God to be true participants and not mere spectators "at Mass." The Synod on Synodality: Journeying Together offers to make changes even greater than those made by Vatican II. But nothing important will change in the Church unless bishops and cardinals in particular let the holy Spirit work among them when they gather in 2023 at the Vatican.
- I am frustrated that women's voices are not listened to as carefully and seriously as men's voices in the Church.
- I am frustrated that the sex-abuse scandal continues in the Church and that relatively few Catholic theologians have asked the question WHY???
- I am frustrated that sexuality is still linked with sinfulness in the rhetoric of the Church.
- I wish the Roman Curia played less of a role in the Church. Although Pope Francis has sought to weaken this centuries-old, decision-making institution, he is still hemmed-in by it. Because the Church is a human institution, "power-plays" will probably always haunt it, but this is no excuse for people not calling a spade, a spade. Power can, after all, corrupt.
- I wish more members of the laity would be brave enough to demand that the Voice of the Faithful be heard. Pope Francis needs the laity to speak, to ask themselves how they can be Jesus in this messy and needy world, and to walk with him, Francis, humbly on a journey that can be difficult, but which promises life and love eternal in the mystery of the Trinity.

Session 2: Digging Deeper, Moving Towards Action

1. What issues in the Church do we need to pay more attention to?

- We need to pay more attention to what Jesus intended for his Church.
- We need to pay more attention to Church governance. The old hierarchical structure of the Church needs to be rethought so that the laity become equal to the clerics.
- We need to pay more attention to the role of women in the church, advocating for women deacons in the near future and for women priests in the long run.
- We need to pay more attention to ecumenical efforts in the Church, joining Christian, Jewish, and Islamic efforts to create a just society. In this connection we also need to learn about Buddhism, Hinduism, and other world religions.

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- We need to pay more attention to involving the laity in Christian education and spiritual direction.
- We need to pay more attention to seminary education. If young priests are taught that they are “ontologically” changed at the time of ordination, they are more likely to view themselves as somehow more special and spiritual than the laity.
- We need to pay more attention to secular thinkers, trying to understand the merits of their views rather than dismissing them as wrong-headed “heretics.”
- We need to pay more attention to providing opportunities for lay people to give homilies. Such homilies can be particularly meaningful insofar as they show how ordinary Christians live their faith on a day-by-day manner. In this connection, we also need to pay more attention to providing opportunities for deacons to give homilies.
- We need to pay more attention to publicizing the laity’s ideas about how to improve Church structures and ministries.
- We need to pay more attention to how bishops are selected, lobbying” to make this selection more transparent.
- We need to pay more attention to making the case for a married clergy, less isolated because they can draw strength from their spouses.
- We need to pay more attention to what was actually said during Vatican II so that we can access whether its teachings have been correctly promulgated.
- We need to pay more attention to fostering synodality in the Church. Listening may be more difficult than some of us have thought.
- We need to pay more attention to why some lay people and priests want to go back to the Tridentine Latin Mass. Being able to hear Mass in the vernacular was one of the most empowering accomplishments of the Second Vatican Council.

2. Who is left out or suffering today? Who are at the margins?

- Teens, young adults, young families (especially single-parent families).
- Women whose time, talent, and vision are sidelined in a Church still dominated by men.
- LGBTQIA people who feel rejected by a heterosexist church, still beholden to the idea of the first “married” couple: Adam and Eve.
- Victims of sexual abuse whose traumatic experiences are not always adequately recognized.
- The poor, an enormous and growing group of people worldwide. The dividing line between the rich and the poor is scandalous in a world where the top 1 percent

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of individuals own 42 percent of the world's wealth. Perhaps this state of affairs is nothing new in human history. But eliminating or at least lessening poverty is one of the core missions of the Church.

- People who suffer from mental and/or physical disabilities, especially those who are labeled crazy, ugly, fat, disgusting, better dead than alive.
- People who have few or no friends and family members but are in desperate need of love.
- People who are dying. No matter how good hospice care is, it is never easy to die or, for that matter, to watch the dying process.
- People who are prisoners, especially those in solitary confinement or in maximum security prisons where, as the philosopher Hobbes might say, life is nasty, brutal, and [sometimes] short.
- People who are in need of “tenderness”: compassion, forgiveness, and mercy.
- People who have given the majority of their life to the work of the Church, only to be pushed aside as “has-beens,” not worthy of admiration and respect.
- People who have been falsely accused of sexual abuse and who suddenly find themselves alone, excluded from the “brotherhood.”
- People who have left the priesthood or a religious community who are not allowed to continue using their time, talents, and charisms in the Church that they still love.
- People who have been hurt by the Church as a result of getting divorced, having an abortion, being trans, etc.
- People who are immigrants or migrants, treated as less than fully human as in the case of children “caged” at the southern border of the United States.

3. If I could change one thing in the universal Church that I think would help us all be better follow Christ, it would be _____

- Its all-too-often lack of compassion or acceptance.
- Its teaching that priests be celibate males.
- Its failure to expand the role of women. Expanding the diaconate to include women would allow women's voices to be heard as recognized interpreters and preachers of the scriptures. More radically, expanding the priesthood to include women might increase the chances of having a servant Church, for it is women who have traditionally played the servant role as binders of wounds, feeders of the hungry, and, most importantly, as mothers capable of unconditional and sacrificial love.
- Its failure to recognize the laity's homiletic wisdom.

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- Its failure to be a more prophetic Church, aware of its sins and asking for forgiveness.
- Its inadequate formation of clergy for pastoral work.
- Its culture of clericalism that makes priests think they are better than the laity and that makes the laity continue to espouse the view that “father knows best.”

4. What actions can each of us take and what can we do collectively to make our Church better?

- We can stop enabling clericalism.
- We can insist that the clergy engage in genuine dialogue with the people in the pews, fostering a genuine give-and-take discussion of Church teachings and ministries.
- We can speak up, insisting that we be heard.
- We can financially support only those Church activities, ministries, building projects, etc., that we think Christ would endorse.
- We can join groups like Voice of the Faithful who want to effect change in the Church.
- We can recognize that the Church is a human institution, susceptible to sin.
- We can participate in our parishes’ educational offerings, charitable outreach programs, and spiritual development efforts, offering positive as well as negative “feed-back.”
- We can insist that our Church’s liturgies be vibrant, diverse, and inspiring. The “Elevation” Churches of the world have much to teach the Catholic Church about ways to develop a spirit-filled relationship with Jesus.
- We can give as much of our money as is possible to the poor people in our lives: household help, servers at restaurants, and, most importantly, to those who do the work we cannot do or the work we do not want to do.
- We can stop expecting Pope Frances to be the prime mover in Church affairs, realizing that he cannot make the Church more synodal overnight. The resistance to his programs is considerable, and he needs all the support that he can get. The fact that many dioceses and parishes in the United States have done little or nothing to support the “Synod on Synodality” is troubling indeed.
- We can remember that money talks as much today as in the past. It is troubling that millionaires and billionaires can use their money to take the Church back to pre-Vatican II days.
- We can pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us down the synodal path.

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Optional Questions between Sessions 1 and 2, asked of those unlikely to attend a formal session because they are unaffiliated with the Catholic Church today

1. What gives meaning to my life?

- For many college-age students and young adults, what gives meaning to life is not belonging to a Christian/Catholic Church but participating in loving, non-judgmental family relationships.
- For some college-age students the values of so-called WOKISM (originally, the word WOKE meant well-informed, up-to-date thinking. Now it is mainly used to signal alertness to racial, social, and/or sexual discrimination or unfairness) are more appealing than the values of traditional Catholic teaching.

2. What effect has the Church had in my life? Good, bad, a little bit of both?

- For many college-age students and young adults, the Church has had a little bit of both good and bad effects. They tend to be disturbed by the Church's views on human nature and human sexuality and its slow response to the sex-abuse scandal. However, even those young people who view themselves as agnostics or even atheists respect Christians/Catholics who exhibit genuine commitment to their faith and who welcome authentic dialogue with secular thinking.
- Millennials (born between 1981 and 1994/6) are much more likely to see the "bad" side of the Church, whereas members of Generation Z (born between 1996 and the early-mid 2000s) are far more likely to see the "good" side of the Church. Therefore, the Church has an opportunity to evangelize members of Generation Z.

Retirement Community

Session 1: March 9, 2022

Local Church

First, going forward, we wish and yearn for a local faith community that:

- Is inclusive, whose priests and lay leaders are open-minded, welcoming of everyone, and aware of every person's intrinsic worth and dignity rooted in God's love in their inner being. "Let no one ever be denied communion."
- Recognizes and encourages the diversity of roles and gifts within the People of God.
- Recognizes that every person baptized in the Catholic faith is eligible for all positions of leadership for which they are qualified, whatever their gender, sexual orientation, color, ethnic, national, or group background. There is only one human race.

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- Is collaborative in its internal governance. Laity will have a clear role in the process of selecting a bishop or a pastor. Elected pastoral councils (parish, diocesan) with which the pastor/bishop collaborates will be required.
- Is ecumenically involved and visibly present within the community, collaborating with other religious and civic leaders to promote the common good.

We wish and yearn for a local faith community:

- Whose people joyfully celebrate who we are and how we are to live in this world as the Body of Christ. Music is a critical dimension of our worship that draws us closer to God and to each other and we would like it to be a mix of traditional and contemporary music led by a trained cantor. All lay ministries (ushers, acolytes, lectors, prayer of the faithful leaders) are necessary. We would like all parts engaging the laity, such as the kiss of peace, the offertory procession, to be retained.
- Whose priests preach homilies rooted in the scripture of the day and apply the Word of God to the realities of our lives and the challenges to create the Kingdom of God.
- That provides educational opportunities to study and discuss the Second Vatican Council, what it means to be a faithful, faith-filled People of God, to be an adult member of the historic, Roman Catholic Christian tradition, and to interact and collaborate with persons of other faith traditions and none.
- That is in communion with other parishes in our diocese, helps them in their need, and collaborates with them for the greater good of the diocesan church and the common good of our civic community.

Second, our experience has included the following frustrations and disappointments:

- “We have lost our young people.”
- The treatment of divorced Catholics as 2nd class members.
- Too many hard fast rules preventing spontaneous changes for the better.
- The slowness of decision-making by bishops and Rome.
- Clericalism manifested by unilateral decision making, by a lack of transparency, and by a sense of an ontological superiority because of their indispensable sacramental role. Clericalism versus Servant Priesthood.
- A pre-Vatican Council II theology of church and liturgy indicate an inadequate seminary education.
- Some bishops seem to be theologically illiterate, openly undermine Pope Francis, and are not available or responsive to the laity.
- Lack of clerical and episcopal accountability to the laity.

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- Absolute power of local bishop enables arrogance and a superiority complex contrary to Vatican Council II's recovery of ecclesial modesty.
- Abuse of the pulpit: preaching single-issue politics instead of understanding the complexity of multiple issues and the primacy and freedom of the individual's conscience.
- We find the word "obligation" intimates and creates a sense of guilt.
- Continuing lack of recognition of the distinctive role and contributions of women: lay, religious, married, single, historically, contemporaneously.
- Lack of being ecumenically involved, especially with regard to collaborating on social justice issues.
- No way to communicate effectively with those who make the decisions.
- Failure to utilize up to date means of communication for purposes of evangelization.

Universal Church

Dreams

We dream of a universal church in which the laity will have more active leadership roles at all levels, especially women.

Recognize and support female religious in the work that they do, as in social justice, healthcare, evangelization.

Ordain women, married or single and married men to the priesthood. We already have a married clergy in the U.S.: 18,000 deacons. Allow priests to marry. Restricting sacerdotal ordination to those who think they have a vocation to celibacy is a matter of church law and not of doctrine.

Frustrations: Clericalism!

Session 2: March 16, 2022

1st Question: Church issues to which we need to pay more attention include:

- The loss of members, especially our young.
- Clericalism: Priests/bishops are out of touch with those they serve. Clergy fail to proactively seek parishioner input. We want transparency and accountability to laity.
- Clergy Formation and Development: We want theological education grounded in the principles of the Second Vatican Council. We want Pastoral formation to inculcate the habit of working together with the laity and working ecumenically with other secular and religious programs.

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- Homilies are a serious universal problem. Simply because a man is ordained to preside over the community's sacramental celebrations and to give God's forgiving love and healing does not automatically enable him to preach a meaningful homily. The People of God need and deserve better. We want scripture related to our daily lives and to the challenges of discipleship locally and internationally.
- Inclusivity: We want recognition of women's God-given vocations to celebrate our sacraments and to open God's Word to us and to serve in higher governance positions in our church. We want LGBTQ Catholics to receive the sacraments with us and we want enforcement of their civil rights in the public sector. In this way, we witness to God's radical inclusivity and are proactively welcoming.

2nd Question: The suffering, those left out, and the marginalized include:

- Our planet and its eco-systems.
- Locally and internationally: the economically marginalized, people of color, the homeless, the incarcerated, the seriously and chronically disabled, the elderly who live alone. Young people, people with alternative lifestyles, people without access to health care. Refugees.
- And in many locations, young women and women in general.
- In the Church, women denied the priesthood, married men denied the priesthood, and priests denied marriage; divorced men and women denied access to the Eucharist and made to feel judged and unwelcome. Faithful priests who are not fully reinstated after sexual abuse allegations against them have not been proven civilly and ecclesiastically.

3rd Question: One thing I would change in the universal church to help us all better follow Christ:

- Acceptance at all leadership levels everywhere of God's radical welcoming acceptance of every one.
- Pastors seeking laity input regarding all activities and programs.
- Allow priests to marry. Have women in higher governance positions.
- Be more hospitable. Invite others to join you at Mass or programs.
- Evangelize by deed and word.

4th Question: Individual and collective actions we can take to make our Church better include:

Individual Actions:

- Each person can directly communicate with one's pastor/bishop.
- Each person can engage in direct personal contact with those in need.

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Collective Actions:

- We will use the synod session model for future meetings.
- We can hold social events that build up community.
- Once the diocese submits its final document to Rome, publish that document online along with each of the diocese's parishes' submission to the bishop. This is an example of transparency.

Appendix D: All Responses from Sessions

Voice of the Faithful® designed its Synod sessions so that participants would be asked the same questions in each session. From the scribe reports for sessions conducted January through May 2022, we compiled the responses to each question and the discernments from each group. The report prepared for the General Secretariat from the scribe reports went first to the scribes and facilitators for review and then to each participant in the sessions.

In this appendix, we present the individual reports and comments from each session, following to the extent possible the format in which the scribe reports were presented. Some reported only the combined discernments from the sessions; others included individual statements from one or more participants along with general comments.

We collated the scribe submissions for the individual questions. Thus, all the comments related to Question 1 in Session 1 are collected together in this appendix, all the comments for Question 2 in Session 1, all the responses on Question 1 from Session 2, then Question 2 from that session, and so on. A row of asterisks (*****) separates each scribe's set within the overall questions.

Session 1 Responses

1. Guided by the Holy Spirit, what for me is most meaningful about belonging to a *local faith community*?

- ❖ **What are my dreams for the Church? What do I yearn for more of?**
 - ❖ **What frustrates me? What do I wish would change?**
-

- ❖ Being able to share one's gifts and talents with others in a meaningful way
- ❖ Having a community that is responsive and caring- one participant described the women's group at her church coming together to help her and her husband after a fall.
- ❖ Being known and knowing others, engaging with your community, and being able to bond with members of your faith community.
- ❖ The bonds of the group reinforce each other's faith and support one another in growth.

For some, the shared beliefs, actions, and hopes of their parish give them space to grow as individuals and as a community in their faith, but others find that meaning in alternative spaces, like VOTF.

Appendix D: Session 1 Responses—Most Meaningful About Local Faith Community

For me, the most meaningful aspect of belonging to a parish is to participate in sacramental life. For this reason, it is most important that the sacraments are celebrated well and beautifully. This should be the main focus of the pastor, if he has limited energy and abilities. Everything else about Catholic/Christian life flows from this sacramental experience

What I have learned from moving about the country and belonging to a number of parishes (both big city and small suburban) is this. If a parish wants to have a large number of complicated programs in addition to the sacraments, then it must hire competent people to run them, and the pastor must trust these people.

Some loved their parishes, some found them cold, unwelcoming and not open to lay input. A lot depends on the individual priest, but many young priests are being formed into a pre-Vatican II church. Clericalism is a pervasive problem.

I am happy with my parish. I wish my Diocese was more like my parish.

- ❖ Companionship, shared goals.
- ❖ Having the opportunity to evangelize people by doing social justice work. For example, towns that had no Catholic church were impressed and inspired by the Catholic worker model, seeing in it an exemplification of Jesus' love for them.
- ❖ Meaningful opportunities to be part of a thriving faith community in which people know each other by face and/or name. Such a community does not have to be officially "Catholic," it can simply be Christian.
- ❖ Working on task forces that lobby for better laws that truly protect people—especially women and children—who have been sexually abused by trusted clerics. Such laws should punish abusive clerics rather than cover-up their offenses.

- ❖ I was lucky to find a dynamic church. I depended on it to find a community and found one that is honest and forthright—it was a community and not an institution. I was encouraged to be part of a ministry and now feel part of the local community outside of the Church.

Appendix D: Session 1 Responses—Most Meaningful About Local Faith Community

- ❖ Blessed with my community. There is small group sharing, but from the laity; I would like to see it from the church itself. More ecumenical. They don't really address the spirituality of the religion, need more of that—it's lacking.
- ❖ Very good parish community. Individuals do work together. It seems like the same people always do the same things all the time. See dwindling numbers and don't see the young people coming. We need to generate a more youthful church.
- ❖ Local church made me welcome and remembered, and it feels like I found a place I fit and belong. I formed a women oratory group; we learn more about other religions and cultures. It takes extra effort. ... Need a more transparent church, a church of equals. Horrified by the use of politics in the church. We are all the same in God's

“Sacraments are celebrated well and beautifully in the parish, and everything flows from the sacramental experience. Sacraments should be the priority of the priest/parish, and then it must hire competent people to run programs; the parish needs to trust the lay people they hire.”

Local faith communities that are vital and spiritually nourishing.

Intimacy found in intentional communities and bible sharing groups provides “spiritual life support”; a place where all are recognized in their human dignity.

- ❖ It provides an environment, a space to worship, whether inspirational or not.
- ❖ Worshipping and serving together makes us family.
- ❖ It provides educational programs to pass our faith and religious instruction on to our children.

Local faith community for many was a parish but it could also include prayer groups, social ministries, and intentional non-aligned communities.

Some things that worked well in these parishes and communities included:

- A sense of community and caring for each other
- Freedom to experiment
- Trust of the Pastor
- Gathering beyond just the mass

Appendix D: Session 1 Responses—Most Meaningful About Local Faith Community

- Desire to help refugees and others
- Good homilies
- Some parishes flourished from being affiliated with Religious Orders
- Parish as a resource for the community
- Online worship communities provide a growing sense of autonomy.

These parishes and communities were diverse in many ways. Some were urban and some were rural. Geographically, Canada and the U.S. from Alaska to the Midwest to East coast were represented. The parishes were in neighborhoods and academic settings.

Warm and welcoming and tries to be a living community with lots of activity

Bible study group

Music

Like tradition, sense of belonging, and family

Similar values and concerns

Appeals to different stages and ages

Looks at the world through a lens of Christianity

A sense of belonging, welcoming and inclusion.

The most common comments were regarding the sense of **community** that was found in their local church. “By staying together we build up the people of God.” Sometimes the sense of community involved a smaller subset of the larger community, e.g., a group that attended daily mass and rosary and became community for each other. Community provides friendship, fellowship, mutual support, and encouragement, and helping each other grow and stretch as mature faith-filled Christians.

- ❖ It is a spiritual haven where I feel connected to God and others, irrespective of their differing points of view.
- ❖ It is a place of solace. If I sit in the darkest corner of my church, alone and silent, I know that God will eventually find me there, providing me with guidance and compassion.

Appendix D: Session 1 Responses—Most Meaningful About Local Faith Community

Growing up in a church family who gave me my faith.

Joy and gratitude for the gift of faith from my mother.

Confirmation gift bracelet with “I am with you always” Mt. 28:20.

Church is Home, especially in churches that are welcoming.

My great aunt was a mother superior in Florida: The Catholic faith runs very strong on my father’s side.

There are some welcoming and good churches, but it depends on the pastor.

Music gives great joy. There is music in heaven! Note: An African group came to Mass and when singing everyone was standing and clapping.

Going to Mass in other countries is like being home.

Going to the Vatican gave me such a peaceful feeling, beautiful music along with side altars surrounding the sanctuary.

LIKE & Appreciate:

*Good liturgies, Music, Personal prayer, daily mass

*Belonging to a faith community in a retirement center, Faith sharing

* Immigrants enriching the community, being of service to the immigrant community, helping pastors

*Value Eucharist

*The inspiration of Vatican II, revitalizing orders

*Spiritually influenced faith development

*Bishops that support justice for First Nation people

Friendly, welcoming, with vibrant liturgy, caring pastor

Strong sense of community in urban, multi-cultural church

Active social justice ministries

Joyful liturgical celebrations of black Catholic congregations “The main thing is the Eucharist.”

Appendix D: Session 1 Responses—Most Meaningful About Local Faith Community

There is already in our U.S. Church a great diversity (ethnic, racial, cultural) that we should welcome with joy and which we ignore at the risk of diminishing who we are as Church for each other and in this world.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the sacrament of the synodal nature of the church.

- ❖ The homilies are wonderful at the parish where I attend.
- ❖ I don't belong to a local church now, but when I did, it was because I was among like-minded people of a similar age to me. I derived satisfaction from serving my fellow congregants.
- ❖ Music is absolutely central to my spirituality.
- ❖ The church I attend has a diverse population, and all ethnic groups interact. The choir also reflects the diversity of the parish. The population of the parish reflects the diversity of the community.
- ❖ Friends attend the same parish that I do.
- ❖ My parish has a strong youth presence. "When you hear babies crying in church, you know your parish is alive!" All age groups should be represented in a parish.
- ❖ Established parishioners go out of their way to welcome newcomers

Most participants felt good about their own local churches, although three (out of five) were in intentional, non-diocesan churches (two were in a lay-led house church and one was in a foundation of a religious order). Most reported that their churches gave them a sense of unity and belonging and were welcoming to gays and other marginalized Catholics. Several remarked on the shortage of priests, and there was a unanimous feeling that the priesthood should be opened to married men, including those in gay marriages, and to women. "The lion's share of church work is being done by women. It isn't right not to let them be priests."

One of the participants had lived in a Central American base community in the 1980s and talked about the joy of feeling part of a community that was working together to build a more just society. That could be a model for a parish community. Another participant spoke proudly of her parish's campaign to raise \$1,600 to replace the church's bells—by making and selling \$5 tacos!

Participants generally felt that local Catholic churches would benefit from collaboration with—and exposure to—other faith communities. One spoke of her church's collaboration with an inner-city Black church, another of his church's joining two Protestant churches in an Easter sunrise service, and another of a wedding performed jointly by a priest and a rabbi. All thought that such liturgical sharing "creates openness."

Appendix D: Session 1 Responses—Dreams/Yearnings

As for the universal church, the feeling was not so positive.

- ❖ With respect to their local faith community, most participants found a sense of sharing, partnering, and community most meaningful.
- ❖ With respect to their local faith community, most participants valued a vibrant liturgy, shared traditions and rituals (for example, washing of the feet, processing into the Church on Palm Sunday, thoughtful reconciliation services, etc.)
- ❖ With respect to their local faith community, many participants valued seeing their “pew partners” outside the context of Sunday worship services (for example, at the grocery, at a soccer game, at a civic celebration).
- ❖ With respect to their local faith community, several participants expressed the value of a creative approach to the celebration of the Eucharist and the giving of homilies. Two participants said they don’t go to their parish church for worship services that much. Instead, they celebrate a liturgy with old and new friends. Among the “officiants” of these liturgies are priests, retired priests, Roman Catholic spirited-filled women, men who were celibate priests but are now married, sometimes with children. Along the same lines, several participants expressed satisfaction with small home masses.

Comfort found in shared experiences belonging to a local parish community – one participant described a sense of being “held” by the community notably during crisis of faith after revelations of clergy sexual abuse.

[Had a] welcoming experience at Catholic parish while living in different part of the U.S.

Dreams/Yearnings_____

- ❖ We yearn for more striving as a community to do what Christ wants us to do. We all should share the same values, as Christians and as Catholics, but in the past 10 years this seems to have become a divisive issue.
- ❖ We dream of a Church with more focus on individuals’ personal relationship with Christ—going through the required elements of being Catholic on their own does not bring one closer to Christ.

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- ❖ We hope for preaching that focuses on that personal relationship with Christ. One good example is Father John Unni [Boston MA parish]—for him, it is a calling to develop the relationship between Christ and each parishioner.
- ❖ We yearn for more outreach to those on the periphery, in line with our calling to live like Christ.
- ❖ We yearn for the power of women and women's groups to be used and harnessed by the church hierarchy. There is a general feeling that there are so many talents and strengths that are not valued by church leaders, particularly in women's groups that can be so helpful and beneficial for communities and individuals.
- ❖ We yearn fiercely for women cardinals.
- ❖ We wish for a Parish council to share in the value of coming together in groups to enact change, share experiences and ideas, and work towards a better church for all.
- ❖ We hope for more face-to-face interactions, post-pandemic, as opportunities to share in the connections of in-person experiences in groups like Baptismal preparation etc.
- ❖ We hope for church leadership to collaborate more with other faith groups to work on interfaith service goals in outreach- in one parish, it felt like the only religious group in town without social justice outreach was the Catholic church. Desire for local parishes to stand up for what is right and be Christ-like in action, not just word.
- ❖ We dream and yearn for our local churches to return to the model of the Church of the Acts of the Apostles. We yearn for each of them:
 - To become an intentional, welcoming, inclusive, social justice oriented, Eucharistic community.
 - Whose members know and care for each other and commit to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.
 - Whose members collaborate in the public arena with other faith and secular communities for the common good and social justice.
 - Whose clerical leaders do not unilaterally make decisions on significant matters without any prior lay consultations.
 - Whose Eucharistic celebrations embody Vatican Council II's teachings on who we are as Church and how we are to celebrate.

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- ❖ The church needs to be open and welcoming to everyone, everyone on the margins.
- ❖ Shouldn't be judgmental of others, must build community, help others.
- ❖ Need more outreach programs in my parish.
- ❖ Married priests, women deacons would be helpful. (Mentioned several times)
- ❖ Some priests think they are superior, but the laity are just as capable, sometimes more.
- ❖ Need an end to clericalism and more humanity from the clerics.
- ❖ Need to have opportunities for change in the church.

- ❖ A welcoming parish offering fellowship, spirituality, safety, moral values: Evidenced by people caring about one another (wearing masks). Less about personal piety, more concern about "we" and not "us".
- ❖ Eucharist table is for everyone. Awareness of people left out with no voice or place to speak. Young people need a place to feel safe, not just learning moral values; need spirituality, fellowship.
- ❖ Welcome ALL and especially the LGBTQT community.
- ❖ Awareness of social justice in all areas of our lives: labor, climate, immigration. There is a desire to support social justice but opportunities lacking in parishes to promote awareness.
- ❖ Some agencies working with parishes don't get the community aspects of parishes; parishes need to help people within their own boundaries.
- ❖ We need to support priests of integrity; priestly formation needs to change.
- ❖ Resistance to the clerical state. Clergy and laity need to collaborate and work together.
- ❖ Women's voices breaking open the Word after the Gospel. Good homilies are expected from priests.
- ❖ We have a dream for open dialog and equality between the laity and clerics.
- ❖ We dream of a faith community (local and universal) that is welcoming and inclusive to all e.g., LGBTQA+ members, single parents, divorced, etc.
- ❖ We are still suffering from clericalism. We need **more democracy and less autocracy**. The Church needs laity in positions of authority. WE are the

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Church! The priests are often not qualified leaders. Priests come and go, and programs valued by the community wax and wane depending on the priest's attitude toward them, and not on their value to the community.

Priests need to be more educated on what is going on in the world today. They are not up-to-date on the needs and hopes of real people in their communities. Many would benefit from more education on current theology and Church teaching and, perhaps, a reminder of what Vatican 2 has initiated. Many older priests seem to be narrow minded and stuck in the past.

Seminarians must no longer hear that by ordination they have been changed ontologically into some higher species!

Seminaries need the same scrutiny that VOTF has been doing with diocesan finances. Who certifies them and on what grounds? What is their academic status? What is their financial status? Can at least part of a seminarian's training be at a local highly accredited Catholic college or university so they are exposed to both tradition and cutting-edge theology. And be forced to engage with people and priests from all over the globe. And with women!

Much discussion of church as a "business." Proposal: The parish priest needs to be relieved of complete responsibility for financial management and hand that over to the Finance Council with fiduciary responsibility for all their actions. The pastor would be a member of the Council with a vote but not the lead. In turn, the Council must have a contract with a reputable audit firm, with no relationship between any of its members or to the Diocese. The firm would then publicly issue annual audits.

There is a yearning for speaking the **truth and for transparency**. How are the Church funds being spent? How are decisions being made? The Church is a business, and we should not need to dig for information.

- ❖ I dream of a more welcoming Church that serves the faith needs of LGBTQA+ people.
- ❖ I dream of a Church that is in dialogue with both secular Christian/Catholic groups. All young people need a fully informed understanding of human sexuality and gender identity.

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- ❖ I dream of a more ecumenical Church in dialogue with non-Christian faith communities as well as other Christian faith communities.
- ❖ I yearn for more true faith formation as opposed to faith indoctrination. Voices over and beyond those of Bishop Barron or those expressed on EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network) need to be heard.
- ❖ I yearn for pastoral care programs that address the crying needs of aging people, especially those with mental disabilities like dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

- ❖ I yearn for more environmentally sensitive Church policies on things as easy as planting trees or recycling plastic containers. In this connection, I also yearn for a Church that supports climate control policy.
- ❖ I wish that the whole people of God would celebrate the Eucharist, not just priests and bishops who believe that they were “ontologically changed” at ordination. Clerics are not automatically more holy than the laity.
- ❖ I wish that the culture of clericalism, supported by many lay persons as well as clerics, would evaporate. “Father” does not always know best.
- ❖ I wish that the structure of the Church would change. Yes, the Church is not a democracy, but neither is it a monarchy.

- ❖ I wish that parish financial councils and pastoral councils were elected and given real power to change Church policies and priorities.
- ❖ I wish that up-and-coming priests be educated not in seminaries sequestered from the lives and concerns of the laity, but in open-minded classrooms populated by female as well as male students and teachers from a diverse set of backgrounds.
- ❖ I wish that the Church would overcome its culture of silence. What we need is more accountability, honesty, and transparency.
- ❖ Community: The local church is more than the institution; it is about being an active part within the community it serves. Needs that giving and connection element.

Most of us in this session found supportive local faith communities but some of us had to find it outside the parish itself or create ones within the parish; whole-parish welcoming environments were not common to all.

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“Parish has small faith groups and a women’s community, and they are very sustaining. It’s a very inclusive community and we feel the love and caring of one another. I yearn for more courage in living the social justice message of the church. It’s already been defined over the centuries, but it comes off as threatening when we try to preach directly on this.”

- ❖ Ecumenical and diverse Church: with more age representation and diversity.
- ❖ A more spiritual and faith-based dynamic. Also, a more sacramental life—everything flows from that.
- ❖ Parish work plus homilies should reflect Gospel messages.
- ❖ Lay people called to run programs of their church, and the parish (pastors) trusting the laity.
- ❖ Parishes have become too big, too impersonal.
- ❖ More courage to speak up for what is right especially, when it comes to matters of social justice. Don’t just give charity but work with real conviction. Church should be more active in supporting women’s ministries and opposing racism, for example.
- ❖ Local church should be a home for the downtrodden and those suffering in its community.

The availability of streamed Masses on the Internet during Covid pleased many people, helped some find exactly what was missing in their own local parishes, and provided a supportive community environment too. So instead of parish-shopping “in person” when a local church is lacking, people can now find better ones online.

Most people talked highly about their experience of Vatican II and the changes the Council stimulated. These included:

- ❖ More vibrant and relevant liturgies, especially the music and singing.
- ❖ Sharing of leadership with the laity.
- ❖ More creative in our approach to mission and community. One person spoke of her parish dividing into small communities with the Sunday liturgy being the

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gathering point for all the communities. Another person spoke of a powerful parish mission statement that emphasized that all are welcome and prioritized inclusivity.

Several people came from diverse parishes and saw the diversity as both a rich experience but also a challenge.

- ❖ Social justice work and Christian service are critical.
- ❖ Community: Most find great value in the support and community provided by their local parish—some for its many activities and diversity, some for the number of lay people involved, some because the pastor is welcoming and some for the sacraments and ritual events. Those looking for a better parish also had wonderful community experiences only to see a new pastor wipe out the programs, so now they are looking for a new community. One has a local community, highly supportive, but not operating within the boundaries of a parish or a diocese; they have Eucharistic celebrations within this intentional community and work on social justice issues.
- ❖ One finds the local church most meaningful when he can focus on the sacraments, religious events, holy days: “Just me and the sacraments.”

Hopes for a welcoming church to come home to

Women deacons and women priests

My mother a deacon at the altar

Women’s gifts affirmed

Women who can be chaplains without “assistant” after the title

More women’s voices telling their stories and preaching

Lots of singing for children and adults. Singing draws everyone in

More Bible stories—Mary Magdalene, pharisees and tax collectors, Zacchaeus in the tree, more heart, more tolerance, Bible verses for Moms

Allergy-free hosts for celiacs

More than singing in the choir and altar serving for girls who feel left out and pushed away

We all hunger for community and for a connection to God. We want to find it in our catholic Church, but if we don’t, we will follow our children on their spiritual journey as they seek a place to call home.

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They dream that their parish be more inclusive, understanding, everyone be respected and giving to others; that we rejoice in differences, be more compassionate and loving. They want the priests to give up the “old ways” and realize that the world has changed and adapt the changes of Vatican II. They dream that the Catholic Church be more synodal and realize that a faith community is more important than ritual, gold tabernacles, excess numbers of candles, and ornate vestments. That we all learn to dialogue with each other; that listening is more important than statements, that we understand what mercy means. Many of the group are praying for Pope Francis, that he has a long life and succeeds as the real presence of Christ in our lives.

- ❖ Dream for a shift towards Social Justice as central principle in decision-making and actions; a driving principle that is more than simply words.
- ❖ Yearning for a realized dream of belonging to Church as it ACTUALLY IS, and not belonging to a Church for what it SHOULD be.
- ❖ Desire to support courageous priests who preach ideas and ideals that are central to our faith and the heart of the Gospel message: love of God and others.
- ❖ Explore elements from our early Church and bring them to Church today—mentioned were social justice projects and election of bishops.
- ❖ Eucharist as central and meaningful about belonging to the Church echoed by all participants.
- ❖ Bible study and contemplative small groups provide faith communities, including virtual groups.
- ❖ Recognition of good work done by Catholic charities and dream of expanding those works into a worldwide focus on protection of the environment.
- ❖ While not belonging to a parish, one participant’s focus is rooted in the parental experience of Catholic school education of her children.

What are my dreams for the local church? I am not really thinking in terms of dreams for the church because we seem to be so far from what is needed. Things that are missing in my life being connected with the church: more equality of everyone. Having been a lay minister, a chaplain, a DRE, all the things we had to struggle with, always feeling like 2nd class citizens. So, I found meaning in my small Christian groups, and some of the parishes have fostered that, so I long for that in both the local and larger church. I am sure they

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cannot take away my faith, even though they have taken away many of the things that nourished me. I know that if the church fails, then I could have a group of friends in my living room and be nourished.

A recovery of the vibrant, Vatican Council II liturgies experienced before the pandemic.

Scripture-based homilies that address realistically issues within our church and society.

At all levels, a collaborative governance structure that requires consulting the laity and engaging the laity in planning and decision making. We recommend the model of the recent German Catholic Bishops Synod and its recommendations to Pope Francis.

An ecumenical church at all levels that recognizes other faith and secular traditions as partners in our journey, especially with regard to social justice issues and needed community programs.

Welcoming parishes that are committed to embracing and engaging everyone regardless of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background.

An inclusive church committed to the faith conviction that every person, including women and LGBTQA+ persons baptized in our church, is eligible for any leadership position at all levels as long as they meet the requirements. “Men must move over to make room for women.”

Being **welcoming and inclusive** was valued (with a note that there was still progress to be made)

Love the **liturgy** and **Eucharist**.

Strong commitment to **social justice**: lived, not just preached.

Young adult minister on staff.

One local church that was particularly valued had these attributes: great leadership, consistent wonderful pastors, and homilies on target. Building expansion includes parish hall, kitchen, more space for events, feeding the homeless, events for college students, retirement group.

- ❖ I dream of a local church that opens its doors to everyone, especially to those who live on society’s margins: the poor, the homeless, migrants and immigrants, members of the LGBTQA+ communities, the war-torn, the refugees, and the incarcerated.
- ❖ I dream of a local church that uses the time and talents of girls and women as much as possible now: as lectors, acolytes, catechists, spiritual directors,

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liturgists, cantors, members of pastoral and financial councils, theologians, educators, healthcare givers, hospice providers, and so forth.

One specific example that would be part of my personal dream is that lay people would be able to participate in a meaningful way in visiting the sick, especially those in hospital.

Yearnings:

- ❖ More equality for everyone. A more open and inclusive Church. A church with compassion—we turn away too many people. No one ostracized.
- ❖ Cannot really think in terms of dreams for the church because it is so far from what's needed.
- ❖ Nurturing of lay leaders. Listen to and encourage everyone.
- ❖ More social justice.
- ❖ Inclusive language.
- ❖ We yearn for the laity to have more power in the parish, to have a greater say in setting directions and making decisions.
- ❖ One person found a spiritual home in a small community that meets weekly to share about the Sunday readings. Another person joined a women's group that focuses on women's issues. These are resources they should have found in their parishes.

Most participants expressed the following “dreamings” and “yearnings:”

- ❖ More women on the altar in a leadership role, starting with the diaconate.
- ❖ More of an official welcome to one and all—members of the LGBTQA+ communities, divorced Catholics, poor and homeless people, immigrants and migrants, people with psychological, physical, and/or social disabilities, the infirm and old.
- ❖ Transform the phrase “Love one another as I have loved you” from an abstraction into a concrete, lived experience.
- ❖ Whether we call it the feminine principles, the female experience, and/or the feminist agenda, our Church needs more of the “F” factor.

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I yearn for an open church, in accordance with the gospel. Church institutions firing LGBTQA+ people is against our values. We are called to be prophets and have a voice. Voice needs to be heard, to be accepted. People still don't understand Vatican II. How do we discover the loving god in our lives?

Sacraments are celebrated well and beautifully in the parish, and everything flows from the sacramental experience. Sacraments should be the priority of the priest/parish, and then it must hire competent people to run programs; the parish needs to trust the lay people they hire.

Going forward, we wish and yearn for parishes and dioceses that embody:

- ❖ A recovery of the vibrant, Vatican Council II liturgies experienced before the pandemic.
- ❖ Scripture-based homilies that address realistically issues within our church and society.
- ❖ At all levels, a collaborative governance structure that requires consulting the laity and engaging the laity in planning and decision making. We recommend the model of the recent German Catholic Bishops Synod and its recommendations to Pope Francis.
- ❖ An ecumenical church at all levels that recognizes other faith and secular traditions as partners in our journey, especially with regard to social justice issues and needed community programs.
- ❖ Welcoming parishes that are committed to embracing and engaging everyone regardless of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background.
- ❖ An inclusive church committed to the faith conviction that every person, including women and LGBTQA+ persons baptized in our church, is eligible for any leadership position at all levels as long as they meet the requirements. "Men must move over to make room for women."

- ❖ Most important is the Eucharist, challenging, well-constructed homilies, and the social interaction of the local faith community.
- ❖ Dreams for the Church include activities which make a difference in the local community, more lay involvement.

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- ❖ The Church needs to make children, even grown children of synod participants, part of the Church community.
- ❖ The clergy do not preach or otherwise deal with the major situations and social issues affecting American culture: among the issues are racism (although many parishes are composed of non-white individuals); capital punishment; the environment, immigration, and abortion.
- ❖ Clergy must demonstrate honesty, humility, and authenticity, especially in homilies.
- ❖ Parish leadership and management should be uniform, not dependent upon who the pastor is at a given time.

All should be treated equally by the pastor. Parishioners, including women, should be included in all decision-making. It should become a “we church,” working with other Christian churches and other faiths to address common concerns (e.g., social justice issues). Make parishioners feel that their faith and their works are validated. One participant felt that her church should focus more on providing spiritual guidance. Another had visited many Catholic churches and failed to find well-planned liturgies involving real congregational participation. “Preaching should speak to us where we are.” Preaching should be of a quality that “lasts all week long,” and should be “about how to apply scripture to our daily lives.” A parish should nurture a sense of community, but also be outward-looking, recognizing and addressing needs beyond its borders. A parish should have its own charism that doesn’t suffer when the pastor changes. Training of seminarians should be revamped to emphasize the priest’s role as a member of a community, assisting it but not dictating its direction. One participant suggested that church authorities identify the best parishes (best pastors, most vibrant churches) and use them to form a model that could be used in seminaries.

- ❖ I yearn for more, not less, in the way of intergenerational community in my local church. We should meet the spiritual needs of our children from the first day of pre-school to the last day of high school. But we should also meet the spiritual needs of our college-age students, young singles, and young families for they too are the future of the church. Moreover, we should meet the spiritual needs of “empty-nesters,” elderly single people with or without children, grandchildren, siblings or friends. In a society that worships youth, a special effort must be made to address the spiritual and material needs of the old, especially if they are lonely.
- ❖ I yearn for more opportunities to celebrate “home” masses in my local faith

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community. It is in small groups that I am able to share my vulnerabilities, crises of faith, moral failings, personal strengths, and spiritual insights.

- ❖ I yearn for the Church in the USA to be more responsive to Pope Francis's pleas for a Synodal Church in which listening rather than lecturing is the order of the day. The USCCB (U.S. College of Bishops) has been particularly slow to fully implement the teachings of Vatican II. In fact, it manifests a certain desire to return the Church to the way it was before the papacy of St. John the XXIII.
- ❖ I yearn for more opportunities to work with lay associations like the Voice of the Faithful (VOTF). Together with this organization, we were able to change child sex abuse legislation in my state for the better.

- ❖ My dream is to go back to the roots, back to Jesus, to his humility and compassion, go back before all this extra stuff that was added. We need more input from laity; the lay need to be valued and acknowledged; we should use the laity to the best of their abilities; optional celibacy—many dreams.
- ❖ We are involved in some community action and service, but we just kind of do it on our own. It is important to continue the mission. I yearn for the leaders of the church to be more of what they are called to do instead of to be administrators. They are called to SERVICE, but the priests are just overwhelmed by the business of the church instead of what they are called to do.

- ❖ Clergy should open up and be honest with the laity (“throw the croziers away”).
- ❖ Take the beatitudes, not canon laws.
- ❖ Encouragement of contemplative and meditative practices.

I yearn for:

- ❖ Priests who help people deal with reality from a Christian perspective, rather than promoting Roman Catholicism as a rule-bound religion.
- ❖ Increase of discernment in the Spirit: This is not a dream; this is a process leading us forward. It is imperative that the synod be renewed, perhaps within 5 years; the relational aspect of the synod process needs time and effort to grow.
- ❖ Social interaction and belonging to a committed faith community with common values.

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- ❖ Clergy must demonstrate honesty, humility, and authenticity, especially in homilies and leadership, lack of hypocrisy.

- ❖ I want my parish to be more welcoming, including the priests being more welcoming.
- ❖ More recognition of the contribution of women. Women are second-class citizens in the Catholic Church.
- ❖ More ethnic diversity and interaction between ethnic groups, which enriches us all.
- ❖ More involvement with social justice.
- ❖ More preparation of homilies! Sometimes it comes across that the priest is just ranting!
- ❖ Fellowship is important, especially after Masses.
- ❖ The laity should be more involved in the governance of every parish.
- ❖ More participation at Mass!

Homilies and Adult Education.

At times, priests preach specific political positions as if required by a Catholic conscience in circumstances with complex, multiple issues. At other times they give a catechetical instruction instead of a homily. We think that the homily should focus on the teachings and spirituality of Jesus. The homily would provide guidance rooted in and derived from the scriptural readings on who we are and how we are to live in this world.

We recognize that Jesus challenged the social and religious teachings and customs of his day and culture and sets us an example to go and do likewise. However, doing so often requires opportunities to dialogue with each other and to study and explore our faith tradition and our role as church when confronted with complex, contemporary issues, such as abortion, war, sexual questions, national economic, social, cultural policies.

Converts study the faith tradition and become educated about the church; ‘cradle Catholics’ do not get beyond an elementary school understanding of our faith and church. All Catholics should have the opportunity to have solid courses in their faith and the history of their church, including such topics as how the Church has changed and developed from the beginning, that faith is not a cut-and-dried matter of “Rome spoke, the matter is closed” and that celebration of the sacraments is simply what the priest does.

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Social Justice

Bishops fail to speak out individually and collectively in a meaningful way on issues relevant to our faith. Catholic parishes often do not collaborate ecumenically with other faith traditions and with civic agencies in combined social action. One thinks of Martin Luther King's anti-poverty agenda, the Poor People's Campaign today, the Berrigans anti-war protest.

Liturgy

Celebrants of the Eucharist fail to take practical steps necessary to enable those celebrating the Eucharist to do so "actively and fully." Examples include the use of missalettes without any guidance, the choice of inappropriate music, which also at times is played at wrong moments.

More good priests, with leaders who respect the people and what they have to say; more openness to different cultural expressions of Catholicism; more lay leadership and lay participation in governance and in liturgy; more fostering of community, to share in worship, in participation in the sacraments and in addressing social issues, such as honoring the sanctity of life by supporting families in need.

Women's voices should be heard at all levels. There was general support for opening the diaconate to women. One participant felt that the priesthood itself is so broken that adding women without reforming it would make little difference.

Clericalism was unanimously condemned. One participant said that, during the pandemic, her bishop conducted an informal Friday night Bible study program on Facebook, which humanized the bishop in her view. Similarly, Pope Francis has led Way of the Cross devotions as well as congregational praying of the rosary.

Pope Francis was seen by all as an exemplar of a good bishop, articulate and accessible, carrying a welcoming message. One participant said that he is the reason she is still a Catholic.

Ours is a universal church that has accommodated many different forms of cultural expression in its liturgical celebrations. We should promote more cultural sharing and celebration in our churches, e.g., with Filipino churches, Native American churches, Hispanic churches, Black churches. That would open us up and also help heal our own divisions. "Healing comes from sharing and feeling connected."

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My dream for the Church is that we are all a part of this living, loving body that welcomes all and ministers in love. We should embody Love. What I yearn for more of is greater inclusiveness, a better recognition of the marginalized. I see the local community as one where we live and learn together.

For me, the most meaningful and valuable thing for a local faith community is that it helps me maintain a habit of practicing my faith in a meaningful way. I have that in one parish—but they are not diocesan priests. We travel a lot, and I always try to go to Sunday Mass. It has been a beautiful experience. It's fun to hear Mass in the vernacular, to hear and see how other communities celebrate.

My dreams for the Church, I get very annoyed, especially with Bishop Barron—his sermons focus on the Church, the structure, not on US, the people. I want them to focus on helping us grow our spirituality and become better Christians, to go beyond the walls of the Church and to grow in that way, to learn from all around us.

What struck me in what you both said was the very different experiences one can have by going to a parish in a different place and how it can be so different. I also have a yearning for real strong moral leadership. I would love to see bishops speak to in an authoritative moral manner, in ways that are not covered loudly and clearly now. Some priests do, they speak up for social justice, and they stand out because it is so unusual in this day and time.

We can be MORE of what is possible. I back off from the authoritative preaching. I would like those issues to be expressed but very few priests can address them in a way that can be thought-provoking and not didactic. It's one of the reasons my kids are falling away. Because they want to grow and learn but the Church is interested only in dictating what they should do.

Going forward, we wish and yearn for a local faith community:

1. That is inclusive, whose priests and lay leaders are open-minded, welcoming of everyone, and aware of every person's intrinsic worth and dignity rooted in God's love in their inner being. "Let no one ever be denied communion."
2. That recognizes and encourages the diversity of roles and gifts within the People of God.
3. That recognizes that every person baptized in the Catholic faith is eligible for all positions of leadership for which they are qualified, whatever their gender, sexual orientation, color, ethnic, national, or group background. There is only one human race.
4. That is collaborative in its internal governance. Laity will have a clear role in the process of selecting a bishop or a pastor. Elected pastoral councils (parish, diocesan) with which the pastor/bishop collaborates will be required.

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5. That is ecumenically involved and visibly present within the community, collaborating with other religious and civic leaders to promote the common good.
6. Whose people joyfully celebrate who we are and how we are to live in this world as the Body of Christ. Music is a critical dimension of our worship that draws us closer to God and to each other and we would like it to be a mix of traditional and contemporary led by a trained cantor. All lay ministries (ushers, acolytes, lectors, prayer of the faithful leaders) are necessary. We would like all parts engaging the laity, such as the kiss of peace, the offertory procession, to be retained.
7. Whose priests preach homilies rooted in the scripture of the day and apply the Word of God to the realities of our lives and the challenges to create the Kingdom of God.
8. That provides educational opportunities to study and discuss the Second Vatican Council, what it means to be a faithful, faith-filled People of God, to be an adult member of the historic, Roman Catholic Christian tradition, and to interact and collaborate with persons of other faith traditions and none.
9. That is in communion with other parishes in our diocese, helps them in their need, and collaborates with them for the greater good of the diocesan church and the common good of our civic community.

Frustrations/Hope to Change

- ❖ We are frustrated with the way bishops are elected: some group in the local area selects several candidates and a group in Rome appoints a bishop, but those who know them well (members of the parish, for example) are not involved in the process.
- ❖ We are frustrated with the inability of lay faithful to be involved in controlling boards—diocesan finance council, Catholic charities, etc.
- ❖ We are frustrated with the training of priests—the way seminarians are not involved in community activities but rather are formed in a cloistered environment focusing only on spiritual development when their ultimate role is deeply embedded in the community. Priests should be more involved in the community.
- ❖ We yearn for more transparency and accountability in governance. VOTF is bringing the church forward in financial transparency and governance reports, as well as the Protection of Children report—wish for more reform and renewal.
- ❖ We wish for more in the church bulletins and agendas on social justice and outreach.
- ❖ We wish for more of the focus to be on outreach, social justice, and growth—many churches are solely focused on theology and adoration and the March for Life, and don't mention things like the synod or any social justice activities.

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Parishioners may not even be aware of them unless they subscribe to *America*, *National Catholic Reporter*, or *Commonweal*.

- ❖ We wish there was a deeper sense of belonging- priests are getting older, and not appealing to younger generations that are needed to carry on the Church.
- ❖ We wish for a parish council to help with decisions that affect the whole parish- an example of a program called “Dynamic Catholic:” the pastor of the parish signed on to this program and decided to use their videos and literature for Baptismal preparation classes, but the videos the parish had before were tailored for their audience, and the Dynamic Catholic videos were targeted at a much younger age group and didn’t suit their needs. With a parish council, and involved members of the church, this wouldn’t have happened that way.
- ❖ We are frustrated with the way local parishes seem divorced from current events when there is such potential to live like Christ and take action when terrible things are happening around them- we would like a local church that leads by example rather than remaining silent in the face of injustice.
- ❖ We are frustrated with an evident push to return to a pre-Vatican Council II Church.

- ❖ The church’s need to raise money to build and maintain buildings, to fund operations, including large works of charity, healing, and education results in the church operating as a top-down, power structure with a divinely ordained clergy over the laity.
- ❖ Homilies are a major problem. Too often, instead of “breaking open and applying the Scripture,” they are catechetical instruction, or they do not address the challenges of our daily lives and the world in which we live. And priests have abused the pulpit by not helping us to form our consciences, but rather telling us what we are to do (e.g., whom we should vote for, the issue of civil rights for LGBTQA+ persons). Then, one wonders at the willful ignorance and hubris of the clergy (e.g., speaking of Dorothy Day solely in terms of her early promiscuity, ignoring totally her decades craving and leading the Catholic Worker House movement and her activist protesting war, racism, and poverty.).
- ❖ Homilies should address not only social justice issues but also from time to time the church’s rich mystical traditions and its basic Incarnation theology. Pope Francis’ encyclicals, *Fratelli Tutti* and, *Laudate Si*, and his teaching on the Good Samaritan also should be subject matter for homilies.

- ❖ Need homilies to be more relevant to life.

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- ❖ If church is not welcoming, I may leave.
- ❖ Need more outreach programs in my parish.
- ❖ Married priests, women deacons would be helpful. (Mentioned several times)
- ❖ Some priests think they are superior, but the laity are just as capable, sometimes more.
- ❖ Need an end to clericalism and more humanity from the clerics.
- ❖ Homilies are dull, not relevant to young people nor adults.
- ❖ Black churches more welcoming and cheerful, have great music.
- ❖ It is important to have a variety of good music.
- ❖ We should be shaken to our toes by Jesus, but the church is not often transformational.
- ❖ The church is not practicing Vatican Council II but going backwards.
- ❖ We are losing Catholics because we are not committed. If we are not, we will continue to lose members.
- ❖ Everyone needs to care because we are all needed.
- ❖ Children are the future.
- ❖ Need more silence during Mass, like after homily with time for meditation.
- ❖ Welcoming should be the hallmark of celebrations.
- ❖ I want a new bishop.

- ❖ Bishops who listen to the people (happy when some bishops retire!)
- ❖ Better welcoming in parishes (Some other faiths do a better job)
- ❖ Pastors are too beholden to their bishops/archbishops and afraid to voice concerns.
- ❖ The power of bishops to disregard the Pope [frustrates us] (some ignore Synod recommendations or substitute their own).

- ❖ Special interest groups exercise too much control with money and influence.
- ❖ More generous sharing of facilities with the community, to be welcoming and inviting.

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- ❖ Loss of young people especially those who respond to a call to serve, often gaining higher education but not finding opportunities in the Catholic church—[they are] going to other denominations, where their beliefs align more closely.
- ❖ More active participation of laity in parish administrative affairs, leaving clergy free for sacramental roles.
- ❖ Connecting poorer with richer parishes (FL effort matched parishes of different economic backgrounds and ultimately extended the effort to other faiths.)
- ❖ Break down polarization: US vs THEM. Need for listening to one another. Stop unilateral decisions by bishops, pastors who impose their agendas on their diocese or parish.
- ❖ Our communities are not reaching out to younger members. Where is our future?

- ❖ It frustrates me when women's time, talents, and spirituality are not recognized by the Church to which I belong. The all-male cast of clerics at Church liturgies increasingly alienates Catholic women and girls.
- ❖ It frustrates me when clerics teach that the Catholic Church has a monopoly on truth and fails to engage in interfaith dialogue.
- ❖ It frustrates me when clerics are fixated on money or power. Contemporary Sadducees and Pharisees are no better than the ones that existed in Jesus' time.
- ❖ I wish that the whole people of God would celebrate the Eucharist, not just priests and bishops who believe that they were "ontologically changed" at ordination. Clerics are not automatically more holy than the laity.
- ❖ I wish that the culture of clericalism, supported by many lay persons as well as clerics, would evaporate. "Father" does not always know best.
- ❖ I wish that the structure of the Church would change. Yes, the Church is not a democracy, but neither is it a monarchy.
- ❖ I wish that parish financial councils and pastoral councils were elected and given real power to change Church policies and priorities.
- ❖ I wish that up-and-coming priests be educated not in seminaries sequestered from the lives and concerns of the laity, but in open-minded classrooms populated by female as well as male students and teachers from a diverse set of backgrounds.
- ❖ I wish that the Church would overcome its culture of silence. What we need is more accountability, honesty, and transparency.

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What frustrates us?

- Church administration needs to be revamped, and we need to come into the modern century.
- Divisiveness in the US; lots of tension between Bishops and Cardinals.
- Clericalism.
- What frustrates me the most about parish life is lack of trust or faith in the people who are not ordained or on a payroll. I wish that the model of tight top down control of everything would change. The nature of a parish depends too much on the personality, talent, interests and politics of the pastor. In the few times that I have been in a well functioning parish, the dream often falls apart with the death or change of pastor. For this reason, quality cannot be guaranteed for all parishes.
- The other thing that I wish could change is that local parishes would decouple from national politics (both parties). This has been poisonous to parish life in recent years

- ❖ A lack of focus on Vatican II. Too many don't even know what it is.
- ❖ Focus is only on the worship in the parish.
- ❖ Removal of many programs in a vibrant parish and focusing only on doctrine instead.
- ❖ Distrust and tension between laity and church officials.
- ❖ So much politics within the church.

Everyone agreed that there has been a retreat from the spirit of Vatican II. We are reverting to a pre-Vatican II model of Church. Some examples:

- ❖ The clergy, especially the younger ones, are embracing a “Father Knows Best” approach to their work – making all the decisions. There is much less of a role for the laity in decision-making. No longer a collaborative spirit on the part of the clergy and some priests come across as arrogant when what we need is a humble clergy who embrace a servant leader approach to ministry.
- ❖ Basic theology needs updating, e.g., get rid of atonement theology, embrace an increased role for women in the church.
- ❖ Homilies are often not relevant to a lay person's life.

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❖ Seems the parish is always asking for money.

Young people are leaving because the parish does not speak to their lived reality.

The church has not yet recovered from the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Church is not credible.

“Our parish became much too big. It jumped from about 300 families to more than 3,000 and got a new pastor not interested in working with the people or continuing all the wonderful programs that included everyone. He said he just was not going to work that hard. It took us 10 years to build up a vibrant, diverse, fulfilling community and only about 2 years and 2 uninvolved pastors to destroy it.”

“The pandemic brought in a lot of sadness, and a change in leadership. They ended up removing programs. Now it’s just doctrine preached—but not gospel. The clergy do not respond to the suffering of the people of God. There’s a sadness. I don’t want my voice silenced.”

“Clericalism. Must root it out. Nothing will change if priests feel like they are preaching to the brainless.”

Need a more transparent church, a church of equals. Horrified by the use of politics in the church. We are all the same in God’s eye.

There’s a shortage of priests. Would like to see woman priests and married priests.

To be people of a shared faith, it means we must care for people beyond our national borders. I enjoy the traditions and history and it is enlightening to learn that [other] churches have made laws when needed and dismissed them when no longer helpful. The Church is bogged down with too much material possession. Also, the culture of one country has too much say in the direction of the Church. I wish that the church central would change countries every few years to get more universal culture.

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Women priests. More servant leadership. I want the church to get out of politics. The Church should listen to female theologians. Stop determining who is a good or practicing Catholic.

I see the tremendous tension here in the U.S. because of Bishops and Cardinals. Leaving Vatican II will lose most of folks who came into the faith BECAUSE of the Vatican council.

Having the cardinals be 50/50 men and women is necessary. Have a woman pope. Nuns! They have been living out Vatican II in a beautiful way and we are going to lose their wisdom, they are a resource. They deserve to be valued. More honesty and accountability. Wish the pope would speak up with the U.S.

Frustrated that the church is so slow in accepting the gifts of women and including us.

- ❖ Liturgy should be brought alive, with better skills. Better homilies—let lay people preach; they are better skilled than so many priests who preach. Liturgists need to prepare better.
- ❖ The lack of servant leadership. They act like we are living in Old Testament times, instead of living by the words of Jesus.
- ❖ Total lack of responsibility towards victims of sex abuse.
- ❖ Ignoring the tremendous need to focus on social justice issues: immigration, environment, poverty. And total silence on gender issues.
- ❖ Parishes that are too big and have no community contact, no programs that encourage people to do more than just show up on Sunday and then go home.
- ❖ Several see nothing to be improved in their local parish but worry about the diocese.
- ❖ Mostly what frustrates me is the lack of servant leadership in the local church. I feel like we are living in the Old Testament! If we could just live the words of Jesus Christ. I know priests who want to live in the community in a different way, but they can't. In my own diocese I see a total lack of responsibility towards victims of sex abuse. It's the lay people who make a difference here. For me as a chaplain, and being a Catholic, I cannot do the sacrament of anointing for all the people to whom I ministered and know deeply—but I can anoint non-Catholics!

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The office for peace and justice has been closed even though we have a tremendous need for it in all ways: immigration, environment, justice, poverty. The parish is too big to be true community. I am frustrated that we are excluding too many people from Eucharist. To exclude all these people from the Eucharist is unjust. There is a total silence on issues of gender difference. Does that mean they are we One of the most discouraging things about parish life is that we no longer have community. Just a lack of community. People go to church and then go home. No connections.

- ❖ Call to leadership with knowledge that as a woman the structure of the church presents road blocks.
- ❖ Missing a focus on discipleship
- ❖ Pastors influences the dynamic within the community, sometimes negatively
- ❖ Differences in pastoral culture in parishes can prompt the need to look for a personally nourishing community.
- ❖ Teaching children how to pray is lacking as well as education to love all.

What frustrates me the most about parish life is lack of trust or faith in the people who are not ordained or on a payroll. I wish that the model of tight top-down control of everything would change. The nature of a parish depends too much on the personality, talent, interests and politics of the pastor. In the few times that I have been in a well-functioning parish, the dream often falls apart with the death or change of pastor. For this reason, quality cannot be guaranteed for all parishes.

- ❖ Lacking cultural relevance for the community
- ❖ Disappointing liturgies and homilies "hunger for the word"
- ❖ Politics from the pulpit
- ❖ No women priests or deacons
- ❖ Bishop and Priests have too much power; "pastoral atrocities"
- ❖ Undue clericalism can be diminished by sharing decision-making with the parish council
- ❖ Lack of outreach to the elderly, including online resources
- ❖ Lack of transparency
- ❖ Not putting reforms into practice

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- ❖ We are missing the "transformational experience" that Catholicism promises.

Particular frustrations with the conduct of pastors:

- ❖ Insistence on dogma
- ❖ Becoming judgmental
- ❖ Insipid homilies, out of touch
- ❖ Failing to deal with pressing social issues
- ❖ Inconsistencies in style and management for one parish
- ❖ Not fostering ecumenism

Belonging to a community that feels safe. Hands-on opportunities to participate in social justice efforts.

Two of the seven participants have left the Catholic Church. Another two have left their parish but joined other religious communities. Most feel devastated and disconnected; they have lost the community they loved. They yearn for a local community to relate to, to share with, to belong to. They were never consulted by the pastor about changes, and yet the pastors are not accountable to the parishioners about the money they spent. Many regret that a change in pastors has totally changed their parish; there is no continuity between pastors or Catholic Churches. Several resent the all-male hierarchy that ignore the talents of women and married men. The laity aren't respected as leaders

- ❖ What frustrates me is the lack of the voice of the laity in the governance of the church. Laity are excluded from virtually every aspect of church life: selection of liturgy, education of priests, bishop selection, almost every aspect. Voice of the Faithful is working to change that; canon law requires lay people to be active in the Diocesan Finance Council. We are looking at all the dioceses to see whether their DFCs really are doing what they should and carrying out canon law. There is a lack of lay voice in church life, in any aspect. What would I like to change? [Quoted all the Canons related to DFCs] I would have the finance canons, on DFC, which is supposed to have control of virtually all the secular goods of the church, be carried out. They should be doing the budget annually. They should approve any Extraordinary Acts, which includes those settlements for abuse victims—they could have known about the abuse by following the Canons. But the DFC does not really do that. There also is no outreach to ordinary people to serve on a DFC. They are, instead, rich, aristocratic, white males. I would

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change the governance of the Church. Canon law allows laity to control the finances.

- ❖ What frustrates me is that since the 1970s the Church has not altered its stance on birth control. In 1973, a priest refused me absolution unless I threw out my contraceptives. So, I had a 4th pregnancy in 6 years, and it led to disease and loss of my uterus, at age 28. I am personally impacted on this topic of MEN making decisions and attempting to control women, men who SHUN women. Our daughters and granddaughters will not belong to that Church, not to a church like this that tries to control them. The Church's failure to develop their stance on birth control also leads to the problems we have with abortion.

Too many celibate priests just do not "get" women at all. So, other than the married priesthood, this reproductive issue is a problem.

Also divorce. My two sons are divorced so now they are not interested in the Church—one joined his wife in her religion. I worked for 13 years in a diocese, processing annulments, and it was NOT helping people at all—it was all about trying to find legal issues, loopholes. That is not upholding the sanctity of marriage, it's just word games.

My frustrations are the rigidity in the church. It has improved over the years. My wife's parents, when they married, had to be married in the rectory because her father was not Catholic. My mother also was Catholic and my father was not, but they were married by a Justice of the Peace.

The rigidity that comes through ritualism also is damaging. The ritual becomes the end rather than the means to the end. They become too rigid in their application; it overtakes the meanings. I am also concerned about the over-emphasis on SIN SIN SIN. We are just awful, awful people. But it is over-emphasized and it leave us feeling so evil and lost that we can only be saved by the priest; it leads to clericalism. Catholic guilt builds up this idea that there is no salvation except through the clergy—it leads to emotional abuse and in extreme cases to sexual and physical abuse. Yes, we are all sinners, but this emphasis on guilt guilt guilt creates a power trip for the clergy.

Ritualism and clericalism

- ❖ Homilies emphasize fire and brimstone, rather than Christian values including humility and the quality of being non-judgmental.
- ❖ Theologies are constructs to advance technical concepts rather than advance what Jesus taught.
- ❖ Greater emphasis on Catholic social justice

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- ❖ Hypocrisy when leading the *Confiteor*, there should not be an inference that the seeking of forgiveness is reserved to the laity alone
- ❖ Retention by hierarchy of biases, elitism, and politics
- ❖ Failure of the hierarchy to embrace the synodal process (it isn't enough to send out a survey or questionnaire)
- ❖ Less emphasis on fundraising
- ❖ Vatican II has been abandoned, reversion to pre-Vatican II seems to be operative; for example, fancy vestments, moving to return of the Latin liturgy
- ❖ Very inclusive church, especially for those without voices, including women
- ❖ Dreams for the Church include activities which make a difference in and are rooted in the local community
- ❖ A responsive, listening pastor: some of the pastors are not engaged; complaints to the bishop did not result in any positive result
- ❖ Parts of the liturgy are not meaningful or are nuanced with objectional attitudes
- ❖ There has always been turmoil in the Church, even running back to the Acts of the Apostles; although Pope Francis is pastoral in attitude, there is opposition. To be optimistic, however, the passage of time may result in more pastoral leadership at the local level.
- ❖ Most important is the Eucharist.
- ❖ Particular frustrations with the conduct of pastors include:
 - Insistence on dogma
 - Becoming judgmental
 - Insipid homilies, out of touch
 - Failing to deal with pressing social issues
 - Inconsistencies in style and management for one parish
 - Not fostering ecumenism

There was a general feeling that the church “attacks the wrong issues.” Instead of climate change and world hunger, the church appears to emphasize sexual issues, like homosexuality, birth control, abortion, and divorce.

The annulment process is too cumbersome and is often administered in ways that are hurtful.

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The church's formulation of "natural law" is "not a viable concept."

The denial of communion to people, "because of rules that Jesus didn't have in mind" puts Catholics on the defensive. One participant thought that the church's position on some of these issues amounts to "a refusal to accept science."

There was acknowledgment that the church's programs for young people are often quite successful at promoting a positive attitude toward social justice.

But there was fear that the seminaries are currently producing a yet more rule-oriented generation of priests.

Summary of Key Themes Presented by our group in Session 1

Catholic Church Emphasis on Rules

The Catholic Church tends to be rule oriented rather than emphasizing a personal relationship with Jesus. They would like to see more emphasis on active participation of the Laity with a Church that has moved beyond the rules explained in Second Grade. Additionally, there needs to be leeway in the Church rules with the understanding that one rule doesn't fit all and that personal circumstances should be considered when applying Church rules.

They believed the People of God deserve more and are ready to move beyond these basics to a deeper religious experience with the tenets of their faith. The rules around marrying outside the Church, rules about who can receive Communion, rules about annulments and welcoming people back to the Church were cited as bureaucratic examples of these rules which stand in the way of being a welcoming Church. Finally, it was noted the Church focus on abortion has overshadowed the crucial social issues which need to be addressed.

Clericalism

Clericalism, lack of leadership, and deaf ears of the parish priests and bishops were concerns expressed over and over. Clericalism was viewed as entrenched with seminaries leading the way in deepening the climate of the ordained often acting superior to the laity and disrespectful of the Laity's roles.

The essence of a parish Church is the laity but their concerns are not respected and not addressed. It was suggested that bishops and priests need continuing education to help them understand their role in the Church and in society. An example was told of a parish priest embezzling and the institutional church "circling the wagons" to protect him while the new pastor was left to heal the spiritual wounds caused by this betrayal of trust.

Vatican 2 and the important role of the Laity has been largely ignored in some Dioceses which has created a divide. Some participants voiced disappointment with the Conference

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of Bishops with their stance on sexual abuse, protecting priests, lack of transparency, ignoring our Pope, and rampant clericalism. The need for collaborative leadership in the Church including all the People of God was noted as a need to bring church members back together as a community.

Lay Leadership and Women

Many wanted to see more shared leadership by the Laity in Diocesan and Parish activities and a structure that included the role of women in the Catholic Church. Again, Vatican 2 was noted as a resource with all the documents in place to guide the inclusion of the Laity in our universal church. It was noted that the church needs to focus on the younger church members because we are losing them in droves.

Some participants reported their parishes encouraged Lay participation and others described parishes where the Priest and a few big-money parishioners made all the important decisions. Another vibrant parish was noted for the new Pastor firing most of the employees, bringing in his friends, and shutting down all the ministries (especially social outreach) except for a few.

One member of our group pointed out that it is difficult for women to feel included unless they are included as homilists, theologians, deacons, participants in liturgy, and respected for their talents beyond cleaning the church and baking. Most women feel marginalized in the Catholic Church and are not accepting of this culture in their dreams for the church they want. (It was noted that our Synod group of 10 participants were all women, which is often the case in preserving our faith.)

Seminary Formation

Many voiced concerns for our seminarians and the education they are receiving, which doesn't seem to have an emphasis on Vatican 2. There were many comments about the institutional church and its rules being favored over the people in their formation.

It was noted that clergy and seminarians need real exposure to social issues facing society so they have an understanding of the marginalized. Many of our priests are from foreign countries with speech issues impeding the understanding of their homilies by the parishioners. Seminaries need to do more with helping them to learn English that is understandable. Many of these same priests from other countries have problems with understanding the culture in our country and this causes a disconnect at the parish level.

One participant noted the spiritual formation difference between Order and Diocesan priests, with her Order priest delivering homilies that encouraged parishioners to use their minds and intellect to 'let go of the side of the pool and venture out into the deep end'. It was her experience that diocesan priests focus more on the 'feel good' and 'play it safe' type of homily than spiritually challenging their parishioners.

Our Future Church

What will be the prevailing model for our Universal Church with all the many and various cultures throughout the world? Diversity is important, with all Catholics throughout the world having the desire to express their faith while being respected by the church. We should make sure that all feel welcomed and included in our future church.

We have Vatican 2 and Pope Francis trying to lead the Catholic Church and we have a big group of clergy challenging our Pope and ignoring Vatican 2. The Catholic Church needs to find a way to move forward from these divisions, and the solutions will rest with the Clergy and Laity working together in mutual respect.

More power, more corruption

Favoritism and elitism; little involvement of the laity; lay knowledge and skills not being used

Inclusion of LGBTQA+ Catholics needed, and divorced and blended families

Social justice

Inclusion of the incarcerated

PAIN OF Catholic women as second-class citizens in the church

Church as a source of strength; frustration at not getting news out about the good works of the Catholics

All yearned for an enhanced sense of community within their parishes, with a recognition of the gifts and voices of lay people, especially women—a Vatican Council II church. The local church should offer inclusion and accompaniment for all. Seminary training is hurting spiritually gifted young men and producing non-pastoral pastors.

I long for a Vatican II church. The church was headed in the right direction, but many bishops and priests have reverted to pre-Vatican II practices and teachings in the past five-to-six years. We need genuine communication and dialogue between laity and church leaders.

In our parishes we should communicate more effectively with [other] parishioners. We should inform everyone what the parish council and other church entities are doing.

I yearn for a Beatitude Church, one that follows the teachings of Jesus that could make the Church whole again, living in harmony & unity. We need more adult learning and catechesis at the parish level.

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I love my Bishop, but my church is suffering from the pre/post Vatican II divide. I have adopted a local seminarian to try to give him a sense of what real-world cares people outside the seminary have.

My Bishop was one of the best, but the leadership of our dioceses has been headed downhill ever since he died.

We should involve the laity in all aspects of the church and make use of our talents and education. Women should be treated with respect and their voices should be heard.

We need to recover a sense of community and ecumenism.

I yearn for an inclusive church, one that treats women, all races, all nationalities, LGBTQA+ people all the same. Other lay people can be the source of exclusion, especially when they are empowered by belonging to conservative parish organizations (e.g., Knights of Columbus).

I need my church to walk with me and with my gay son.

We need a church that educates adults as well as children, reaching to Franciscans, Jesuits, etc. for adult formation resources.

We need to hear more women's voices, especially in homilies.

We need more emphasis on Catholic Social Teaching.

One thing that frustrate me and that I would change in my local church is:

- Politicization of the Eucharist
- Training seminarians to be distant or even dictatorial, not shepherds of their flocks.
- Lack of love, openness, respect, and inclusion
- "Run Spot Run" theology

My sense of the four main themes are as follows, in no particular order:

- Communications and Voice
- Education and Vatican II
- Power and Hierarchy
- Women, Youth and Other vital energy resources

Local Church

- ❖ Frustration of the lack of Inclusion/Hospitality/Welcoming, as well as the discriminating conduct of people. Can't the effort simply be made?

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- ❖ Financial imbalances between parishes within a diocese, can't this be rectified?
- ❖ Such financial imbalances are correlated with older/retired parishioners predominating within a single parish.
- ❖ Church and the 'disabilities' populations or any populations of difference, why can't difference be viewed simply as difference rather than deficit? Where are we towards these population as compared to the Symphony that has developed performances for the autistic—if them, why not us?
- ❖ Voices of children and youth who have 'graduated' from the church: how to get them back?
- ❖ The Church is being called to change and I hope to be part of the Journey.
- ❖ Power/Wealth speaking more loudly to Bishops ties in with the dismissal or non-engagement of Vatican Council II—a return to a pre-Vatican II church—certain bishops are leaning/moving in this direction, Charlotte as only one example.
- ❖ Variations between older/former and new pastors, not necessarily one-sided that older or younger is better or worse.
- ❖ “Arise” lives, in a small group gathering that participants find meaningful and nourishing.
- ❖ Some parishes feel like bubbles of communication and well-being versus the norm; people are drawn to those (destination parishes). There are log jams in communication that are created by the hierarchical structures—invert the hierarchy.
- ❖ Social Justice as a binding force, Rev King's statement, “the most segregated hour in the U.S. is Sunday at 11:00 AM,” remains true.
- ❖ U.S. bishops are less pastoral in addressing my needs as opposed to Francis, perhaps because these do not carry ‘the smell of the sheep’—I do not like hearing negativity about the Pope.
- ❖ I'm trying to make my way to heaven, through loving God and my neighbor.

The failure of U.S. Church leaders to recognize that we remain a wounded and polarized church, reflecting the culture rather than the Gospel.

Principal wounds include handling of the clergy sexual abuse scandal; laity, clergy, bishops, publicly attacking and financing attacks on Pope Francis; the exclusion of women from the sacrament of holy orders; the insistence on single issue politics; the failure to defend the civil rights of LGBTQA+ persons.

Pastors and bishops unilaterally undermining the Vatican Council II's liturgical reform and its vision of who we are as a disciple church, the People of God, and the Mystical Body, and who lack the Spirit of Pope Francis. These point to serious failures at the seminary level in theological education and pastoral formation.

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“I can’t be proud of my local church right now.”

Participants acknowledged that there are today many, committed, faithful, faith-filled, hardworking priests, some isolated, others with support from other clergy, parishioners, friends, family. They remind us we need to recognize and support these priests.

Clericalism must be diminished. Parishioners should have a say in who becomes their pastor and their bishop. Parish decision-making should be collaborative. Able priests should not be barred from being pastors by outdated church rules (e.g., affiliation with a different diocese). Seminaries should teach the evils of ego and of authoritarian decision-making and emphasize that the people are the church, and that the clergy should be assisting. Pastors should be encouraged to “get behind Catholic social teaching.” One participant reported that his pastor dismissed *Laudato Si* by saying that the Pope “isn’t a scientist.” Several participants complained of a lack of relevancy in the preaching in their churches, and too much focus on buildings and money. One reported that her church, located near a Catholic university, could improve its preaching by inviting faculty theologians to assist, but it does not do so.

There was much admiration of Pope Francis, his emphasis on social justice, environmental responsibility, world peace. All liked the universal eucharistic liturgy and the Church’s social teaching. The catechism was also mentioned, as were the saints. But there was a general feeling that the Church should be more of a force for change. Nuclear disarmament was mentioned, as were human trafficking, gun violence, and climate change. There is too much focus on the rules (“puts God in a box,” should “focus more on what to do and less on what not to do”). The annulment process, for example, was described as “painful.” “Universal” should denote a common core, not that we all have to adhere to the same rigid set of beliefs.

We should fix the problems first, such as the discrimination against LGBTQA+ people, unmarried people with children seeking baptism, and Black Catholics. These are people “at the margins” and they are often made to suffer by the actions of Church officials.

In many ways, women are also “at the margins” in the Church.

We should end the divisiveness (and politicization) caused by an undue stress by bishops and priests on issues like abortion and gay marriage. The Church often seems obsessed with sexuality. The Church should publicly confess its role in the sex abuse crisis and should make restitution. Instead, it has defended itself like a secular corporation. Church finances should be transparent on all levels. To attract new people, we must be a genuine

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faith community. Seminary formation must be changed. Seminarians should spend time performing service in real community churches before being ordained. Parishes should do more to welcome new people, including immigrants, but also others who are new to the parish.

Frustrations and should change:

Want everyone to feel **welcome**: LGBTQA+, older, younger, divorced, questioning.

Want inclusivity for all.

There is a strong need for more outreach and ministry to **younger Catholics**. Most people at mass are older. Want to see more younger people.

For folks getting married or in early years of marriage, need better marriage prep and early marriage support. The Church can do a much better job supporting young families and making church present to people going through that phase.

While **Vatican 2** was over 50 years ago, there are still priests and some community members who have the old mentality, with focus on the priest, moral perfection, obeying the rules. A particular example of this is a diocese in North Carolina where a bishop is taking them back to Latin mass, building a new cruciform church with altar rail, kneelers, priest at altar with back to people. Peace and social justice work are taking a back seat to this project.

The **structure** of some parishes works against forming community, e.g., one church is tri-parish: three churches, one pastor. Very divided as a church. People clump together: a young group, an elder group. Liturgies scattered over different churches.

Clericalism—priests preaching about abortion, pornography, and same sex marriage. The priests say this is what is **relevant**. Not so! Not talking about LGBTQA+, racism, poverty. Need homilies relevant to people's real lives and challenges.

Need more of a **voice for the people**, more community participation.

Sadly, church does not always feel like a **safe space**. This Synod is the only place they feel safe to share their voice. As a survivor, doesn't believe their story would be safe or believed in another place. Wants our churches to be safe, non-judgmental places, especially for those who have been traumatized.

❖ I want Church to keep moving forward, to be more Christ-like.

The other thing that I wish could change is that local parishes would decouple from national politics (both parties). This has been poisonous to parish life in recent years.

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Mostly what frustrates me is the lack of servant leadership in the local church. I feel like we are living in the Old Testament! If we could just live the words of Jesus Christ. I know priests who want to live in the community in a different way, but they can't. In my own diocese I see a total lack of responsibility towards victims of sex abuse. It's the lay people who make a difference here. For me as a chaplain, and being a Catholic, I cannot do the sacrament of anointing for all the people to whom I minister and know deeply—but I can anoint non-Catholics!

*Clericalism that criticizes or looks down on others, reactionary to Vatican Council II in behavior and dress.

*Lack of responsibility in dealing with clergy abuse

The lack of dialogue between church members with competing theologies. A question is why cannot those who prefer to do so celebrate the Eucharist in Latin and in the Tridentine Rite.

There is a need for adult theological education at the parish level. Bishops are invisible as leaders and teachers of their churches.

Lack of communication—not informing the people about what is going on

There is a “disconnect between the hierarchy and the people.” Clericalism does not serve the needs of Catholics today, except those who want things to remain “as they have always been.” The focus of the parish is often inward, on its own congregation, rather than outward, to those on the margins. One of the participants felt that the voices of older women are also often ignored. Apathy is a problem in many congregations. Ninety percent of Catholics are not even attending church. “Things can't change until the congregation is motivated to participate, to get out and walk in solidarity with people who are hurting.”

Several participants continue to be frustrated by the on-going sex-abuse scandal. Although some progress has been made in the effort to make offending priests and bishops accountable, the sex abuse has not been eliminated.

Almost all of the participants expressed dismay about seminary education. Indeed, one participant remarked that the priesthood has become a place for men who can't function in the real world. Because there is a shortage of priests, there is the temptation to accept candidates for ordination who have no business being priests. Especially disturbing is the lack of sex education in many seminaries. Men who would be priests must have a deep understanding of sexuality: its many pluses, not just its minuses. Priests were not always celibate men.

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- ❖ Several participants were frustrated that many old people do not want to change. They want the Church they experienced as 7 year olds to continue down the same paths now that they are 70 or 80 year olds.
- ❖ Several participants were frustrated by the fact that many young people do not feel they have a place in the Church even though they are some of the best Christians around.
- ❖ A few participants reminded us that the Synod process started with the laity. It was meant to be a continual “listening” session, assuring us that our Church can be all that it was meant to be: loving, compassionate, forgiving, humble, understanding and so forth. Pope Francis has made the synodal journey his top priority, and yet many priests and bishops undermine his program.
- ❖ More than one participant reported their parish and/or diocese has done little or nothing to engage the faithful in the process of synodality. This state of affairs is very frustrating to most participants. How is it that some factions in our Church hierarchy can get away with this openly—or not so openly—defying Pope Francis’s call for a more “listening” Church?
- ❖ Several participants are frustrated by the fact that [so many] people don’t keep up with Church news; for example, they have no idea about how the synodal practice is going on in Africa, Germany, Australia, etc. Similarly, they have little if any knowledge, about the ideas of some of the Church’s best theologians: Karl Rahner, Teilhard de Chardin, and Bernard Häring. These theologians have been willing and able to challenge Church doctrines and dogmas and to work against literal interpretations of the Scripture, beginning with the story of Adam and Eve.
- ❖ Many participants wish the Church, especially in the United States, would have a more expansive social justice program. The very complex matter of abortion in a secular society need not be #1 on every cleric’s and parishioner’s social justice issue. Let’s not forget racism, homophobia, the death penalty, the mass incarceration of Black men, the cruel treatment of many migrants and immigrants, the neglect of poor and homeless people’s basic needs, an unfair healthcare system.
- ❖ Several participants wished there was better communication about what goes on in the parish churches, the dioceses, the U.S. National Conference of Bishops, the Roman Curia, and so forth. For example, people may wonder why some parishes are offering Masses in Latin, whereas other parishes don’t permit any Latin whatsoever—not even an *Ave Maria*.

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- ❖ All the participants identified themselves as Vatican II Catholics, waiting for the full implementation of its teachings. Why don't more local parishes offer a course on Vatican II? Bible studies are a necessary but not sufficient condition for being an educated Catholic. In this connection, it's important to remember what one participant said: It takes about a hundred years to effect a change in the Church; Vatican II is only one-half the way to this goal.
- ❖ All the participants want women to become Church authorities, leaders, clerics, and so forth. It is deeply disturbing, for example, when the Passion of Christ is celebrated without one woman on the altar. What message does this send to young Catholic girls?
- ❖ Several participants want the Church to be more ecumenical, acknowledging the spirituality and teachings not only of other Christian denominations but also those of Jewish, Islamic, Hindi, Buddhist, etc. believers. In particular, the Jewish and Islamic traditions must be honored to counterbalance the propaganda of White supremacists and people who think all practitioners of Islam are terrorists.
- ❖ There needs to be an end to clericalism, both by the clerics and the laity. One participant said that in his Men's Club, one or another member addresses a Church issue, leading a probing discussion of it without the benefit of the clergy. It is vitally important that we participants in this VOTF forum insist the synodal process must continue even after Pope Francis has died. He has done his share; now we must do ours.

Frustration at expectation to follow rules without explanations, especially rules that are rooted in sexism and racism and authoritarianism.

Two that come to mind are the clericalism and patriarchy. They frustrate me in the ways they impinge on growth and what people can offer and come together.

What's frustrating me now is how the two bishops [and the two dioceses I am in] are ignoring the Synod. I must have gotten 5 letters about what to do for Lent, but only one little thing about the Synod. Another thing that scares me is that the priests who are tuned in and telling us things that are inspiring and helping us to grow are all OLDER priests. The younger ones absolutely scare me. I wish what would change is refocus what they are teaching in the seminary, what they are training priests to be.

You mentioned priests from Hawaii. I remember we were there once—wherever I am, I always try to find a church and go to Sunday Mass. So, I told the people we were with that

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I was going, and they decided to come with me. Seven of us went to Mass in Hawaii, and it was wonderful, what an experience! It was so joyful and it was fun! It brought in the people.

Part of an extremely conservative Archdiocese

Lack of Women in leadership at all levels of the local level, including deacons and someday priests

Judgmental Bishops, guilting the people, i.e., refusing Communion

Hierarchy of the church with an in crowd and out crowd

Depends too much on the pastor; need to share duties

Pretty much ignored the Synod process and did not promote the listening sessions

Didn't pay attention to the scandal and took no responsibility for ruined lives (rebuild trust)

Emphasize the Holy Spirit

The church should engage and be more involved with the community

I cannot feel comfortable when all are not welcome (women, LGBTQA+ community).

Women who want to lead are not allowed to

Lack of women in leadership roles

Feeling invalidated when talking about the deep hurt and anger I carry within me about women's lack of leadership roles in the church. When I expressed this in the Confessional, the priest confessor responded, "You cannot let the little things bother you."

- Anger about my mother who has an MDiv degree from a Catholic seminary and was erased from the photo of her class in the annual Archdiocesan Directory

- Prayers for vocations to the priesthood which is only open to men

No justification for women's lack of equality in the Church when the culture supports women as equals.

When churches are closed for lack of a priest, and questioning the lack of women's leadership in the Church, our daughter asked, "What is so bad about being a girl?"

Our values are mostly derived from the Church and what Jesus taught. But when those values don't align with the church experience it is difficult to justify the differences to our children. Our children don't understand why all are not welcome, especially the LGBTQA+.

Bishop vocal about rejection of LGBTQA+ support—including raising of flags.

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Poor catechetical resources—boring and irrelevant. Lessons and workbooks are not compelling.

A CCD teacher who teaches about Jesus but experienced mean-spirited parishioners while holding a sign for the procession of parish groups and judging others as “unworthy” to be there.

Deep pain and anguish because of not being able to take the host at communion because of celiac disease: *gluten-free hosts are NOT totally gluten free* (required to have a trace of wheat). *The effect of even a small bit of gluten is cumulative.* Concern for daughters who inherited the disease and other celiacs who might be unaware that the hosts are not gluten free. They should be allergy-free so ALL can partake of the hosts. GREAT SADNESS that she can't fully participate in Communion! Jesus broke bread for me, too. But I cannot eat it!! Is this a cross I have to bear? Do my daughters have to bear it, too? Is there no possibility for me and my daughters to participate? Since Covid, the chalice is not offered, and the transmission of germs is always possible. My daughters want to leave. Why should they join a community they cannot participate in, especially the Eucharist?

Anger on the *Camino de Santiago* when a priest told the pilgrims who came to Mass “you cannot come to Communion if you have not been to confession in the last six months.” This was the only statement made in English in the entire Mass.

“We are so far away from the words of Jesus.”

Decision made to follow daughters as they seek another faith community where their gifts are welcome and they can fully participate.

Why do we keep coming home to the Church? Hope and hunger to fully participate

Affirming a quote heard from someone else that “what was acceptable for our grandmothers is not acceptable for our daughters and never acceptable for our grandchildren.”

Session 1, Question 2

2. Guided by the Holy Spirit, what for me is most meaningful about being part of the *universal Church*?

- ❖ What are my dreams for the Church? What do I yearn for more of?
 - ❖ What frustrates me? What do I wish would change?
-

- ❖ Belonging to a universal church means that we can discuss things with and relate to those from other communities because we have shared values and experiences.

The Universal Church is a force for unity across the world and across cultures, but women's voices are not often heard in the Universal Church and gifts of the laity are often not recognized. Clericalism is a problem in both the local and universal church, but we should reach out to our priests and support them. Many U.S. bishops do not acknowledge Francis' authority, but things are different in other parts of the church.

Discernments:

- Commonality—I can go anywhere and be a part of the bigger Church. I can participate in the local Mass even if I don't understand the words or the culture. There is a gift to seeing how people in other cultures share this oneness in community and meaning.
- The “universal” Church is an overly ambitious project because there cannot be a homogeneous global entity. We need the many flavors, many cultures.
- Belonging to this Church allows it in practice to manifest the many cultures in which it lands.
- The longevity—going back to St. Hildegard and beyond.

Our group reported on both sub-questions as one:

Universal Church: dreams/frustrations

There is a joy in having a recognizable liturgy wherever you go in the world. We recognize our connection and sameness. The Church can bind us together.

COVID has given us all an excuse not to go to Church in person. What will it take to bring people back to the pews? The Church needs to ask people what they need, what they want, what is meaningful to them.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Most Meaningful About Universal Church

Seminaries need to be revamped. If they keep doing what they have been doing, we will keep getting what we have been getting. Unacceptable.

We need **more women in Church leadership**. Will there be any women in the Vatican seeing the results of these Synods? Or married people? Or any non-cleric? People are passionate about this!

We are called to **social justice**. We need to care about our local communities and the rest of the world. There are so many needs, and we should be helping others to survive. This is what the Church and we are called to do. Church is our response to our Baptismal call being commissioned to live out the gospel.

- ❖ For me, the Church's unity in diversity is amazing. The fact that the universal Church has survived over 2,000 years attests to its meaningfulness for millions of people.
- ❖ For me, the Church's works of charity in schools, hospitals, hospice, etc. are a source of justified pride. Capital "S" Saints and "lower-case" saints, many of whom we know, have worked tirelessly to improve the lives of marginalized people: the sick, the dying, the grieving, the lonely, the unwanted, the poor, etc.

"I most appreciate the richness that comes from being a universal Church, having visited almost all continents, having served as lay missionary in Africa, having taught in Europe, wherever I go in the world I know there will be a Mass even though cultures differ, and you can see the goodness there. There's a whole other way to experience Eucharist. Love being connected to John XXIII and Pope Francis."

I think the *universal* church is an overly ambitious project. The notion of a homogeneous global entity is impossible; it is not all the same. We need to have different flavors, more localness, more flexibility, more significant differences because they are not all the same.

Belonging to the universal Church is quite meaningful to me for a couple of reasons. To be linked to people throughout the world through a shared faith means that we must care for people beyond our national borders. This is essential since we live in a time when the survival of our very species is threatened. My dream is that this vision will be shared creatively and more universally in the church and beyond.

Additionally, I appreciate that our Church has such a deep tradition, recorded in many theological works and stored in historical records. Becoming more familiar with this history has helped me to put many things into perspective. It is enlightening to learn that throughout its long history, the Church has developed policies that were useful in a particular time but were eventually set aside when they were no longer helpful to people [albeit at a very slow pace]. There is much wisdom about humanity [for better and for worse] stored in this very large archive, and we should be tapping into it with greater gusto.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Most Meaningful About Universal Church

Most meaningful about belonging to universal Church:

- ❖ Global efforts-Catholic Relief Services, Hospitals
- ❖ Pope Francis
- ❖ Respect for life from conception until natural death
- ❖ Art, Music
- ❖ Synodality
- ❖ Migration Issue efforts
- ❖ Social Justice

Most meaningful is the spirit of connection, the universal nature of the Mass. Our **unity** and the pontiff are valued.

The international church is beautiful, especially how our faith is expressed throughout the world: **rhythm** of the liturgical year, rhythm of the Mass—can go to church around the world and rhythm is the same. It is beautiful and inspiring when we all pray together, e.g., when the Pope asked people to pray the rosary at noon every day and hosted every day by a different country. Sense of unity.

Happy to be a Catholic, love the Catholic identity; whole neighborhood was Catholic. Being Catholic is spiritual, social, and cultural.

Love being part of Church that has been **pioneers** of social justice, hospitals, higher education, social work. Proud of Church that has done so much good in the church.

The Universal Church under Francis is doing a better job than some local churches. Even fallen away Catholics are noticing this.

Have great hope for the universal Church. More frustrated on the local than universal level.

No matter where I travel, if there is a Catholic church, I feel an incredible unity in diversity if I enter it.

And another said: Wherever we go in the world, we experience the unity of the Eucharist in the diversity of languages and cultures—we are, together, the Body of Christ empowered to love and co-create God's reign.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Most Meaningful About Universal Church

With respect to the universal Church, most participants found great meaning in the concept of unity-in-diversity. The liturgy will be different in Nairobi, Kenya, than it is in Chicago, Illinois, or, for that matter, in Rome. Yet, the essence of the Mass will remain the same. Bread and wine will be “transubstantiated” into the Body and Blood of Christ, offering sustenance to one and all in their journey through death into eternal life.

With respect to the universal Church, one participant expressed his unique position as a Ukrainian Eastern Rite Catholic, under Rome, yet very similar to Russian and Greek Orthodox Catholics who are not under Rome.

With respect to the universal Church, several participants expressed a feeling of awe that the Church has survived the test of time: 2022 years.

With respect to the universal Church, some participants expressed the view that its longevity confirms, affirms, and validates their own unique spiritual journey.

I am proud to belong to a Church that for centuries has educated the illiterate and ignorant, tended to the wounds (psychological as well as physical) of the ill and suffering, brought consolation to grieving hearts. To be sure, I am not proud of the sex-abuse scandal in the Catholic church. Nor am I proud of the wars and crusades that have been waged in the name of God. But the Church is more than its sins. It can be a haven in a heartless world.

- ❖ It is comforting to know that others around the world are celebrating and worshipping in a similar way.
- ❖ “The Universal Church is the most important thing in my life. It is extremely important to me.”
- ❖ The Universal Church has helped me develop and grow as a person.
- ❖ I am attracted to the rites and rituals of the Church.
- ❖ The Universal Church holds the fullness of truth. Historical continuity is important, as is apostolic succession.
- ❖ “I like the order and rules.” I like being in a community of good people—or people who are at least making efforts in that direction.
- ❖ I can recognize a Mass no matter where I am in the world.
- ❖ The Eucharist!
- ❖ Catholic social teachings, e.g., *Laudato Si* and Catholic Charities.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Dreams/Yearnings

When we travel, we feel comfortable and welcome at most Catholic Churches. We have the Mass in common: the prayers, the Eucharist, and *often* the music. The universal church sees the bigger picture and that there are more ways than one to do things. Until recently, we could count on the service being in the vernacular. Even when traveling abroad, we can recognize and appreciate the Mass in the language in other countries because we have more in common than just language (but they are distracted and distressed by Latin at Masses in English-speaking countries).

Question asked was “What do I like and appreciate about the universal Church?”

*Pope Francis

*Global social justice efforts (Hunger, Environment, Immigration, Refugees, etc.)

*Efforts to continue and promote Vatican II reforms

*Revitalizing brought by religious orders

It is worldwide Mass universal when traveling

Like the Pope

Interest in the unity of Christians

Reaching out and wanting to hear from the people

Seeking a “Gray Zone” between the Progressive-Conservative divide

Concern for the environment

Dreams/Yearnings_____

- ❖ We would like celibacy to be made voluntary, rather than mandatory, for diocesan priests.
- ❖ We believe that it is extremely important to allow ordained women deacons, and ideally ordained women priests—we yearn for more women to preach.
- ❖ We wish there was more respect for Pope Francis.
- ❖ We feel like there is enormous potential to change the world if the universal church were united in actions—Francis’ *Laudato Si* could have a huge impact if all churches committed to taking action for the environment (as one example).

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Dreams/Yearnings

- ❖ We wish for more women in leadership roles—think women should fill the roles of College of Cardinals (six to be a critical mass)—this would allow women to command more respect and act as a check on power.
- ❖ More local control and less top down.
- ❖ Laity must have a role in the selection and formation of church leaders and pastors.
- ❖ Develop an international network of “Sister Parishes” to create real, live connections around the world. This also creates an opportunity to share resources to meet needs, as Paul’s Gentile churches did with the Jerusalem Church.
- ❖ We yearn to become a true, Vatican Council II Church universal, a Synodal Church at all levels, journeying with God, each other, with other faith traditions, with humankind, and with our planet home.
- ❖ Without women in the kitchen, there would not have been any food at the Last Supper.
- ❖ Women have always been a part of the church from the beginning, and we need to recapture that kind of church.
- ❖ Pope John Paul II set us back; Francis is trying to move us forward.
- ❖ Converts have a tough time becoming Catholic without support.
- ❖ Need to accept other’s opinions.
- ❖ Need humility from clerics,
- ❖ We should support priests outside of the church environment.
- ❖ Invite priests to your home, to family functions.
- ❖ Reach out to non-Christians.
- ❖ Invite non-Catholics to outdoor celebrations and events.
- ❖ Same Eucharistic celebration everywhere shows unity, with one and the same body.
- ❖ We should speak the truth.
- ❖ All in unity shows power.
- ❖ Married clergy. Why can we have married priests from other faiths, but no married or women priests?
- ❖ The presence of women deacons preaching, proclaiming the Word.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Dreams/Yearnings

- ❖ Support for sanctity of life from conception to death, focus including and beyond abortion to address all life issues: inclusion of immigrants, LGBTQA+ community, disadvantaged.
- ❖ Broader inclusion of issues, including climate change and others. Pope supports climate change, but we need the same commitment on so many other aspects of church teaching that are relevant to contemporary issues.
- ❖ A bigger table for the universal Church, broader inclusion of all Christians.
- ❖ Hierarchy not trusted: include laity and hierarchy led by the Holy Spirit in decision-making

- ❖ I dream of a Church in which women can serve not only as lectors, acolytes, and catechists, but as deacons, priests, and bishops. Although Pope Francis supports female lectors, acolytes, catechists, and perhaps deacons, he seems closed to the idea of female priests. If Jesus lived in our times, chances are that he would select women as well as men to be among his apostles.
- ❖ I dream of a Church that does not politicize important matters. In this connection, the battle between pro-life and pro-choice Catholics needs to stop. Listening is really important when issues like “artificial” contraception, abortion, in-vitro fertilization, and genetic screening/testing/diagnosis/ therapy are concerned. Yes, we don’t want to support a “cancel culture” that is disrespectful of life. But we don’t want to treasure one person’s life over another’s automatically.
- ❖ I dream of a Church that opens its arms to LGBTQA+ people, recognizing their sexual identities and/or gender identities as worthy of respect.
- ❖ I dream of a Church that includes in its program of priestly formation, the study of the anatomy, physiology, sexuality and spirituality of both women and men.
- ❖ I yearn for a Church that doesn’t sacrifice individual lives to “Doctrine.” The Catechism and Canon Law have many rules and regulations that sap the energy from people’s souls.
- ❖ I yearn for a Church that can keep its paintings, sculptures, and cathedrals intact, so long as it does not sacrifice people to the Almighty Dollar. However, this may not be possible. The sex-abuse scandal has cost the Church millions of dollars. It has also cost the Church’s its moral authority. When children are forced to confess their sins to priests that prey upon them for sexual gratification, anger is the only appropriate response. In Martin Luther’s time, the Church was almost destroyed because of its penchant for selling indulgences. Now the future of the Church is threatened by the sex-abuse scandal.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Dreams/Yearnings

- ❖ Embracing Vatican Council II and the Synod as a dialogue and journey. If we keep the dialogue open, we are on our way.
- ❖ We need to recognize that we are all a part of one another: nature, animals, human beings.
- ❖ More young people and having a welcoming presence that connects those of many cultures and backgrounds to feel called to the church. Moving away from a White church.
- ❖ Women and married priests; women theologians listened to; learn from the nuns; 50/50 women and men cardinals. Woman Pope.
- ❖ Move away from politics and into servant leadership.
- ❖ Sell the Vatican and move the seat of the Church around to different countries to become truly universal.

The Christian mission when well understood is inclusive, seeks to find a place for everyone.

More emphasis on the spirit of Vatican Council II.

The diversity in the worldwide Church is good, but it is a challenge to meet diverse needs.

The Church, especially religious women, do a lot for the poor. Worldwide social services, e.g., Catholic Relief Services, are an impressive work of the Church.

I prefer to think of the church as universal rather than institutional. Whenever we get frustrated with our local church, we can look to the universal. I had a large family, and we are now in the stage of grandchildren marrying. But not in the Church. It's as though the Church does not exist. That makes me sad. Maybe the universal Church is a way to solve that.

Hope expressed for the Synodal Church and potential for possible movement of global Church toward regional autonomy (recent *Commonweal* article mentioned).

Yearning to eliminate the celibacy requirement in the priesthood.

Desire to ordain women deacons and increase the authority of laity, including women.

The overall feeling in the group was that the Church needs a complete overhaul that emphasizes love as the basic value of all we do. The hierarchical model of Church needs to be permanently replaced by a synodal approach. Some specifics that were shared:

- ❖ We need the priesthood to be open to women and married people.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Dreams/Yearnings

- ❖ Much more decentralizing of the church structure.
- ❖ Revisit church teaching on sexual morality—why can't same sex marriages be blessed? Is the church aware of how much unnecessary harm the prohibition on birth control is having, especially in developing countries?
- ❖ We need to reform how pastors and bishops are chosen.
- ❖ Seminary training seems often out of touch with real life.
- ❖ We need to broaden our social justice focus beyond abortion.
- ❖ We need a new catechetical model—how do we share the faith today?

Clericalism is a core problem—priests need to be human first, Christian second, and priests third.

Other suggestions:

- ❖ Loosen regulations about marriage to allow couples to choose the site of their wedding.
- ❖ Priests should have a group of parishioners with whom they discuss homily prep.

Consciousness that we are all one body, we are all one. Relationship must be at the heart of what we do.

A corrective, a balancing of the frustrations at the local level.

YEARN FOR MORE OF:

- ❖ We can get mired in old practices and should grow beyond them, especially where women are concerned.
- ❖ Open the clergy to women! We need women deacons, at the very least. Many feel that we need women priests as well.
- ❖ Priests should be allowed to marry.
- ❖ The laity should be more involved in the governance of the Church.
- ❖ More participation at Mass! The Mass is not a performance to be watched.
- ❖ “We are losing some of our most creative, spiritual and effective ambassadors of our treasured faith communities” by not welcoming members of the LGBTQA+ community.
- ❖ More acceptance of divorced Catholics.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Dreams/Yearnings

- ❖ Rigidity is an impediment to faith—it can turn people away rather than encouraging them.
- ❖ There is an overemphasis on sin and how we are all unworthy. This can lead to emotional and spiritual abuse.
- ❖ The priesthood is currently a very lonely life. That should be changed.

Francis originally restored some hope in me. It felt like the Spirit trying to blow through the Church again and lift us up. But I don't think so now. The young priests need better training in the seminary. They want the Vatican 2 priests to die so they don't have to bother with it anymore. We need a new way for us all walking all together on same [path].

- ❖ Hope for communion of the Body of Christ according to scripture.
- ❖ Leadership role of women is historical and must re-appear. The role of women must be acknowledged and represented at the Table.
- ❖ Need transparency around the clergy sexual abuse crisis.
- ❖ More nourishment and conversion of youth and young adults who are being lost from the Church. Increase foundational study of scripture to youth and adults to provide a Christ-centered perspective of the Church.
- ❖ Inspired by voices of female theologians and writers.
- ❖ Seeing the Church as GLOBAL and should include all peoples, not just Catholics.
- ❖ Breath of God is not static and should not be limited.
- ❖ Synodal process is the beginning of “letting laity speak.”
- ❖ Constancy and familiarity found in liturgies around the world: Mass, daily prayers, etc.
- ❖ Cultural differences in practices should be embraced and not excluded as “different.”
- ❖ Current papal outreach for unity across religious denominations (ecumenism).
- ❖ Beauty of the universal Church with one leader who writes for ALL people (e.g., *Laudato Si*)—that one-leader role is helpful, even if not all agree with the message.
- ❖ How can we bridge the divide to welcome someone who disagrees with my faith, my beliefs? How can we get beyond the differences?

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Frustrations/Hope to Change

- ❖ Laity need to participate in the governance of the Church, in equality with clerics.
- ❖ Dream that the priesthood will be understood differently, more inclusive.
- ❖ Need to change the structure of the church, especially in seminarian reforms, YET the divided church obscures the problem.
- ❖ Church has diversity in spirituality and cultures, which are beauty to be celebrated.
- ❖ The Catholic Church provides a familiar spiritual home no matter where in the world you are.

- ❖ The Church in general needs to take people where they are, rather than where the clerics or hierarchy want the people to be. There should be an equality in power between the people and the clergy: There is no growth when the people are simply told what to do.
- ❖ Pastors should be selected by the parish people, who know the needs of the local faith community.
- ❖ All people do not worship the same way. The Church needs, through its leadership, to accept the difference in cultures, and encourage the appreciation of other cultures.

I dream of an ever more universal Catholic church that seeks unity not only with all Christians but also with the practitioners of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and so forth.

I dream of Vatican III, a church council that examines all of its man-made rules and regulations, eliminating those that serve as stumbling blocks to authentic seekers of God in this day and age.

Frustrations/Hope to Change

- ❖ We find it frustrating that diocesan finance councils have not always followed Canon law and that they are always white, aristocratic, wealthy men. Women have been ignored and disregarded when they tried to contribute. Diocesan finance councils are the only boards with any actual power, but they are always made up of the same types of people, and always have so much deference to the bishop that they are advisory in name only. We wish that the governance issues would be addressed and allow for lay people to have some control and make things happen.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Frustrations/Hope to Change

- ❖ We are frustrated with the intense clericalism that is innate to the way priests are trained; they are stuck behind the walls of seminaries and focus only on individual spirituality, learning in echo chambers.
- ❖ It is frustrating that women are not commonly ordained priests.
- ❖ We wish for the Church to divest from the clericalism that has led to the abuse crisis and the silencing of talents and voices.
- ❖ We are frustrated with the actions and vitriol against Pope Francis. The Church needs to heal from all the scandals—they are still happening and still being covered up.
- ❖ We need to heal and support individuals, communities, and families affected by clerical sexual abuse. We are the injured Church, and this is where the healing must begin.
- ❖ We are frustrated with the lack of movement on vital issues—the sexual abuse crisis, the environment in which we are called to be stewards, the social justice issues affecting our most vulnerable—and feel there must be a collaborative effort to effect change. Pope Francis speaks frequently of the need for action, and while some individual parishes take actions, the majority do nothing.
- ❖ My bishop is cold.
- ❖ Stop unilateral decisions by bishops and pastors that impose their agenda on the diocese or parish.
- ❖ Laity should be able to select bishops.
- ❖ Stop training new men to be pre-Vatican II priests. One told first communicants that it was important to receive the Eucharist on their tongues.
- ❖ Some U.S. Cardinals are a disaster.
- ❖ Need new church structure.
- ❖ Go all the way back to what Jesus taught and to the practices of the very early Church.
- ❖ Clerics should respect the laity.
- ❖ Follow Pope Francis' suggestion, have women deacons.
- ❖ Fully embrace Vatican II.
- ❖ Faith formation/understanding stronger in adults who are confirmed: charisms not validated, especially by youth who are to be Confirmed.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Frustrations/Hope to Change

- ❖ Bishops are an obstacle to recognizing charisms (especially for young persons and women).
- ❖ Lack of trust in bishops. We don't trust them to do their jobs; we need good leadership.
- ❖ Prayers for a long life for Pope Francis.
- ❖ Catholic media is responsible for some misinformation and fueling polarization.
- ❖ Need for reform of seminary selection/formation bringing seminarians in contact with the people they will be serving.
- ❖ I am frustrated by the Church's insistence that only celibate men may be priests. No "self-respecting" woman should put up with this opinion.
- ❖ I am frustrated by the Church's top-down structure.
- ❖ I am frustrated that the gains made during Vatican Council II are waning in strength. The 60's and early 70's were a joyful time for the Church. The same cannot be said now.
- ❖ I am frustrated by the Church's teachings on human sexuality, many of which seem to equate sexuality with sinfulness; in particular, I am upset by the Church's teachings on masturbation, gay and lesbian sex, sex between people who are not married but are living together, and non-procreative sex in general.
- ❖ I am frustrated by the Church's teachings on marriage and divorce, many of which marginalize good Christian men and women, depriving them of the sacraments in some instances.
- ❖ I wish women's role in the Church to be as valued as men's. Women's traditional ethics of care would be strongly supported by Jesus.
- ❖ I wish the Church would be cleansed of all traces of misogyny, racism, and homophobia. In this connection, the Church must be honest about the number of gay men in its ranks, making clear the difference between homosexual men and pedophiles.
- ❖ I wish the Church would explain its mystical roots, its powerful sacraments, and its transcendent messages more clearly, consistently, and in ways that speak to both the hearts and heads of contemporary people. Doing so would help more people have a direct and personal experience of Jesus' love for us.
- ❖ I wish the Church would really listen to its people, avoiding preaching and teaching that infantilizes them.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Frustrations/Hope to Change

- ❖ Embracing Vatican Council II and Synod as a dialogue and journey. If we keep the dialogue open, we are on our way.
 - ❖ We need to recognize that we are all a part of one another: nature, animals, human beings.
 - ❖ More young people and having a welcoming presence that connects those of many cultures and backgrounds to feel called to the church. Moving away from a White church.
 - ❖ Women and married priests; women theologians listened to; learn from the nuns; 50/50 women and men cardinals. Woman Pope.
 - ❖ Move away from politics and into servant leadership.
 - ❖ Sell the Vatican and move the seat of the Church around to different countries to become truly universal.
 - ❖ Better training in the seminary. Young priests have no understanding of Vatican II, no desire to learn about it, and no desire to learn from older priests. Perhaps even close all the seminaries and make them study along with others in a reality-based university.
 - ❖ Inclusivity and elimination of the hierarchical system, one with equality for women, and a focus on living Jesus's priorities.
 - ❖ Attain a better understanding of sexuality. "A few guys in Rome cannot decide on all morality or what morality means."
 - ❖ Ability to welcome all people.
 - ❖ More ecumenism.
 - ❖ Giving lay people more say in the selection of bishops.
 - ❖ Also, close all the seminaries and send them to Jesuit universities. Put them among the people, not tucked away on some mountain isolated from all the people.
 - ❖ If our Church follows the way of Jesus, that would be enough.
 - ❖ Hierarchicalism; a lectionary only using men saints. Lay people have to have some voice in choosing their pastor, and even bishop. I don't know how to make that work.
- *****
- ❖ There is a lack of full communion of apostleship in the structure of the church, exclusion of parts of Body of Christ (all baptized) from authority positions.

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- ❖ Current church structure disagrees with scriptural mandate that all share in the whole communion of the Body of Christ.
- ❖ By exclusion, the talents of women are being thwarted and squandered. The voices of women are excluded within the hierarchy, who have a patriarchic and misogynistic perspective. Folks are marginalized by many of the ordained. ... Church dynamic should be of a shared journey, where all are equal, including female diaconate and female voices.
- ❖ Gender inequality in ministry.
- ❖ Lack of women in leadership roles.

- ❖ Hierarchy has not taken responsibility for the clergy sexual abuse and resulting crisis.
- ❖ Universal church should not be limited to “just Catholics” as Christ is in everyone.
- ❖ Unnecessary “boundaries” created by naming denominations that limit.
- ❖ Negative treatment of non-Catholics by the Church in the past and lasting effects today.
- ❖ Cultural differences in how we live out the Gospel can lead to misunderstandings.
- ❖ Unique focus on strict adherence to rules, while excluding “walking together.”
- ❖ Mission of the Church not implemented universally due to political divisions and differences on how we express our faith.
- ❖ Concern about possible schism in the church.
- ❖ Bishops who oppose current Pope or tell folks how to vote are not helpful for the Church nor for us in the pews as it drives many away.
- ❖ Concern over truly understanding the meaning of transformation of heart, a change of heart.
- ❖ Need for social outreach to youth—need for retention of youth as young adults.
- ❖ Older church structures are being turned into museums and are not kept as houses of worship.
- ❖ Frustration with worldwide leadership who lack accountability.
- ❖ Scriptural message of loving neighbor is not being followed.

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- ❖ Are there some unnecessary rules, such as papal infallibility? Some bishops seem to ignore at their convenience.
- ❖ Negative effect of non-pastoral counseling in marriage situations, driving folks away from the Church.
- ❖ Seminary training needs transformation, to be more pastoral and less theological in concentration and not “hung up” on doctrine.
- ❖ Constructed ethic of sexual propriety ignores the creation of multiples. The Holy Spirit has revealed this diversity of creation as a gift and LGBTQA as a witness to this.
- ❖ Frustration with excluding the needs of the world to focus on church structure/hierarchy/power.
- ❖ U.S. bishops follow the model that provides the rich, white men with power, to the exclusion of the “have nots,” and consequently have become alienated from Church tradition.
- ❖ Clericalism/exclusive clerical power is the problem, and is an arrogance of a creation set apart and superior to others: cannot walk together if one group has these superiority beliefs.

Priesthood is now broken as it exists, and putting women into a broken priesthood is problematic.

The vision and reform of Vatican Council II needs to be implemented. Right now there is a sense that we are trying to recreate a pre-Vatican II model of Church.

Religious orders, especially women, have already done much of the renewal work that the Church needs to do. They could be a model for the larger Church.

There were several concerns related to the priesthood:

- ❖ The priesthood should be open to everyone, and celibacy should not be required.
- ❖ Clericalism is still rampant.
- ❖ Many of the newly ordained priests are very conservative.
- ❖ Reform the way seminarians are taught, emphasizing connections to the world and people they will be serving.
- ❖ The sacramental structure is too priest-centered. For example, why can't lay chaplains anoint the dying?

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We need to build a deeper commitment to social justice and diversity. Part of the diversity involves making room in the Church for both those who are more progressive as well as those who are more conservative. Part of the problem is that the Church itself is intolerant of differences.

We need serious exploration of revising our sexual ethics.

Reclaim the important role of women in Scripture.

We need to hear more about various social issues (death penalty, racism, immigration, etc.) in homilies. It seems the only social issue addressed is abortion.

Many US bishops seem to be a block for needed change. Part of the problem is the alliance between the USCCB and the Catholic right. The Church maintains a feudal-type structure that needs to be reformed.

Laity must take leadership. Church should enable it. We are the Church.

- ❖ Women in leadership roles in the church
- ❖ Involvement of the laity—conversation with the laity
- ❖ Involvement of the LGBTQA community—involvement of other orientations (one participant disagreed with this.)
- ❖ Loss of credibility on moral issues
- ❖ Concern over seminary training
- ❖ Support for the good works of the women religious

There is skepticism about the leadership characteristics of pastors, sometimes obsequious and patronizing. A good leader follows the group and empowers the group rather than dictating from out front.

Where are the young people to carry on the renewal of the Church?

Some members of the hierarchy are arrogant and not authentic when they claim that the Church has been improved since the sexual abuse crisis. This means that the past and its errors, must be recognized and admitted.

The shared Eucharist is a treasure of the Universal Church. The Universal Church is a source of unity, with the faith shared in common across the world. In some parts of the U.S. and across the world, individual bishops do not smell like the sheep and the do not use their

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*authority to bring about unity. They do not provide relevant preaching about social teaching, the environment, or the sacredness of **all** life.*

Wherever you may go in the world, you can celebrate Mass with others who believe as you do.

The Eucharist brings us together.

The Universal Church, and especially Pope Francis, calls us to recognize the sacredness of all creation.

The church still includes and nurtures Jesus-centered communities, but often people (especially those at the margins such as gay or trans people) don't feel wanted or loved.

The Universal Church offers universality with diversity.

Other faith communities are more active in social justice causes, but I can't leave because only the Universal Catholic Church offers the Eucharistic.

Despite the Eucharist, which is the ultimate source of unity, some church leaders are using the Eucharist to divide us.

Bishops and pastors have too much power and are misusing their authority to divide us rather than bring us together.

The leadership of the Church is often co-opted by money and political power, and individual and marginal voices are ignored.

Clericalism is a problem across the Universal Church.

Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs, and I am not alone because I can always find people who worship as I do.

Lack of relevant preaching can be a problem. There is not enough preaching about climate change and way too much about the preborn. We need to hear about the pre-born *and* the post-born.

We need more faith formation for all ages, children, youth, and adults.

We need more lay people to step forward and work to make the church a place for belonging.

Contradictions between a Church of the victim, and a Church that victimizes.

The Church must be addressing a changing world.

Awareness of the German Synod—can we share their experience?

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The centrality of the Mass for the Universal Church, a deep connection is available wherever one is on the globe.

Universal communications of the church as a World Church—the challenge to the church to become an evolving, emergent reality or enter a death spiral

Common to Both universal and local:

Women's voices and role—not simply to be given tasks but to be listened to and respected.

If we are to be catholic our actions must speak it—as such we must practice being nonjudgmental.

Church as an aid, an attractor, rather than an impediment in abusive situations...marital or child sexual, etc., “I find no guidance in this area.”

Synod should hear the voices of those who have or are leaving, or who remain only out of habit.

Stop leaning so heavily upon ‘tradition’ and the notion of Hersey; Cardinal Tobin’s comment, “The ultimate heresy is the denial of complexity.”

Unapproachable bishops, hierarchical structures act as separators and blocks to communication. Whose voices are being heard?

Birth Control/Abortion 'nexus'. If you are to exclude abortion you must have a system of care in place.

Youth! Youth! Youth! Youth! Energy, from where will it come, if not youth?

There has been a failure of Priestly education in science, history, organizational awareness, and communication. Some are an embarrassment. One could add here the disruption when a pastor is changed, or church is ‘merged.’ Again, revealing a certain lack of awareness traceable to a weak education, in important areas.

Disruption of COVID and how to recover from it.

Involve other non or former Catholic voices in the Synod.

What frustrates me is that it seems that the institutional Church is too bogged down with material possessions. Raising the money to maintain just the Vatican alone causes leaders to be forced into compromising principles to appease big money donors (some of whom are bad actors). Plus, the culture of one country has too much say in how things are done. Part of my dream would be that the Vatican would be reduced to a shrine to be visited by pious tourists. Valuable records would all be digitized for safe keeping and greater access to many more people.

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The Pope would move church headquarters to different countries around the world over time.

- ❖ Empower the Laity more
- ❖ Top-Down Authoritarianism
- ❖ Clericalism
- ❖ Equality for Women at all levels
- ❖ More inclusive of LGBTQA community
- ❖ Lack of moral authority resulting from the abuse scandal

Frustration is found in the rule-bound culture of the clergy; the more dogmatic, the more judgmental. All people do not worship the same way. The Church needs, through its leadership, to accept the difference in cultures.

There seems to be an “old boys’ network” between the people and those who are trying to lead the Church in new directions, even including the Vatican Council II reforms. Pope Francis calls for collaborative action, but there is a lack of courage from the pulpit e.g., on racial issues, even white supremacy. The denial to women of entry into the priesthood—or even the diaconate—is unjust and should end. Some women feel the same call of the Holy Spirit that some men feel. On clerical celibacy, there was a general feeling that it should not be required, **although one participant noted that a rule of celibacy renders a priest’s sexual orientation irrelevant, and so perhaps it should be continued in some form.**

The emphasis by the Church on abortion over the last several decades has obscured its efforts in other areas of social justice. One participant felt that the Church’s message often seemed to suggest that “the lives of those who are born are not as important” as fetal lives. The Church needs to change its attitude to LGBTQA+ people (e.g., not firing teachers because of their sexual orientation).

Human beings suffer from unmet spiritual needs and the Church is not clear enough on what it can offer to meet those needs.

Young people are leaving the Church because of the statements regarding LGBTQA+ Catholics. We need to welcome people, not condemn them.

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What faith do you want to pass on to your children, especially if LGBTQ+? Can I trust the Church will treat my family with dignity and respect everywhere, or do we have to pick and choose which parish church we go to?

The Church needs to fully affirm the gifts of the laity. We want to be part of the Church and not constantly needing to fight for our rights as baptized Christians. We need to discern and pay attention to the voice of the Spirit in all of us. It is important to pay more attention to the voice of the Spirit.

There is a value to tradition, but the Church must be up-to-date and relevant to people's lives, especially young people. There is a tension between unity and addressing local needs.

The Church still hasn't adequately addressed the sexual abuse scandal.

Too much clericalism remains from the past. Priests are human and make mistakes. Need to see them as people of God, not God Almighty.

We need a Church that looks more like the original Church, to go back to basics. We don't know our own history and think that things "were always this way." Let's go back to the Church Jesus called us to be, based on the number one commandment of love. Jesus showed us what community could look like and we are far from it. Jesus showed us how to reach out to those on the margins, the poor, the forgotten, the least of our brothers and sisters. Jesus didn't envision a Church; he envisioned a movement. Jesus never said worship me; he said follow me.

Language – make gender neutral and inclusive.

Frustrated with movement toward more conservative opinions. Too many want to go backwards.

We call the Church "universal" but many parts of the world aren't really included in its structure, design of rituals, etc. So much of the Church's view is white and European. Also, it is limiting to think of the universal Catholic Church rather than the universal Christian Church. We have much to learn from other Christian churches and vice versa. Our aspiration is to be a truly universal Christian church. We hope for incorporation of what is learned in all these places. There are lots of good ideas in Protestant churches and we want more opportunity to engage.

The celibate priesthood is a huge mistake. Priests are fed the line that they are special and set apart. A married priesthood would reduce that. We want women priests, married priests, priests who understand our real lives.

We want LGBTQ+ acceptance and an affirming Church for our youth.

"All sacraments for all people." – struck a very strong note

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I get frustrated when I am told that because Jesus's apostles were all men, Jesus's intention was to have an all-male clergy in perpetuity. There is no theologically sound justification for an all-male clergy, let alone an all-male celibate clergy (presumably at least some of the Apostles were married men given Judaism's high respect for the married state). Jesus lived at a time when women were confined to the role of spouse, child-bearer/child-rearer, and domestic servant. But Jesus had more plans for women than these. He let Mary of Bethany sit at his feet listening to his discourses, while her sister Martha discharged her domestic duties. Jesus did not recoil when Mary of Bethany washed his feet with a precious ointment, her tears, and hair. Her "sexuality" did not threaten him. At his crucifixion, Jesus's mother, along with Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, and John, the beloved disciple, stood courageously at the foot of the cross. In an act of defiance against Rome's law, they stood mournfully, watching Jesus die a cruel death. Where were the other Apostles? Hiding it would seem. When Jesus was resurrected on the third day, he appeared first to a woman. Given all these facts, why would Jesus deny women the priesthood today in a world where women are CEOs, presidents, intellectual luminaries, and so forth?

What would I change locally and globally? First and foremost, I would open up the diaconate and priesthood to women. Women are more than the (veiled) "complements" of men. They are full human persons, worthy of the same respect and recognition accorded to men. The church must shed its patriarchal vestiges.

Second, I would root out clericalism whenever and wherever it occurs. Clerics are not holier or better than the laity, and it is dubious that they are "ontologically" changed on the day of their ordination. To be sure, clerics have a different role than the laity, but that role is to serve the laity, lead the Eucharistic celebration with and for the laity, and administer the sacraments co-operatively with the laity. Women in Germany are already performing church-sanctioned baptisms and it won't be too long before they are also performing church-sanctioned marriages, anointings of the sick, and last rites.

I would change faith formation programs and seminary training in particular. Catholics, including Catholics preparing for ordination, should not separate themselves from the secular world. Instead, they should be in genuine dialog with it. It is worrisome that many seminarians as well as Catholic-college students know only the official Catholic position on sexual matters, reproductive decision-making, and end-of-life decision-making. In the world in which the Church exists, sincere discussions with those with whom it disagrees is an imperative. Living in a "Catholic bubble" is a bad option for contemporary Catholics.

I would change the churches views about social media. Were it not for the Internet, Catholics would have lost touch with their faith communities during the two-year-long COVID-19 crisis. Instead, they learned how to watch live-streaming of their parishes'

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religious services. They also learned how to attend Mass virtually—to the north, south, west, or east of their home parishes. As a result of doing this, they heard some excellent homilies and music, and there is reason to think that when they return to their parishes for face-to-face Eucharistic celebrations, they will no longer be willing to listen to boring homilies, bad liturgical music, unsound theological arguments, and misguided political imperatives.

I want Catholics to stop saying that the church cannot change now but needs to wait 25 years or a century or two to change its man-made regulations. The Church can change quickly if enough of us want it to change quickly. That's what happened after Vatican II. Nearly overnight, priests started to say Mass in the vernacular instead of Latin, etc., etc. Think here of the Apostles and St. Paul. They had to get over the idea that Jesus came for the Jews alone. They had to recognize very quickly that he also came for the Gentiles, the Greeks, the Romans, and several other ethnicities that they did not like or even know. But they managed to make this profound change. If the Holy Spirit could get the Apostles and disciples to change their whole way of thinking, then the Holy Spirit can do the same for us. We need only ask.

- *Inadequate Vatican Council II formation of new priests
- *Flawed efforts to address clergy abuse (monetary priorities)
- *Lack of support for Pope Francis
- *Bishops that don't support justice for First Nation people
- *Lack of full participation for Women (full recognition and utilization of their gifts)
- *Lack of lay leadership

There are understandable governance tensions between maintaining orthodoxy for the universal church and the lived faith experiences of diverse local churches. Unfortunately, too often these differences seem to be resolved from above in a way that is inconsistent with a synodal process.

Participant Note: As we go forward with the synodal process, we should be aware of how injured the Church has been due to the sexual abuse crisis in multiple countries throughout the world, especially in European nations along with the U.S. Church and the changing demographics of global church membership.

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The laity do not recognize the authority they have. The Church will not change until society does. Neither the laity NOR the newer priests understand the history and the traditions of the Church or the trends to reclaim Vatican II.

We don't understand the authority that we do have as laity, there is a great need for ADULT education. Both the ordained AND the laity need a refresher course in Vatican II so we all understand how it was intended to bring the Catholic Church up to date according to the teachings of Jesus.

Many in the group are frustrated that nothing is being said about the Synod; there is no call for lay leadership to develop the Listening Sessions that Pope Francis called for. They believe that the bishops and pastors are not focused on community, but instead are focused on their own power and are not accountable. Those who knew about the synod believe that the results of the Listening Sessions will be discarded, that there is no path to accomplish change. There is no sense of faith (*sensus fidelium*), no instrument to understand.

Most are frustrated that the talents of women are not used and that probably won't change. Women and others lack the power to implement what is learned. Clericalism dominates. We don't listen to each other. Several said the Catholic Church doesn't work anymore; the hierarchy is a century behind the rest of the world. Reports are commissioned (e.g., previous synods), but the results have not been implemented. We are just expected to "follow the rules – pray, pay and obey."

Seminaries do not teach the students anything about the social or financial aspects of being priests nor do they teach how to tap into the gifts and talents of all those who want to share those assets with their communities. More seminary teachers need to be women and male laity. Unless the Church provides what the people need (like the new mega-churches), there will be no universal Catholic Church. Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IEC) will replace what for centuries has been the Universal Catholic Church, or parishioners will leave the Catholic faith and join those churches that have changed to meet the needs of the 22nd century.

There is also frustration about the constant petition for more vocations but when some try to enter discernment, they are rebuffed, maybe because they don't fit the narrow vision of those who make those decisions.

The group has their hope in Pope Francis and are praying for his good health and successful implementation of the changes that were offered in Vatican II and could be reinforced by the results of the Synod on Synodality.

It was acknowledged that it is difficult to move such a large body, especially since so many Catholics were lost during the pandemic. What Would Jesus Do?

The Church is a political organization with two popes.

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The internal politicking and the bishops' attacks on the Pope and each other undermine enthusiasm for the Church's mission.

We need more women in leadership roles. Today women excel in every field and in every way, are regarded as equals, and are chosen based on talent and not on gender.

How can we insist on mandatory celibacy for ordination to the priesthood when we already experience the excellent ministry of married priests?

Must admit that the Church did change many times and in many ways. *Ecclesia Semper reformanda est.*

- ❖ The Church behaves like a dominating institution that ignores the truth of its failings.
- ❖ Absence of justice as the forefront of the Catholic mission.
- ❖ Concern expressed at hierarchical power quest as the root causes of frustrations with the Church leadership—one participant mentioned in particular budget management.
- ❖ Difficulty remaining Catholic in spite of what is going on in the Church.
- ❖ Concern that adult children are not practicing their faith, either Catholic or Episcopalian.
- ❖ Concern that Church leadership is not more vocal on environmental issues, especially after the encyclical *Laudato Si*.
- ❖ Concern over seminary training and newly ordained priests who wear cassocks and collars everywhere and seemingly exclude social justice issues.
- ❖ Concern for type of men coming into the priesthood and the far-reaching effects of the current non-inclusive, seminary training.
- ❖ Entrenched bureaucracy within the Vatican needs the lay input, the “sense of the people.”
- ❖ Lack of a consistent message from bishops who expect loyalty from their community but do not in turn show loyalty to the Pope.
- ❖ Concern over very vocal critique of Pope Francis' efforts compared to a lesser amount of public criticism of previous popes, notably John Paul II. One participant notes that the power of popes has expanded since early Church when the pope was only bishop of Rome with limited scope of power.
- ❖ There are many rules in the Church; most Catholics “pick and choose” which to follow.

Appendix D: Session 1, Question 2—Frustrations/Hope to Change

- ❖ Formality and inflexibility of rules in the Church: question of how to break down the “big picture.”
- ❖ Change: Learn from interfaith practices to enhance experiences—one participant mentioned the use of small paper cups to share during liturgies.
- ❖ The Church lags behind other faith denominations on many social issues. There is a need for openness to diverse populations, such as separated/divorced Catholics, LGBTQA+, etc.
- ❖ Embrace interfaith dialogue and adopt more inclusive ways present in other denominations.
- ❖ Expand social justice efforts in all dioceses.
- ❖ Invite all people into leadership roles and dismantle the exclusivity in the hierarchy.
- ❖ Change needed in social justice: to do for others within our own Church without judgment.
- ❖ Change: Election of bishops should be considered, based on early Church practice of election from the community by the laity.
- ❖ Idea: Input of laity into local and universal church could follow a business model of executive team leaders who set short-term goals and serve as advisors in dioceses.
- ❖ Conversation about church organization at parish level: declining number of priests for parish assignments; more lay-led parishes are needed.
- ❖ Pastoral Team model utilized in combined parishes can mean less lay involvement; many lay jobs are being eliminated with one lay position responsible for same ministry in many parishes.
- ❖ Concern expressed that one pastor of combined parishes exercises control over the reduced number of staff: need a mindset change in priests.
- ❖ Change: Increase roles for women and laity and end clericalism and power-seeking force within the hierarchy.
- ❖ Change: Ordaining more deacons, including women, could fill the need for lay parish leadership.
- ❖ Change: women in all church roles following Jesus’ model of inclusion.

Clericalism

Need to guide youth

More compassion and nurturing

Appendix D: Session 2 Responses—What Issues Should We Pay Attention to?

Lack of women in leadership at all levels of the universal church

Ordination of married persons as priests

Study of and return to early church practices that foster servant leadership

Return to the spirit of Ecumenism of Vatican II

Church closures

Session 2 Responses

1. What issues in the Church should we pay more attention to?

- ❖ Growing wealth gap in U.S. and most of the industrial world, income inequality/disparities
 - Is the system working? Is it moral?
 - Prices are rising without reason- just for added profits for those who are already wealthy.
 - Although the standard of living has increased for many, it's certainly not working for everyone.
 - Gaps exist in salaries; housing; and healthcare.
 - Wishing the Church would speak out.
- ❖ Environmental issues—*Laudato Si* tried to call the Church into action but no universal actions have occurred.
- ❖ Racism and racial injustice?
 - How many Catholic churches have a BLM sign? How many Catholic priests have done anything for BLM?
 - Fr. Ted Hesburgh, former president of University of Notre Dame, marched with MLK, but what has happened since?
 - Pastors don't need to go out on a limb to talk about these issues—based on Catholic Social Teachings.
- ❖ Catholic Social Teaching in general: needs more attention
 - Seems that the only reason this doesn't happen is because priests are afraid of irritating donors, which sounds a lot like politics.
- ❖ Seminaries/Training of priests

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- Should pay better attention to pastoral care—only learn for six months when they are embedded in a parish, but they are a “step above” when they are deacons, not actually “with” the parish. This would reduce clericalism.
 - Should be required to work with ministries: would speak to the issues discussed in social teachings as well as show them how women and lay leaders run successful programs.
 - Every year of training they should be in the real world, attending parish council sessions, liturgies, being involved in religious education—important to be involved in the world that they will be leading. Example: Father Greg Boyle, the priest who works with gang members in Los Angeles.
 - Focus preaching on the community and the scriptures—not helpful when the homilies don’t offer any type of messages from Scripture.
 - Diminishing number of male priests and lack of pastoral priests.
- ❖ Women’s sacramental role in the Church.
- ❖ Delegate and respect talents within the community; acceptance of more lay participation.
- ❖ Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults
- Should talk about social teaching; they cover abortion but nothing else.
- ❖ How can we ensure that what we say during Synod Sessions will be listened to?
- There will be a critical mass of voices: but will that critical mass tend toward the progressive or the traditional?
 - A large number of progressives have left the Church: how can we ensure that their voices are part of the critical mass participating in the Synod Sessions?

The clergy sexual abuse crisis has multiple implications that demand continuing attention. The questionable adequacy of the measures taken by dioceses to protect children; the continuing existence of clerical and episcopal cultures that enabled clerical sexual abusive conduct, including recent disclosure of Pope Benedict XVI’s actions when a German Archbishop; the care for the victims of clerical abuse; the fairness of the procedures adjudicating accused priests; and the support that must be given to priests of integrity.

Role of women in the Church. The root principle is that any person baptized in the Roman Church has the right to serve in any leadership position, including liturgical ones, given fulfillment of all non-discriminatory requirements.

The lack of USCCB public attention and of individual dioceses to the call of Pope Francis for every diocese to be fully engaged in promoting and implementing the Synodal Process.

Appendix D: Session 2 Responses—What Issues Should We Pay Attention to?

One-issue pro-life Church v. Multiple-issues pro-life Church. This question is important in terms of the Church's public image and also in terms of each individual's formation of conscience.

Resolution of the 1968 Birth Control Issue. 80% to 90% of adult U.S. Catholics have rejected the papal teaching on birth control. The result is that the Church has no authoritative, public voice on sexual matters.

The Church should pay more attention to women's voices, and less to clericalism claims that priests are better than lay people. Allowing ordination of women to the diaconate would help elevate women's voices in parishes and across the church. Women deacons served in the early Church. They could and should do it now.

The Church should be more focused on seminary formation and realize how damaging it can be to seminarians to treat them like princes and to exclude women from seminaries. Priests in formation should study with women, and women should be present as teachers and as supervisors for parish assignments.

The U.S. Church doesn't demonstrate concern about young people between confirmation and marriage. In many parishes there are no programs to draw them to the church during those critical years. Opportunities for service should be provided to them.

During formation, seminarians need to discern their vocations and faculty should pay more attention to discerning if candidates for the priesthood have a genuine vocation to priestly service. Women should play a role in the formation in seminaries since women are 50% or more of parishioners.

We need parish priests who can communicate with *all* their parishioners and have a common touch. If we need more priests, maybe we should have fewer serving as mitre-holders for bishops and put them in parishes, as long as they can treat parishioners with respect.

The Church needs to consider the impression given by excessive displays of pomp and regalia, e.g., a bishop arriving at a confirmation dressed to the nines in a limo with the Knights of Columbus in attendance. Following Pope Francis, priests *and* bishops should smell like their sheep.

There is pushback on efforts on behalf of social justice: example in Los Angeles of land sales and the proper use of funds for housing the poor.

The good work of Franciscan sisters and laity [who are] burying unknown migrants who have died in the desert: a cause for joy. A recognition of the laity answering a call to serve.

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Many needs are being met by people doing the work we are called to do.

Better transparency is needed on how abusers are punished and victims compensated. The Church has lost moral authority because of abuse revelations and coverup.

Need to acknowledge the loneliness of priests, especially during the pandemic.

Silencing the church can be as abusive as the abuse itself.

Some German bishops should not be back in ministry.

In California, nuns in a Catholic school stole funds but initially the archdiocese did not want to cooperate with the police.

Dioceses who do not distribute money from CRS Rice Bowl collections and keep it without dispensing it to those in need. Laity have the right and duty to know where our money goes for special collections.

Need for diocesan financial transparency and accountability (efforts such as those by VOTF).

We briefly revisited the discussion of Church as “business.” While we have faith in the Spirit leading us, the bills still need to be paid. But finances must be transparent!

Seminaries: All the diocesan priests come through the same seminary and all are imbued with the same sense of superiority [which leads to] clericalism! They are coming out with a pre-Vatican Council II mentality. In London, Ontario, there is an *Opus Dei* group and they are actively making contact with current seminarians. At a local liturgy a seminarian actively promoted the Latin mass.

A lot of priests are being recruited from other countries. They are supposed to have indoctrination into our culture and speak English well. But this is not happening. Not fair to them but importantly not fair to US. They are not understood and they do not understand us.

We need open dialog and equality with priests. We are a priestly people by virtue of our baptism. The Synod is giving us an opportunity to use our voices!

The RCIA group gives us hope! As church, we must be open to those who seek the Spirit.

- ❖ We need to pay more, not less attention to the sex-abuse scandal. Unless the Church adequately addresses this sin, the moral credibility of its hierarchy will be undermined, perhaps irrevocably.

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- ❖ We need to pay more attention to discord in the Church so that we can overcome it. Bishops from one country cannot agree on much of anything with bishops in another country. Moreover, some bishops (and priests, for that matter) openly defy Pope Francis' leadership. In the United States, "traditionalists" engage in intellectual warfare with "progressives."
- ❖ We need to pay more attention to "modernizing" the Church. In particular, men and women need to be accorded equal status in the Church. There is no sound reason for an exclusively male priesthood.
- ❖ We need to pay more attention to each other's strengths, Spirit-given gifts, and worthiness. Always emphasizing each other's weaknesses, sins, and worthlessness can erode our hope. We are God's creation and worthy of God's love. We have spiritual gifts, often needing help identifying our gifts and helping others identify their gifts. Grouped together we become stronger. We make mistakes and need the spiritual gifts of others to heal, change our lives and build community.
- ❖ We need to pay more attention to Jesus' message of unconditional love.
- ❖ We need to pay more attention to how decisions are made in the Church. Clerics should not lord it over the laity, viewing themselves as somehow "infallible." The culture of clericalism needs to be a thing of the past.
- ❖ We need to pay more attention to developing a proper understanding of human sexuality. Doing so would enable the Church to support a married clergy, women priests, and members of the LGTBQIA+ communities. Sex is not inherently "sinful."
- ❖ We need to pay more attention to becoming a loving Church. Squabbles about the use of "artificial" contraceptives, the full acceptance of people in the LGBTQAI+ communities, and the ordination of women do not build God's Church. What does build God's Church is a program of inclusivity.

Scribe reported each participant's response:

For me:

- Selection of Bishops and how they are selected. There should be more individuals like the parishioners having more say in who's going to be a bishop.
- Clericalism is a big issue. Everyone treated me so differently when I was a priest, and it irritated me.
- Lack of priests in the Church and there needs to be married and women priests.
- Women need more control in the administration.

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- The whole Vatican administration has to be revised; it seems like we're still doing the things we did 1,000 years ago.
- More LGBTQA--Vatican has denied sacraments to these people.
- There needs to be a change in the annulment procedure. More people need to understand what it is.
- The prayers of the Mass seem to be a direct translation from the Latin, they should be more meaningful.
- The Church needs to change their attitude on birth control. The whole idea of sexual intercourse should be more about intimacy, a sacrament between two—not just having babies.

Two things come to mind. 1st, the weaponization of sacraments. This goes beyond Eucharist. In the U.S., Bishops have weaponized who can and cannot receive sacraments. And that extends beyond, including who can receive holy orders, be forgiven, etc. This is a wide frame.

The second thing that comes to mind is that the church should pay attention to the way that it interacts with our political systems.

- There is a tendency of the church to always be responding defensively or striking out against modernism. They have a tendency to be looking at extremes. The truth is somewhere in the middle. If they were going to recalibrate how their first response is and look at the middle of the extremes, they will see some truth. I have a son who is gay ...

We need to get this sexual abuse crisis out in the open once and for all. The church leaders must repent and ask for forgiveness.

- U.S. Bishops creating this potential schism in the U.S. is concerning and taking us back to pre-Vatican II.

The expense of the litigation and the lawsuits with the sexual abuse has caused a major redirection of financial resources that really could be put to better things. ... If people feel disenfranchised, they are not going to be involved in the Church. What's critical is that we have to reach out to people and let them know that they are seen, that their thoughts and ideas and values should be considered. This is what the synod is about—on a journey together.

- My boys didn't have anything bad to say about the Church. But they felt that the Church isn't growing anywhere. They are doing nothing for the children. It's all the ritual, but there's not a community of how we picture Christ.

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Safety. People are yearning for a sense of community with emotional and physical safety. And it doesn't always feel that way in Church. Can't really share vulnerably or disagree with the priest.

- Grateful to Pope Francis for initiating this whole idea of a synod. Because he's calling us all—priests, lay people, etc. to listen. Listening to the Lord and our prayer, but to each other. I think there is such a need in our church and country to hear where people are coming from.

We have lost the young people, the parents, and the community I work with—we are losing the *abuelitas*, the grandmothers, they have been holding on to Vatican Council II and are seeing this polarization in the Church. The “Jesus as the foot washer” is what came out of Vatican II, and that was hard work. But now we are back to “Christ the King” model. The *abuelitas* are saying NO! I think that's a wake up call that we need to have; we are losing the older folks who just don't want to hold on anymore.

The role of women

- It's disillusioning when you aren't valued for what you can contribute or give. I go to church because that's what I need. I need that as a part of my life. My daughter is a very spiritual person, but she is not able to find that community.

There has to be a flexibility that respects where people are coming from and what they have to bring. Someone mentioned alienation. I think there's a lot of alienation in the church's hierarchy. And laity.

- Realize in a universal church, we don't have to be universally the same. The apostles were able to understand many Jewish dialects. There's pushback in the U.S. about Amazonian traditions and African bishops. Not to judge, it's a starting point. Recognize that the Spirit has lots of gifts and brings us where we are, and we should allow God to meet them where they are.

Adding more respect and drawing on other traditions to help problem solve. We need democracy. I don't know how to evolve and change the way we need to [be] without incorporating democracy. Then something can emerge that nobody expects.

- We need more of a grassroots type of effort in the Church itself. The first three centuries of the Church when it was persecuted, the pageantry wasn't there. Administration really began in 325; we have to go back to when we, as the grassroots, have to have more say and have to make the change. The administration is still “in control” so how can we have a revolution? How can we bring about the voice of the people?

Several issues were mentioned by a number of people:

The Structure of the Priesthood

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- Clericalism. It keeps laity as second-class citizens. We need to cultivate a servant leadership model.
- The priesthood should be open to women and married people.

Listen more effectively to the Laity. Examples:

- Laity could be a more significant part of the parish council.
- Parish council members could be invited to preach periodically.

Issues:

- Abortion: The Church focuses too much on abortion as the only social justice issue.
- Women' roles: More education about women in the early Church. The Pope should make a strong statement (maybe an encyclical?) about the importance of women.

Other issues mentioned:

- Millions of people have left the Church, but the leadership seems not to care or to ask why.
- *Laudato Si* needs to be promoted more since caring for the environment is fundamental.
- Clerical sexual abuse coverup. Can't simply sweep it under the rug.
- Sexual morality. We need to review and update our approach to sexuality.

Liturgical changes like vibrant or reflective music, some lay homilists, broaden the location of Mass, i.e., homes, beaches, etc., expand lay involvement beyond lectors, servers, distributors.

- ❖ Power, the abuse of power. We need to pay more attention to how power is abused in this hierarchical structure. To change it to a concentric circle, we should begin with love, as Jesus did.
- ❖ Exclusion—from denying the Eucharist to people to denying equality for women to placing so many obstacles in the way of annulment, all we do is put up obstacles.
- ❖ Equally, the need to respect and support those on the margins and those with different views, the need to welcome people.
- ❖ Recognizing the power of the Holy Spirit and embracing ourselves as filled with the Spirit and part of the Body of Christ. Respect for the laity.

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Quotes: “Three things: One, we haven’t recognized the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As a Church, we need to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and worship. Two, we need to recognize ourselves as the Body of Christ with every cell of the community in connection with the others. Three, we all need to practice discernment throughout our daily lives—not just to discern if we have a religious vocation. These lived understandings constitute the foundation of our relationship with God.”

“My biggest concern in the U.S. church is American bishops who push back against Pope Francis. It hurts me personally! This man is trying to show love for all people and to welcome all and bring us to 21st century, and the bishops here say such horrible things about him! It’s awful. It hurts.”

- ❖ Lack of unity within the Church, including racism evidenced in parishes, criticism of women active in parish ministries, and the exclusion of diverse populations.
 - Disunity among the laity compromises the success of reform efforts.
- ❖ Loss of members, especially youth, coupled with inadequate outreach to those who have left the church and scarce interaction with other faith communities.
- ❖ Defective structures within ministries, including lack of women in ordained ministry, the training of seminarians, and the need to re-structure vocations with the inclusion of more women.
- ❖ The effects of clergy sexual abuse, including a deficient outreach to victims / survivors of clergy abuse and their families, and the lack of bishops’ accountability for cover-up that has resulted in loss of trust by the laity in the Church leadership.
- ❖ Clericalism and the need for inclusive ordination are both issues: focus should be on finding those best able to provide a needed ministry with the laity taking on a larger role.
 - The broad implications include the need to look at the meaning of the priesthood.
 - The length of priestly service could be limited.
 - Celibacy could be optional.
 - Focus on theology in seminary training should change to focus on relationship building and how to be pastoral.
 - Need for a married ministry, male and female; a family perspective is needed.
- ❖ Incomplete education of adults to best understand our faith, with a need to broaden educational topics for children that engage them into an understanding of the world,

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and the promotion of spirituality within parishes that does not get hung up on doctrine to the exclusion of human learning through personal, real-life experiences.

- ❖ The issue of abortion should not be over-simplified; there is a need to explore human dignity in a broad context of human experience and family planning.
- ❖ Financial transparency that uncovers discrepancies is the key to determine the priorities for the church; lay experts must be involved.
- ❖ Deficient and exclusionary liturgies, not designed to meet needs of local community, including youth, that should include more practices, such as dance and the use of videos.
- ❖ Flawed decision-making process within the Church that should become collaborative and democratic with augmented lay roles that are not simply advisory.
- ❖ Canon Law – need to codify with clear statements that avoid potential for secrecy.
- ❖ Lack of engagement of parishioners in parish life; sterile parish atmospheres.

- ❖ The need to be more selective of who is accepted after applying to the priesthood. There are many priests today who should not be priests. The Church also needs to be less restrictive of who can be priests; women and married men.
- ❖ The formation of the clergy is deficient. The candidates are cloistered with little reference to the secular world, and many result in being dictators rather than shepherds. Patriarchy is preserved as a cultural characteristic of the clergy.
- ❖ The clergy do not preach or otherwise deal with the major situations and social issues affecting American culture: among the issues are racism (although many parishes are composed of non-white individuals); capital punishment; the environment, immigration, and abortion.
- ❖ The issue of accountability
- ❖ The role of women
- ❖ The lack of inclusivity

The Laity, clergy, and religious would all benefit from coming together because it hurts everyone when they are not communicating and working together. Our Church needs attention and all need to be invited to sit at the table.

The social gospel is spotty throughout the Church and there is a backlash about not wanting to talk politics. Who are we as a Church if we are not preaching the social gospels?

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We need more emphasis on social justice with welcoming everyone and not just white males.

We are destroying Church communities because there are not enough priests. We need to think outside of the box and consider making them sacramental leaders. We have two parishes run by nuns and all is going well.

Priests are afraid to speak out if their views are different than their bishop's.

Priests need more education on social issues such as the real-world issues challenging families in their parishes. Often the priests are in denial about their parishioners lives and don't take/have the time to learn how they can help. They also need more knowledge about LGBTQA, as an example of current issues.

Our seminaries are falling short in providing a balanced preparation for their candidates. These seminarians have little experience in the real world of families and marriages.

Seminaries need to make sure language coaches are provided for foreign priests because some are unintelligible when they talk to their parishioners, say Mass, provide homilies, and hear Confession. This drives people away.

Start with practical fixes we can achieve like educating all on Vatican Council II so we're all on the same page. Provide workshops on Vatican Council II in parishes and seminaries. In many cases the roll-out was weak and today Vatican Council II and its message have been challenged in some dioceses.

Chicago's Cardinal Bernardin was noted for his focus on "the seamless garment of life" and the duty of the Church to embrace people across their life span. We need to move beyond abortion as our only life focus in the Catholic Church and attend to the elderly, disabled, imprisoned, immigrants, etc. They saw the seminarians participate in the March for Life but none showed up for the Peace Marches during Vietnam.

Women are marginalized in our Church, and they need stronger voices and acceptance. Again, it was noted that the 10 people participating in our Synod group were all women. What will happen to our Church when older people/women are all gone?

We don't have younger people in our Catholic Church because they are not respected by the clergy. The clergy is misogynistic, and women feel this same rejection and lack of respect.

VOTF has brought financial transparency to the dioceses and is in the process of adding two more reviews: governance and child protection. If the laity had not brought these issues forward, the abuses could have gone on forever. Where is the transparency and accountability in our Church? If we (the Laity) had committed these abuses, we'd be in prison and yet the clergy got away with it for a long time.

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How painfully the Church handles divorce and remarriage. How we live & practice our faith and the teachings of Jesus. Accountability for Church leaders not participating or encouraging the synodal process. Need to make adult learning central and remember that very stage of life has different issues, and that one style of learning or worship is not enough.

Change must start with seminary training. The Church must enable and encourage women to assume leadership roles.

End racial, sexual and age discrimination. Acknowledge that men and women learn differently. Reinstate programs (e.g., Call to Action) that involved laity and were having a positive impact until a new bishop dropped them. The previous bishop had sold the bishop's mansion and spent much more time visiting parishes. The new bishop bought a new mansion.

We need unity, not division based on liberal vs. conservative political disagreements. Strive to find commonality and don't just talk about it—lead by example and act to enhance unity. Show respect for others and for their differing views.

The Eucharist should be unifying, not divisive. Adults in a parish should communicate with each other and learn from one another.

Parishes are scattered and need more communication. Activities of the parish council should be shared with the parish and their advice should be respected, not disregarded.

Parishes used to have multiple priests but now they often live alone. Reinstate regular meetings of priests to support each other and provide community. Separate administrative duties from spiritual/pastoral/shepherding and let members of the parish assist with administration. Revise seminary training to encourage this. Churches are no longer welcoming, but they don't even seem to realize it.

We must learn to communicate. If we are silent, nobody knows why we are leaving the Church. When pastors tell parishioners only to vote for candidates against abortion, or bishops limit synodal discussions (e.g., discuss only abortion) then we must speak out.

Need more attention on Catholic social teaching beyond abortion.

Last week's session raised the issue of a lack of joy in Church/within the Church. In error, I omitted any comment on it, but I believe that it fits well here. Why have we so neglected certain of the 'fruits of the spirit' that Paul proclaims in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

More specific to the question was concern over the "baptism wording issue," causing unnecessary pain. The comment, "I'm not sure that Jesus is terribly concerned with wording,

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God is so much bigger than those words. The Baptized will be saved; placing rules around God is the height of arrogance!!” A few years ago, a sister in an inner-city parish baptized in the name of the Creator, Sanctifier, and Redeemer.

Even well-educated Catholics are uncomfortable with any serious questioning.

We have been a Church of change, we need to keep pace with the culture, rather than be stuck in ‘quicksand.’

Vatican Council II is a foreign notion to many Catholics. Before we can move forward, we may need to move backward to those documents.

Pay attention to the people, who are not sheep, not brainwashed to pray, pay, and obey.

Attention needs to be given to seminaries. A contrast was made to the teaching of an English Benedictine monk, who challenged weak education, “... my job is to bring you closer to God, get you into the deep water, away from the side of the pool.”

Role of women at all levels. Active participation of the laity.

Refine and recommit to the mission of the Church.

The legalistic attitude used to resolve issues instead of relying on Scripture and the teachings of Jesus.

Church members’ ignorance of the history of change and development in the Church (“it hasn’t always been that way).

Term limits for bishops and the laity’s role in their selection. Seminary formation programs including healthy sexual growth.

The rationale and financing of the proposed Eucharistic Congress.

- ❖ **Younger people**--Without them we have no future. The Church needs to reach out to them.
- ❖ **Papal Encyclicals**--From *Rerum Novarum* to *Laudato Si* addressing existential threats to our Church and our planet.
- ❖ **Adult Education**--Laity and Seminaries
- ❖ **Women**--Diaconate and Priesthood
- ❖ **Church Structure**--Complete overhaul needed to be an inclusive discipleship of equals
- ❖ **Liturgy**--How we pray is how we believe.

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- ❖ **Clerical Abuse**—All should feel free and encouraged to report abuse.

- ❖ Seminary training
- ❖ Role of women
- ❖ Social justice: need greater emphasis
- ❖ Lay involvement and clericalism
- ❖ Try to increase church attendance after the pandemic to pre-pandemic levels
- ❖ Regaining social interaction at communal liturgy
- ❖ Less concern over rules, increase compassion

In recent years, many people have left the Church, reducing congregations. We must evangelize, but the people in charge often do not seem willing—or well equipped—to lead, leaving us to wonder how to evangelize. We can pray, we can witness by living as Christians. There are resources available (e.g., materials produced by the Paulist Fathers), but few parishes take advantage of them. Catholics tend to join Catholic groups, but we should join groups that reflect the wider community and “stand up and be Catholic in a world that is not Catholic.” There should be a greater emphasis on service, “because we are Christians.”

Teach an internal form of conscience; laity not trusted to have their conscience before God. Teach healthy discernment. Guide laity to trust themselves before God. Individual sovereignty before God.

Pay more attention to the Beatitudes. Focus more on the social justice aspects of our faith. Focus should be on loving each other and taking care of each other. Pay more attention to the teachings of Jesus and less on rules and circling the wagons to protect the Church.

Reach out more to the Catholic Community and beyond, including those who are baptized but not attending Mass. Actively extend invitations to others. Concern about our adult children not attending Mass regularly or at all. Reach out ecumenically with other faiths to help our communities and show we are a church of action, not just rules and regulations.

Be committed to focusing on the catastrophe of the sex abuse scandal. People are ashamed, tired of it, just want it to go away. We need to concentrate on how and why it happened and how to keep it from ever happening again.

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Transparency, especially regarding sex abuse and finances. We need open meetings on finances and decision making.

LGBTQA+ inclusivity is of major importance. Inclusive language: how we name God in our prayers, how often we say “brothers and sisters” = binary.

Need attention to mental health, especially for younger folks and especially since the pandemic. (Referenced a meaningful experience during a Mass where the priest shared his own mental health struggles and issues.)

Want the synod model to be the norm in the Catholic Church.

Hierarchy feels threatened and [is] trying to pull power back.

Women’s issues as a whole. Church has a narrow definition of what constitutes Catholic teaching on women’s health. Not conveyed in a pastoral way. Not realistic.

Issues of inclusive language

Don’t be afraid to admit to being part of the Church. Act well and [it] may encourage others to join with a beautiful prayerful enthusiasm.

All participants were concerned about priestly formation and had many examples of pre-Vatican Council II attitudes and actions on the part of newly ordained priests. They felt clerical treatment of all lay members of the Church was a problem, but lack of women’s voices and dismissive treatment of women were particularly widespread.

The American Church is split along political lines, and the problem is getting worse, not better. A significant number of American bishops, along with some lay people in my area, would impeach the Pope if they could. The press does not pay attention to the people who support the Pope and reporters seem to spend all their time covering the dissenters.

Many diocesan seminaries, including one right next to my parish church, are forming new priests and cassock-wearing seminarians who are firmly convinced of pre-Vatican Council II theology and have access to school children in my parish. One young priest told second graders that he really regretted having to let them receive communion in their hands instead of on their tongue, which [he claimed] was the correct way to receive the sacrament. My parish is not pre-Vatican Council II and my pastor promotes dialogue but he is getting close to retirement and I fear what our next pastor will be like.

Too many priests, especially younger ones, are arrogant, not pastoral.

Racial injustice within the church needs more attention.

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- ❖ We need to pay more attention to the role of women in the Church. Yes, it is good that Pope Francis wants to officially recognize the role of women as acolytes, lectors, and catechists. Likewise, it is good that he is making it possible for members of religious orders, women Catholic theologians, and women with expertise on economics to serve on important committees in Rome, including the Roman curia itself. But a handful of women cannot change an organization which is sexist to the point of misogyny. Why should “modern liberated women” be denied the diaconate and priesthood? There is no theologically sound argument for this exclusion.
- ❖ We need to press for married clergy in view of a worldwide shortage of priests.
- ❖ We need to object vocally or by way of letter when social justice programs like “Just Faith” are rejected as “not Catholic enough.” When a social justice program espouses Christ’s essential message of love of God and people, it should be supported.
- ❖ We need to nurture Black communities and Black Catholics, encouraging them to celebrate the Eucharist in ways which mean the most to them. There are over 3,000,000 Black Catholics in America, and yet “we” (White America) know so little about their spiritual and material needs.
- ❖ We need to serve the poor and hungry, irrespective of the faith community and in a way that acknowledges and respects them.
- ❖ We need to demand a more inclusive Church that has room for divorced Catholics, members of the LGBTQA+ communities, women who want to be deacons or priests, and the poor—especially the poor. Jesus was well aware of the chasm that separated the rich from the poor in his day and age. As much as possible, we should feed the hungry, shelter the homeless (including migrants and immigrants), and bring solace and a measure of joy to the elderly and mentally ill.
- ❖ We should develop vibrant faith formation programs for our young people, permitting them to ask deep questions about their meaning and purpose in life. Indoctrination must be avoided. It is the enemy of genuine education.

What issues in the Church do we need to pay more attention to? [Scribe included each response.]

I think there are five burning questions, in order of importance:

1. Ordination of women deacons.
2. Get rid of mandated celibacy—I am convinced of this, especially after reading the book by Richard Sipes on priesthood and also the Donald Cozzens book on the state of priesthood today.

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3. Diocesan Finance Council must adhere to Canon law.
4. Appointment of bishops—laity should have a strong voice in appointment.
5. Roles for marriage need to be changed. A number of friends of mine are former Catholics because they got divorced and found themselves excluded. Go back and look at the Scriptures. I think what Jesus was talking about differs from what we have today. It's something that is burned into my psyche at this point.

Another issue is engaging young people. There won't be a future Church if we don't engage them. I also am concerned that we do not engage with the needs of the times. In Vatican Council II we had a whole constitution that spoke about the needs of the time. But today we never talk about these needs. Hardly anyone in any parish is talking about the issues or even praying about them. The parishes need to hear these discussions. I will give you an example. I and a number of people now follow the online Masses at St. Cecilia's, with Fr. John Unni. He speaks about everything that is current, he brings it into the homily; we need more of this. Overall, we need more openness, less regimentation, less emphasis on abortion. The rigid structures are not helping the Church.

“Why can't we simply go back to Jesus? To His messages of compassion, inclusion. We should include real life in the homilies. We should pray Intentions for people today who are suffering, include the social justice issues. We should be hearers of the Word and doers of the faith.”

The whole purity code of the Church just sucks the life out about the message of Jesus, and does not emphasize our Christ life, and there are so many people who feel they are failures because they don't meet all the little rules, instead of focusing on the big needs.

The Catholic Church has changed from an immigrant church with many people who struggled economically to one now with lots of people who have money, and I feel that they are funding this whole trend to conservative voices. The needs and voices of the little people are squashed. ... We need some pressure against that from the top down.

We should have services that are relevant to the times.

- ❖ Clericalism is still present and thriving (not good).
- ❖ Priests should have the choice to marry.
- ❖ The role of women
- ❖ The lack of inclusivity: define universality. Does this term mean conversion of the whole world to Catholicism or that the Church should be inclusive?

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- ❖ The need to be more selective of who is accepted after applying to the priesthood. There are many priests today who should not be priests. The Church also needs to be less restrictive of who can be priests; women and married men.
- ❖ The formation of the clergy in the seminarians is deficient. The attitudes engendered are elitism and superiority. The emphasis is to produce priests to preserve Catholicism (but with a pre-Vatican Council II slant). The laity are not an important factor or consideration. Patriarchy is preserved as a cultural characteristic of the clergy.
- ❖ Seminarians are not taught to be pastoral. The candidates are cloistered with little reference to the secular world, and as a result many become dictators rather than shepherds.
- ❖ Equality and service are the purer motivators of the clergy, but these qualities are not promoted into strong positions, if at all. Take the image of a circle, traveling together, rather than a triangle. The circle is the original model of early Christianity, and is still available today (but not used so often).
- ❖ Women deacons are to be encouraged, but women priests may not be necessary. Additionally, further thought should be given to the treatment of transgendered people.

- ❖ Relating to people with mutual respect
- ❖ Realistic and not antiquated attitudes about divorce and remarriage
- ❖ Equality for women
- ❖ Clericalism
- ❖ Inclusion vs. exclusion
- ❖ Loving attitude, not shame and fear
- ❖ Outreach to adult children (
- ❖ Programs for preschoolers
- ❖ Accommodations to young families that makes them feel welcome
- ❖ Servant leadership
- ❖ Shared leadership
- ❖ Vocation discernment-recognition of marriage as a vocation
- ❖ The processes on diocesan levels for reporting sexual abuse.
- ❖ Bishop level female leaders

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❖ Married priests

Selection of Bishops. We have experienced bishops who are non-responsive, who fail to keep the diocese informed, who fail to invite and welcome lay input and collaboration, and who act as if they are not accountable to anyone other than the Pope himself.

The laity should have a voice/role in the selection of their diocesan Bishop. We need mandatory synodal diocesan pastoral councils.

The separation of the formation of clergy for pastoral ministry from that of the laity. This separation is not necessary and maintains an artificial barrier. Men and women, clergy, and laity should study theology together and participate together in ministry formation programs. Synodal collaboration is the norm and will provide an organic basis for resolving issues of the ordination of women and the necessity of celibacy for the Roman priesthood.

Synodality afterward and going forward. How are we to maintain, build in, educate and form for, and in governance make real, our reality as a synodal church, including clarifying its underlying ecclesiology? See [Prof. Rafael] Luciani's *Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding*.

All agreed that the leadership of today's Church needs to be more pastoral with an emphasis on servant leadership and less about Catholic rules. The way the Church is governed needs to be updated via Canon law revisions regarding structure at all levels, especially what would empower the laity in leadership roles in areas of management and finances. The leadership of the Catholic Church today needs to include women, married men, multi-racial, ALL regardless of sexual orientation. The leadership of the Catholic Church should no longer be restricted (and limited) to single men.

Several participants emphasized that seminary training needs to be restructured to emphasize becoming "pastoral," with a modern style of leadership that includes social skills. Everyone involved needs to learn to dialogue, we must all be welcoming and inclusive and be willing to listen to the experiences of all the people, the laity.

We as laity need to be informed, educated, and empowered about "our" personal responsibility in being church.

Allow women to be priests; allow married people to be priests; make our churches more welcoming to "outsiders" and to those on the margins.

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The Church seems to have shifted away from its earlier commitment to social justice and now emphasizes personal spirituality and personal morality—especially sexual morality. One participant reported that his diocese actively discouraged participation in programs of the Just Faith Ministries. (“Not Catholic enough.”)

Local churches need to go beyond preaching and find ways to help parishioners actually get involved in social justice activities. They need to work harder to form ecumenical connections with other Christian churches, and to partner with churches in lower income neighborhoods and in developing countries, to “experience poverty” and help to alleviate it. Several participants had participated or knew people who had participated in such partnerships and spoke of their “eye opening” effects, especially for young people. There was a general feeling that the American hierarchy, far from supporting initiatives like these, were arguing about things like the Latin Mass, and that seminaries were turning out priests “from Vatican I.”

Churches must look beyond the people in the pews and encourage members to walk in solidarity with people who are marginalized. Focus less on the rule-based obligations and emphasize the obligation to reach out to those in need in the community. “It has to start locally.” People are afraid to take that initiative and they need encouragement. Priests are often also afraid, fearing the authority of the Church with its emphasis on rules. The result is widespread apathy in congregations. We should all “live more out of faith and less out of fear.”

- ❖ We need to give women more positions of power and influence in the Church. Women already serve as lectors, catechists, and acolytes. There is no convincing reason why they cannot serve as deacons and, yes, priests. Many parishes would benefit if women could give homilies. One participant said she had been tremendously moved when a woman, whose infant had been killed by neighborhood dogs, gave a homily on drawing positive meaning from her experience.
- ❖ We need to provide men (and in the future, women) with the option to be married priests. Celibacy should not be a requirement for the priesthood.
- ❖ We need to make Eucharistic celebrations as vibrant, welcoming, and diverse as possible. It is in the Eucharist that we have a chance to feel what it really means to be the Body (and Blood) of Christ. For this reason, we need to get young people into the pews of our churches, inviting them to teach older people how to love, how to be “instruments” of peace and social justice.
- ❖ We need to confront the issue of clericalism head on. “Father” does not always know best. The Laity “enable” clericalism to the extent that they fail to ask

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questions courageously and to demand, as a right and responsibility, a greater role in the Church. Our times are not Medieval times. The laity are well-educated and well spoken. They can master the intricacies of Canon Law, the depth and breadth of Church dogmas and doctrines, and the history of a Church with sinners as well as saints.

- ❖ We need to confront our clerics about their plans to continue Pope Francis's synodal mission. Some diocese(s) in the United States have conducted many well-organized and well-motivated "listening" sessions, but other diocese(s) have done nothing or next to nothing about "the Synod." All too many Catholics don't know what a synod is, or how and why to participate in it.

- ❖ Deficit in number of priests: Celibacy requirement and absence of ordained women.
- ❖ Vocations: There are many called to serve; who are answering the call?
- ❖ High amount of sacrifice to become a priest; many barriers. Why has lack of vocations become such a problem now?
- ❖ Problematic male-female dynamic in the Church; and problematic priest-lay dynamic prevalent.
- ❖ Succession planning to take the Church into the future: children are not being raised in the Church as so many parents have left. What will be the future of the Church?
- ❖ People leaving the Church: children are brought to sacraments but not to Mass. How does this affect development of a spiritual life?
- ❖ Lack of community experience in recent years compared to past parish life. How can this be re-captured?
- ❖ Church changing from communal church experienced in our earlier years: Do people recognize the church today as Catholic?
- ❖ Feeling tethered to the Church but simultaneously hypocritical to belong while being critical of many aspects of the Church. Where else can we go?
- ❖ Root issue is the stance on sexuality, which affects many aspects in the Church.
- ❖ Authoritarianism: We need to look at ourselves as Christians, not just Catholic, and learn from other denominations to be more "democratic."

- ❖ The influence of money

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- ❖ Racism
- ❖ Lack of creating a welcoming feeling
- ❖ Need to change the attitude of the Church towards development of faith in its members
- ❖ Need to encourage members to question, read, discuss
- ❖ One participant indicated that her parish is inclusive, and she considers the pastor a friend; this is to be encouraged; gave example of a sign in the women's restroom that some considered offensive, and pastor asked two women to check it out and it was changed.
- ❖ Some people are devout in practice, but this is not reflected in thinking or actions.
- ❖ Don't ask Catholics to check their brains when they enter a church.

Need married priests

Seeking a "Gray Zone" between the Progressive-Conservative divide

Immigration

More participation by the Laity

Making the Church more relevant to the youth

The loss of members, especially our young.

Clericalism. Priests/bishops are out of touch with those they serve. Clergy fail to proactively seek parishioner input. We want transparency and accountability to laity.

Clergy Formation and Development. We want theological education to be grounded in the principles of the Second Vatican Council. We want Pastoral formation to inculcate the habit of working together with the laity and working ecumenically with other secular and religious programs.

Homilies are a serious universal problem. Simply because a man is ordained to preside over the community's sacramental celebrations and to give God's forgiving love and healing does not automatically enable him to preach a meaningful homily. The People of God need and deserve better. We want scripture related to our daily lives and the challenges of discipleship locally and internationally.

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Inclusivity. We want recognition of women's God-given vocation to celebrate our sacraments and to open God's Word to us and to serve in higher governance positions in our church.

We want LGBTQA+ Catholics to receive the sacraments with us and we want enforcement of their civil rights in the public sector. In this way, we witness to God's radical inclusivity and are proactively welcoming.

Session 2/Question 2

2. Who is left out or suffering today? Who are at the margins?

- ❖ Those with healthcare needs
 - ❖ Those with economic struggles
 - ❖ LGBTQA+ folks
 - So many other denominations have rainbow flags on their signs.
 - St. Cecelia's parish in Boston has a really active LGBTQ ministry that is welcoming. Because their leadership knows how to delegate!
 - ❖ Those who speak in other languages.
 - ❖ Young people who want to focus on ideals and how we should impact the world/shape the world, focusing on social justice, but so many parishes don't make space for that
 - ❖ People who no longer identify as Catholic
 - ❖ Black Catholics/ Black community
 - ❖ Ex-prisoners
 - ❖ Women from governance and leadership roles
 - ❖ Nuns and the disparity between salaries for men and for women workers in the Church
- *****
- ❖ LGBTQA+, African Americans, the Incarcerated, Indigenous Americans, Central American Migrants, and others.
 - ❖ Sexual abuse victims. Faithful priests of integrity.
 - ❖ The USCCB must publicly advocate for the needs of the poor and dedicate resources to help them.
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Black and Hispanic Catholic parishes often have very limited resources but have strong communities and have welcoming, joyful liturgical celebrations. We need to reach out to and support Black, Hispanic, and other poor parishes.

Those in bad marriages are insulted and diminished by the Church and officially barred from receiving communion. If communion is not only for the perfect, why should they be excluded? They are marginalized and need to be welcomed and supported—for example, one wonderful man, married outside of church who runs service programs for children. We need to stop and look at what we are doing and ask what would Christ do.

Would Jesus condemn LGBT people or people who are struggling financially and use contraceptives to try to support the children they have?

LGBTQA+ people. The Church still teaches that homosexuals are “intrinsically disordered.” But this is simply a minor variation in human sexuality. Young people see that and cannot accept the church’s stance on this. Also:

Divorced Catholics

Women who have had abortions

Undocumented immigrants

Global warming, the environment [is not a major consideration but should be]

- ❖ People who are the victims of sexual abuse, their families, and friends.
- ❖ People who are members of the “second sex,” that is, women
- ❖ People who are rejected because they are members of one or more of the LGBTQA+ communities
- ❖ People who are the victims of systemic racism
- ❖ People who are poor, without a home, and/or lacking adequate education and healthcare
When people are suffering, it is difficult for them to love. Economic justice should be one of the Church’s central concerns.
- ❖ People who are young parents, especially single young parents
Oftentimes, it seems that the Church is designed for people who have the time and money to worship. Left out are the people who are struggling to make ends meet and who find it very difficult to supply even the basic needs of their children.
- ❖ People who have physical and/or mental disabilities
Relatively few churches can adequately accommodate people in wheelchairs or

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who have impaired vision or hearing. The needs of the elderly will increase as people live into their 80s or even 90s.

All people are in one way or another left out or marginalized by the Church.

COVID-19 has simply increased the distance between parishioners. Suspicion and mistrust increase as feelings of acceptance and community decrease.

- ❖ Women who are called to the priesthood.
- ❖ LGBTQA+ persons—our language about them is so harsh
- ❖ Young adults

Almost everybody: our youth, the divorced/remarried, those co-habiting, the LGBTQIA+, young families, the mentally ill, women leaders, the imprisoned, and the disabled. Also, immigrants, people of other religions—calling all Muslims terrorists. We do not live out Catholic social-justice except in some of the parishes. But it is not endorsed by the hierarchy.

Women!

Anyone who inculcated the belief that we are all bad somehow, not worthy, because we are told we are not good Catholics, rather than feeling God's love.

- ❖ Those who differ from the majority or do not fit into the “mold” in economic, social and sexual areas are seen as outcasts and oftentimes are ostracized, including immigrants, refugees from war-torn areas, those who live in poverty, victims of abuse of any type, those who think differently from our perspective, those who experienced abortions, victims of clergy sexual abuse and their families, and those who experience damage to their faith due to the clergy sexual abuse.
- ❖ Vulnerable populations, including LGBTQA+, youth, ex-prisoners, and veterans.
- ❖ Children and youth are not seen as integral to the church and are often excluded.
- ❖ **In some places, those who want to follow Pope Francis are excluded.**
- ❖ Those who the Church drives away; although God is forgiving, the Church does not provide avenues for re-entry.
- ❖ Parishioners who attend liturgies/contribute funds but are not engaged with parish activities, that can be seen as superficial and not directed at the needs of all peoples.

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- Homogenous composition of parish council members excludes those of different cultures or those who are not of the governing group.
- ❖ Clergy who speak out for church reform, resulting in a divided clergy that leads to exclusivity of leadership.
- ❖ The exclusion of differing expressions of art, such as icons of cultural significance to some but not all parishioners.
- ❖ Question: what comprises a welcoming, diverse community?
 - Are all welcomed as who they are without expectation that they will “fit into the mold” established by other parishioners?
 - Need to re-think how we view differences in others, including those who can be seen as sinners and outcasts, e.g., LGBTQ+ and divorced folks; there is a need perhaps to re-structure what we understand as sin.

- ❖ The clerical power structure is such that [those] left out [are] all who are not “in.” There is a dualism: conservatives fight inclusion, creating tension and a perpetuation of those on the margin.
- ❖ Some Catholics find the necessity to form and foster splinter lay groups to deal with the issues of the marginalized, partially due to the inaction of church leaders.
- ❖ The youth may also be marginalized, especially where faith formation is out of touch with the times, and there are no significant post-Confirmation structures which interest the youth.
- ❖ Women are unquestionably plagued by the traditional Church which is “not an attractive place.”

Young people are disappearing and are angry and “ho-hummish” about religion. We need to do a total reorganization to get the young back because they often see no sense in belonging to the Church.

The Universal Church is not welcoming.

People of Color, immigrants, young people, etc. are on the margins. It is an uphill battle for our parishes to have quality programs with all these different focuses, so people just drift away because they don't feel like they belong.

People who are on the margins are those who are different, the poor, children, and LGBTQ's.

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When we were growing up, our parish, parish school, and the sacraments were the center of our lives and community. Now people don't feel invited to sit at the table and don't trust the Church. They are disillusioned.

We have priests on the margin because they may not fit in with the prevailing culture in their diocese. Some have been pushed aside and not given the best parishes because they have spoken out.

One priest was marginalized after he turned in his predecessor for embezzlement. Other diocesan priests treated him like he was the problem, not the priest who committed the crimes. Even though the bishop acknowledged grave sin was committed, the emphasis continued to be on protecting the priest who committed the grave sin.

- ❖ Divorced and remarried Catholics
- ❖ Single adults
- ❖ The poor in our parishes
- ❖ Men who are not priests
 - [Men] are often less active in church ministries than in the past (no longer running pancake breakfast, etc.). Knights of Columbus may be an exception.
- ❖ LGBTQA+
- ❖ People who don't meet a parish's minimal standards
- ❖ Refugees
- ❖ Immigrants
- ❖ People of other faiths are sometimes treated like 2nd class citizens.
- ❖ Anyone can be marginalized by a Church leadership that sees people through the lens of power and control and cannot accept all as Children of God.

Women, whose words and thoughts are ignored; gays; lesbians; people in poverty.

We preach care for the poor, but we prohibit birth control that could help those who cannot sustain large families, which can be devastating.

The question was posed to a participant, "How can I bring my female child into a church that does not respect women?"

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Single women who find themselves pregnant; divorced who are not welcomed if they remarry. Another participant commented that for a friend the annulment process was quite painful.

Confirmed women religious are often mistreated and disrespected. Women priests who exist; the film, “Pink Smoke was an eye opener.

Not enough Catholics understand social justice.

The danger of the influence of the Koch brothers (now brother) buying influence in Catholic Universities, particularly schools of business; the Napa Institute, their money, and their association with bishops who actively oppose Francis.

People who have left the church because of a negative experience; the abused are still suffering.

Women, LGBTQA+, lapsed/former Catholics; victims of sexual abuse by priests

Teen-age women and their relationship with their mothers

- ❖ Former Catholics; women; priests who are non-clerical and very pastoral
- ❖ LGBTQA+; divorced and remarried without annulment
- ❖ The CEOs (Christmas and Easter Only Catholics)
- ❖ Refugee/homeless/the poor, young people

- ❖ LGBQTA+
- ❖ Divorced people
- ❖ Women
- ❖ Loss of trust in priesthood
- ❖ Nuns/religious women
- ❖ “Nones”: those who have left and now profess no particular religion
- ❖ Browns and blacks (this might be a regional problem, more one region than another
- ❖ Youth and young adults, marginalized since the church does not speak the same language

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In recent years, many people have left the Church, reducing congregations. We must evangelize, but the people in charge often do not seem willing—or well equipped—to lead, leaving us to wonder how to evangelize. We can pray, we can witness by living as Christians. There are resources available (e.g., materials produced by the Paulist Fathers), but few parishes take advantage of them. Catholics tend to join Catholic groups, but we should join groups that reflect the wider community and “stand up and be Catholic in a world that is not Catholic.” There should be a greater emphasis on service, “because we are Christians.”

But we should fix the problems first, such as the discrimination against LGBTQA+ people, unmarried people with children seeking baptism, and Black Catholics. These are people “at the margins” and they are often made to suffer by the actions of Church officials.

In many ways, women are also “at the margins” in the Church.

We should end the divisiveness (and politicization) caused by an undue stress by bishops and priests on issues like abortion and gay marriage. The Church often seems obsessed with sexuality.

The Church should publicly confess its role in the sex abuse crisis and should make restitution. Instead, it has defended itself like a secular corporation.

Church finances should be transparent on all levels.

To attract new people, we must be a genuine faith community.

Seminary formation must be changed. Seminarians should spend time performing service in real community churches before being ordained.

Parishes should do more to welcome new people, including immigrants, but also others who are new to the parish.

Get rid of clericalism and the authoritarian structure of the Church. All consecrated individuals should make decisions by asking, “What would Jesus do?”

Clergy should adhere to published codes of conduct, and accountability should be enforced by the laity (e.g., a diocesan board of directors).

Replace clericalism with true collaboration, mutual respect, and empowerment of the laity. Make it easier for ordinary Catholics to get to know the bishop and for the bishop to be “closer to the flock.”

The LGBTQA+ community and their allies feel left out. Advocates/allies feel their church is not a Church for all, and the Church marginalizes those who want it to be a Church for all.

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Women are kept to the margins.

Immigrants suffering housing insecurity because of being displaced from their homes. We need to welcome immigrants.

People with disabilities are not accommodated or welcomed. Need more accessibility both in terms of attitude and physical access. Folks with mental illness need to be welcomed. Folks with less obvious disabilities need to be included, e.g., ADHD, autism.

Many elders have given up being Catholic because they couldn't follow the rules and just gave up. The damage over the years is still there and needs to be understood. Some feel either damned or that there just isn't a God, so just don't think about it any more.

Divorced Catholics. Can I go to Communion knowing that I am a good person??

Victims of priest sex abuse may receive compensation, then are told not to talk about it.

People of Color.

Women who have had abortions—no one talks about them or welcomes them.

WE are the Church. If all these people are on the outside, who is on the inside?

Women are excluded from the grace of the sacrament of ordination. Ordination to the diaconate is being withheld from women even though there is strong evidence that it has been the Church's practice in the past.

All laity are marginalized, especially when their gifts, opinions, and contributions are disregarded by their pastors.

Dismissing women's voices is a particular problem with some newly ordained priests who may have never had a woman professor or supervisor and have had *no* preparation for working with women in a parish environment.

The Pope has broadened the nature of leadership in the Curia, with women being allowed to lead dicasteries. Women must be allowed to teach in all seminaries.

Divorced Catholics who want to give marriage another shot. One-third of Canon Law is devoted to questions about annulments/divorces, contraception, and the "complementarity" of men and women.

Member of the LGBTQA+ communities and trans-people. Although there may be good reasons to ban trans-women from competing in sports events, this is a sports issue [and] not a theological issue.

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Undocumented immigrants and migrants who are desperate to give their families a better life than the one from which they are fleeing. This issue is of great importance to the Catholic Hispanic community. But it is also of much significance to Afghans, Vietnamese, Somalians, and, most recently, Ukrainians.

Black Catholics who remain committed to the Church despite Black non-Catholics' criticism of them. Why practice a religion whose institutions are very white and European?

Catholics who have left the Church in anger or disappointment. These are some of the “sheep” that the Good Shepherd is searching for. Helping them would be a good idea.

The divorced. LGBTQ. Transgender individuals. I worked in genetics before I retired, and one thing we find there is that there are many biological inputs into what makes up gender, it is not just chromosomes. So, they need to be treated with understanding and respect.

There is support for children in Catholic schools for religious education and programs but not much for the kids going to public schools. I think there should be more support for children going to public schools—don't leave them out.

- ❖ The Church today is less about transformation into Christ and Christ's vision of others than it is about purity codes and exclusion; the dualistic judging so prevalent [in society today] today, we are *supporting* that instead of helping solve it ... we are not teaching people to be compassionate.
- ❖ Minorities are left out—someone once said Sunday mornings are the most segregated time of the week.
- ❖ Also, people in poverty
- ❖ Also, the abortion issue—bishops wanting to throw people out and deny them the Eucharist.
- ❖ The lack of women in councils and on other levels in the parish. What a loss! Women have so much to offer but are not allowed to. We need to re-educate the clergy!
- ❖ The mere thought of a movement within the Church that would regress back in time to try and erase the reformation of Vatican II, is heartbreaking. It is mirroring the divided world we are living in today. The Church should be a beacon of hope that draws the masses, not a spotlight seeking to separate and alienate its children.

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- ❖ Jesus never spoke out or against:
 - LGBTQTA+
 - Divorced
 - The Poor
- ❖ The clerical power structure is such that who is left out is all who are not “in”. There is a dualism: conservatives fight inclusion, creating tension and a perpetuation of those on the margin. The identity of the excluded groups depends in part on the local culture.
- ❖ Women are unquestionably plagued by the traditional Church, which is “not an attractive place.”

- ❖ Divorced
- ❖ Those hurt by Church and clergy
- ❖ First Nation peoples
- ❖ LGBTQA+

- ❖ Survivors of sexual abuse by priests. Pastors must work with SNAP [Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests].
- ❖ LGBTQA+ persons and organizations. Protect their civil rights.
- ❖ The scandal of denying the sacraments to the divorced must be stopped.
- ❖ Women who have not had abortions and are suffering

More basically, we must acknowledge two classic Roman Catholic defense mechanisms to dealing with these challenges: denial of their existence, and repression of our feelings about them.

We must also recognize that people no longer go to the clergy with their problems and also have other sources of theological understanding and guidance in moral matters.

What are adults looking for when they leave the Roman Catholic Church? Where do they find religious inspiration?

How are we passing on our faith tradition and what are we passing on to the next generations? VOTF members are overwhelmingly seniors.

Why are we importing foreign priests, many of whom cannot be understood? To insist there is a priest shortage in the U.S. is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. There are many in our

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communities with vocations but who are prevented by theological and canonical obstacles that must be dealt with rather than importing foreign priests.

Those who are left out or suffering are all those who are currently at the “edge of the Church,” women (including those who have had an abortion), the disabled (physically and/or mentally), divorced men and women, LGBTQIA individuals, ex-clergy, those who have left, secular world, those who are seeking, pro-choice, youth, Protestants, immigrants and refugees, and also the people who cannot accept change—those who resisted Vatican Council II as well as those who don’t want to revert to pre-Vatican Council II practices.

Many of the attendees feel isolated, lacking love and support, even feeling hostility toward today’s Church when priests care more about the rules than about the people and their needs. They feel left out and are suffering.

Apparently, the only folks who are NOT feeling left out are those who are satisfied with attending weekly Mass but have no other interest in belonging to a church community; those people consider that their spiritual needs are being met by attending Mass one hour per week.

Those who are left out or suffering because of the Church’s actions are divorced and remarried Catholics, the entire LGBTQIA+ community, including parents of LGBTQIA+ children, and women who aspire to the priesthood. The Church’s focus on those groups distracts from Catholic outreach to those who are suffering because of societal evils: the impoverished, the homeless, the mentally and physically disabled, addicts, street people, and victims of racial prejudice.

People at the margins of the Church—consigned there by Church teachings and their interpretation—include women, divorced Catholics, LGBTQIA+ Catholics, and others. This makes the Church seem more elitist and oppressive; it distracts Catholics from attending to the needs of people who are marginalized by societal problems, such as poverty, racial and cultural discrimination, addiction to drugs and alcohol and incarceration. The church seems to have “embraced a culture of taking care of the people in the pews.”

The clergy sex abuse scandal has made this inward-looking culture worse. Fear by families (of danger to their children) has combined with fear from clergy (of misunderstandings and accusations) and has led to pastors turning down opportunities to initiate such programs as day care centers, summer camps, and religious education. Some churches “have stepped so far away from youths that young people are now marginalized.” Churches must do a better job of reaching out to families of young children while still doing everything they can to keep people safe.

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Self-selecting non-participants. Every group can choose its own parish.

Educated people are left out by the lack of discussing anything with them.

The divorced, LGBTQ, the incarcerated.

Those who do not participate because they assume that the formal teachings that excluded them have not been changed.

- ❖ One participant humorously said that sometimes she thinks that anyone who is not ordained is relegated to the margins of the Church.
- ❖ Many participants said that poor people, LGBTQA+ people, migrants and immigrants, people of color, divorced people, single-parent families, people with disabilities, and old people exist at the margins of the Church. The Church needs to confront its own racism, classism, and sexism as well as society's.
- ❖ Some participants said that the Church must stop shaming people for their "sexual sins." Truth be told, the Church has never addressed the issue of human sexuality positively enough.

ALL OF US are in the margins: many groups are excluded even at the parish level where one focal lay group conspicuously excludes others. Catholics are more divisive than supportive.

Power of parish priest: over parish decisions; over acceptance of divorced or gay, at times to the exclusion of the poor/homeless because energy is placed on other less Gospel-based issues.

Denying access to the Eucharist: at funerals to those not faithful Catholics; in the political arena the Eucharist is weaponized, such as publicly denying communion to political figures and not following Pope Francis' statements to the contrary.

- ❖ We are missing the opportunity to welcome back members and evangelize.
- ❖ Parish closings and consolidation of churches into one parish with one pastor and pastoral team; yet mass attendance falling.
- ❖ Competition among combined parishes to maintain their own properties.
- ❖ Financial problems in many combined parishes are becoming a serious issue.
- ❖ Changing culture in many parishes.
- ❖ People shop for a parish because of a priest.

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- ❖ Bureaucracy at diocesan level: slow to act on and speak out on current issues.

- ❖ Women
- ❖ Those looking for a real Christian community
- ❖ LGBTQA+ Catholics
- ❖ Divorced and remarried Catholics; example of a mother who corrected her daughter when she was critical of a divorced friend she saw going up to Communion, urging compassion [rather than] criticism
- ❖ Priests and nuns who have left their orders
- ❖ Older priests
- ❖ Those who are not permitted to do what they are called to do

People who leave

Divorced

Women

LGBTQA+

People of other faiths

People who disagree with us

The suffering, those left out, and the marginalized include:

- ❖ Our planet and its eco-systems.
- ❖ *Locally and internationally*: the economically marginalized, people of color, the homeless, the incarcerated, the seriously and chronically disabled, the elderly who live alone. Young people, people with alternative lifestyles, people without access to health care. Refugees.
- ❖ And *in many locations*, young women and women in general.
- ❖ *In the Church*, women denied the priesthood, married men denied the priesthood, and priests denied marriage; divorced men and women denied access to the Eucharist and made to feel judged and unwelcome. Faithful priests who are not fully reinstated after sexual abuse allegations against them have not been proven civilly and ecclesiastically.

Session 2/Question 3

3. If I could change one thing in the universal Church that I think would help us all better follow Christ, it would be _____

- ❖ More involvement of women in the power structures/leadership
 - There are many women chancellors in Catholic dioceses; does a chancellor count as part of the power/leadership structure? Do dioceses score higher for child protection if the chancellor is a woman? Does the age of the bishop correlate?
 - Although there are many, we should have more women chancellors.
- ❖ Discriminatory pay scales for women in lay ministry
 - Paid lay ministers in parishes: The majority are women and one contributor has heard priests say, “Oh, we’re looking for a woman so we can pay her a lower salary,” which is offensive! Women do the bulk of lay ministry—religious education, pastoral care, etc.
- ❖ Seminaries
 - Should not be cloistered because this is not helpful in the formation process. Boston College, for example, has a theology department and a school of ministry but they are separate. If they were united, if seminarians mixed with lay students, they would have a better view of what it takes to be a good pastoral leader. Everyone should have a voice, and everyone should be listened to—concern over which voices are heard (in seminaries and in the Synod!).
- ❖ Women’s ordination
 - Women need sacramental roles in the Church. To deny women [any of] the sacraments, you are denying women the opportunity for grace. Can the Church really limit God’s love and God’s blessings?
 - Women priests and women deacons are needed.
- ❖ Respect for the dignity of the individual
 - Innate respect for every human being in the sense that some humans are not better than other humans (clericalism).
 - Hierarchical and structural clericalism is innate in the church—offering respect to every member of the church would eliminate clericalism because it is, at core, a problem of disrespect or differential respect.
- ❖ Focus on the scripture at an individual level
- ❖ That the ideas of Pope Francis would trickle down to the majority of Catholics

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- The ideas he espouses and what he preaches (what actions we should take) do not make it all the way through the hierarchy of the church.

Do away with the hierarchy.

The Roman Church is not the only Church. Every individual is responsible for caring for their spiritual life and must decide where and how to nurture it before they can help and share with others.

Find a small community and share it with others.

To what reality does the phrase “the universal Church” refer? All those in communion with the Bishop of Rome? All those baptized in any and every Christian tradition (e.g., Western Protestant traditions, Eastern Orthodox Traditions, etc.).

Silence and absence of Church leaders who fail to speak out and be engaged publicly on social justice issues and fail to follow the example of Pope Francis doing so, and thus also fail to provide an example for us.

The Holy Spirit is with us in this meeting. The laity must take leadership. Change is from the bottom.

Recall that the original, pre-resurrection disciples called Jesus “Teacher,” and consider the wisdom of the Jewish congregational practice that recognizes rabbis as teachers and scholars of Torah. Each congregation chooses its own rabbi.

To recognize the unique power of contemplative prayer and how it can move the Church forward. It should support small (10-15 people) groups that focus on contemplative prayer in addition to other forms of prayer, not instead of them. This might be particularly helpful for young people.

To always point to Jesus and what he did, welcoming and forgiving. It should emphasize and live His unconditional mercy and love. Celebrate Mercy Sunday more prominently. This would be compelling and attractive to people who now see nothing beneficial in belonging to the Church. They would see the nature of Christ’s life in a welcoming Church.

To foster unity between priest and their people, not entitlement of clergy over laity. We were all called to be priests at our baptism, and the ministry of the ordained priest should be seen in the context of the priesthood of the baptized. Priests who harm children should never be protected.

To study and live the beatitudes.

Take advantage of the Prayers of the Faithful: adding our petitions; walking out in protest when offended (and saying why).

Pastoral Council (parish and diocesan) members need to be elected and not “rubber stamps” of the pastor/bishop. Parish Pastoral Council members should voice the concerns of the people they represent. The same goes for Financial Councils.

INCLUSION OF WOMEN in all aspects of church ministry and governance.

Examples of exclusion: (1) Trained as a prison minister, one woman rejected from the position as she was not “ordained.” She requested support from her pastor, as a Syrian Orthodox woman did the same thing with approval of her pastor, but pastor denied her request. (2) Photograph of MDiv class at a seminary erased the picture of one woman who earned the degree.

Need for education/formation for lay women to be financially supported.

St. Clare of Assisi, a follower of St. Francis, founded (along with her sister) the Poor Clares. She was the first woman to write A Rule of Life (monastic guidelines) for her order. How many people are aware of her influence and gifts?

If women were allowed to preach, people might return to hear a woman’s voice break open the Word of God after the Gospel.

Women are too often seen as the source for sin. Mary Magdalene was misnamed a prostitute.

Hypocrisy in the Church: Jesus welcomes all to the Table but His Church does not. One example: A person with a rainbow sash was denied Communion at Mass. This is not a sign of “all are welcome” and drives many away from the Church.

Where is the justice (described in Gal.3:28) in the Church’s teaching that “Boys have the possibility of receiving seven sacraments, but girls can only receive six.”?

Here is one more issue we had time for discussion:

People must be made aware of movements afoot that are unknown to many Catholics yet exert financial and political power that challenges Pope Francis and Vatican II theology.

- ❖ The USCCB is influenced when partnering with wealthy educational non-profit institutes that do not support the agenda of Vatican II.
- ❖ Awareness of such organizations and the money invested needs to be exposed and transparent.

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- ❖ Blogs such as <https://brandedcatholicism.wordpress.com> provide information to alert and inform others of potential unseen dangers to the Synodal process the Pope has called for.

Allow priests to marry to better understand their community, families, and their concerns.

To accept EVERYONE the way God accepts everyone. We are all sinners. We all walk crooked paths, not the straight and narrow.

Empowering the baptized to know and understand the weight of their baptism so the baptized know they were anointed priest, prophet, and king.

Seminary reform (as discussed last week) to include training in preparation of homilies in relation to our lives today.

Acknowledgement of women in the Church. They are not acknowledged for all the hard work and holiness of lay women.

Women priests and deacons.

Joy! We need more joy!

Young people today are taught critical thinking skills. But the Church says “pray and obey.” We need to invite in the younger people and we and the clergy need to listen to them!

More lay involvement in liturgy, especially lay homilists.

- ❖ Its emphasis on designating one or more persons the leaders and everyone else the followers.
- ❖ Its emphasis on doctrines and dogmas, rules and regulations. The Church needs to help people become more contemplative and spiritual. After all, Jesus periodically separated himself from the crowds to pray in silence.
- ❖ Its failure to open the diaconate and priesthood to women. Women are true disciples. They stood at the foot of the Cross and courageously visited the tomb of Jesus. If anyone is a feminist, it is Jesus who valued women as full persons in the world that largely viewed women as mere domestic servants and/or wombs to impregnate.
- ❖ Its failure to understand changes in science that require a reassessment of what it means to be a human person. In particular, the Church needs to take developments in genetics seriously. We live in a world where would-be parents can select their child’s sex and more. Moreover, talk about “designer babies” is not idle. If parents can select a healthy as opposed to an unhealthy child, is it wrong for them to do so?

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Theologians, natural scientists, and social scientists should gather (perhaps at the Vatican) to answer this question and other related questions.

- ❖ Its formation of priests. Jesus did not wall himself up in a “seminary” for years before proclaiming His good news. Candidates for the priesthood should be educated alongside women and men in the secular world. Priests are neither more holy nor more spiritual than the laity. At ordination, they are not “ontologically changed,” their nature remains the same as the nature of the men and women in the pews, so to speak. The role of the priest is to serve the members of his/her church—to see to it, that they have enough food, clothing, and shelter as well as adequate schooling in Church teaching.
- ❖ Its “narrow mindedness.” The Church needs to be more open to the insights of non-Catholic religious traditions. Interfaith dialog is much needed in a world that all too often pits one group of believers against another, as is the case between Christianity and Islam.

- ❖ Allow women deacons.
- ❖ Change how bishops are chosen.
- ❖ Change the structure to include more laity in decision-making and develop ways to listen more to the laity. Make the Church more of a bottom-up organization.
- ❖ More of an ecumenical emphasis.
- ❖ Emphasize that the relational is more important than the doctrinal.
- ❖ Where there is a shortage of priests, allow parishes to stay open with deacons or lay parish administrators as leaders.
- ❖ Make the Eucharist more relevant to the lives of the laity. Examples:
 - More movement during Mass, like liturgical dance
 - Allow Mass to be celebrated in a variety of locations – in homes, on beaches
 - More lay influence in music selection, prayers of the faithful, and other parts of the Mass.
 - Develop teams of “prayer warriors” who stand with the priest at the end of Mass to call all to continued prayer.

- ❖ We must focus on the abuse of power, but with humility and an openness to learning a new way. We need to open the hearts of the hierarchy so they truly want to make a change of heart.

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- ❖ Give the laity more say in selecting their bishops and improve formation in the seminaries.
- ❖ Respecting and supporting those who are on the margins.
- ❖ A sense of hospitality—we must learn to welcome ALL.
- ❖ Allow women to have power in the Church. Let women be priests and preachers—do that and you will have the best church the world has ever seen!

- ❖ Women's ordination or, at the very least, women deacons.
- ❖ Integration between activities (i.e., Christ like behavior) and the institutional Church (rules and regulations)
- ❖ More laity involved in sharing ideas and power
- ❖ Actual dialog where outcome is not preordained
- ❖ Power structure currently unable to move with the times. Need to flatten the bureaucracy. Need to lead with love.
- ❖ Less dogma, more community action/social justice
- ❖ Reach out ecumenically to other Christian churches

- ❖ **Participants expressed difficulty in limiting responses to one thing.**
- ❖ Forgiveness as a Church and to regain trust built on transparency and accountability.
- ❖ Follow the Franciscan model of all things equal before God, and the need for conversion from a tendency toward idolatry, male exclusivity, and authority in the clergy.
- ❖ Change of energy toward women as integral to the church in essential roles.
- ❖ Exclusive ordination of men.
- ❖ Lack of servant leadership, needed to be built on person-to-person relationships, reflecting the fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Clericalism: priests are put on a pedestal above others. The responsibility of the laity to not place clergy on a pedestal.
- ❖ Three doctrinal teachings that should be ignored because they have led to arrogance:
 - One true Church of Jesus Christ
 - Truth has not changed in 2,000 years

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- The Pope is infallible

- ❖ Adoption of emerging theologies; change the image of God, developing openness, acceptance of mercy and forgiveness (see Teilhard, Rohr)
- ❖ Break the impasse with women religious and women in general
- ❖ The abolition of clericalism in all its forms

We need to re-establish the goals of Vatican Council II and stop the backsliding from the original intent of the documents for the liturgy and Laity. We were so hopeful when Vatican Council II came out and it seemed the Church was going back to its roots. We need to have leadership in studying and reteaching those documents.

We need to consider organizing our parishes into smaller groups of 12-18 as a building block for helping people feel they are a part of a community. It worked in South America. Smaller groups create bonds and would address clericalism.

We need to return to Vatican Council II because it has been gradually removed from Church practices. In Vatican II parishes, the Laity feel empowered. The hierarchy in our Church needs to be reminded of our commitment to Vatican Council II.

Consider optional celibacy because there are not enough priests.

“Love thy neighbor” should be a focus. The nuns have consistently done this, and they have led the way. (The nuns are not under the control of the Bishop.)

Do away with Clericalism, recognize women, and give everyone a chance to participate.

There needs to be a profound effort at accountability and transparency because the coverups have hurt so many people. This has created loss and grief.

Are we a Vatican Council II Church or aren't we? The People of God are confused and disheartened by the divisions in the Church from the highest levels right down to the parishes. Why are the U.S. bishops generally not accepting of our Pope? What is going on?

- ❖ Use the Trinity as a model for community and leadership. God is relational, so we must be in in genuine relationships within our communities.
- ❖ Focus on the Beatitudes, seeing others as God sees them and not judging or categorizing others.
- ❖ Recognize and accept our brokenness and do not make the Eucharist conditional on perfection.

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- ❖ Fully implement Vatican Council II.
- ❖ Follow Pope Francis in focusing on people who are in pain or being overpowered. One example was his visit to the Russian embassy. In October 2019 Emeritus Pope Benedict asked the cardinals to remain faithful to Pope Francis.
- ❖ Follow Pope Francis and act to protect the environment.
- ❖ Encourage dialogue and real human relationships in our communities.
- ❖ Really change, don't just talk about changing.
- ❖ Listen to our voices—really *hear* us.
- ❖ Believe that we are all one and build relationships.
- ❖ Take Catholic social teaching seriously.

Improved education, communication, and the dissemination of information. Could even be provided even in snippets in the bulletin or local media.

Even the Baptized do not have a clear understanding of many issues, Vatican Council II for example. All Catholics and, where necessary, non-Catholics should be offered the opportunity to learn, use of local papers, even a brief paragraph encapsulating an issue with clarity. The example of a misunderstanding of the Sacrament of the Sick exists in most hospitals, leading to unnecessary stress on families.

The Hierarchy and Vatican should strive for a consistency in meaning.

A married Priesthood would ground priests in a more pastoral approach and not neglect social justice and allow a leading by action.

Emphasize Vatican Council II's Universal Call to Holiness.

Eliminate medieval clerical titles (e.g., Eminence, Monsignor, My Lord, etc.).

Remedy the disproportionate role old men have in church governance.

Ordain women.

Embrace climate change.

Bishops to assume primary role as shepherds (teaching and preaching), delegating administrative duties to vicars and/or lay staff. More visibility, transparency, and accessibility to their constituents.

Put an end to internecine divisions and return to fraternal correction and civil discourse.

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[*Sex abuse and child protection --*] Pledge adherence to the word and spirit of the Dallas Charter and embrace of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi's* norms as applied to Bishops.

Avoid even the appearance of engaging in “political activities” that may jeopardize the Church’s 501(c)(3) status.

- ❖ Optional celibacy
- ❖ Eliminate the distinction between priesthood and laity.
- ❖ Outsource/allow the administration of the 7 Sacraments to/by trained laity;
Examples: make infant baptism optional, modify the Sacraments of Penance from a personal one-on-one to a communal event, outsource/allow marriage outside the Church, eliminate annulment—a priest should be spiritual director or companion to his flock, not Sacraments Dispenser.
- ❖ Completely update the syllabus in seminary,
Examples: include getting to know other faiths; make Continuing Education of priests mandatory (like all other professionals)
- ❖ Update the Nicene Creed with 21st century knowledge and language
Examples: the changing understanding of God and creation, integrating theology with science according to John Paul II’s letter to the Director of Vatican Observatory on June 1, 1988. Modifying syllabus on seminarian training—lighter on history of theology and philosophy and heavier on cosmology, bioethics, inculturation, and other faiths that are much more relevant to the 21st century people.
- ❖ Re-examine the format of the Mass—how to carry out the “active, conscious, full participation” of the attendees? Suggestion: simplify the liturgy but streamline and enhance the Sunday readings making the process more interactive. Let selected laity do the homily (change the name to sharing/reflection). Laity can lead communion services.
- ❖ Give Parish Councils more power.
- ❖ Let everyone who wishes receive Communion.

- ❖ Married priests, women priests
- ❖ Listening before preaching
- ❖ Focus on belief, not rules
- ❖ More ecumenism, acceptance of other faiths
- ❖ Segmenting the markets, dealing with people as they are, where they are

- ❖ All Catholics would be active and vigilant in keeping children safe.
- ❖ Seminary formation would change.
- ❖ More women would be involved in seminary formation.
- ❖ The Synod would be a success and its implementation would increase lay involvement in the life of the Church.
- ❖ There would be more servant leaders among our priests. Priests should be more like Jesus—welcoming, not judging.
- ❖ There would be more women involved.
- ❖ Clericalism would end.

We need to open up the priesthood to women whose traditional ethics of care and relationships help the Church be more giving and loving, more worried about the plight of the “have-nots” than the privileges of the “haves,” and more apt to create networks of relationships than isolated silos, where each person is out for her/himself.

We need to address the issue of clericalism head-on. The laity should not be put off by high-ranking Church officials who claim that the “commonality” cannot “possibly appreciate the theological complexities they’ve spent decades learning and studying.” By virtue of the sacrament of Baptism every Catholic/Christian has been made “priest, prophet, and king.” The belief that priests are “ontologically changed” at their ordination is to be disputed rather than humbly accepted.

As much as possible, the laity should have full participation in the process of reviewing and selecting seminarians, priests, pastors, bishops, archbishops, and cardinals. Moreover, a significant number of the laity should have voting representation at episcopal conferences.

Ideally, the Vatican hierarchy should share more authority and responsibilities with regional and national episcopal conferences, retaining the right to veto decisions and actions that threaten the fundamental unity of the Church. Other sharing of Church power and responsibility are conceivable, but too numerous to discuss in a document of this type.

The “mystique” of the priesthood needs to be challenged. Priests are servants of the People of God. First, they are men; second, they are Catholics; and third, they are priests. They are not first priests, second Catholics, and third men. Like the laity, the clergy are sexual beings. For this reason alone, celibacy has to be questioned as a necessary condition for admission to the priesthood.

We need to overcome a strictly American view of the Church. The Internet is a gift of God, not the tool of the devil as some clerics maintain. All we need to do is click a few times on our computers or I-Phones, and we will be connected to the Church in Ireland, Italy, the Philippines, Australia, Germany, and so forth. The more perspectives we have on the Church, the more likely we can improve it. In this connection, it is very important to learn about the Church in Asia and Africa where the number of Catholics is booming.

We need to change seminarians' education. Although seminarians attend college with the laity—female as well as male—in some areas of America, they are sequestered. Moreover, after their “minor seminary” experience, most candidates for the priesthood complete the last years of their formation in an exclusively or nearly exclusively “male environment” studying theology, philosophy, Latin, Greek, sacred art, sacred music, homiletics, and so forth. The more we can eliminate a separate education for would-be priests, the better. As much as possible, seminarians should spend a significant amount of time in a parish environment, learning how demanding it is to be a servant of the People of God.

- ❖ To embrace the true and rich meaning of supporting ALL life, to take care of all people, of each other, not just focus on the abortion issue. We must do the spectrum.
- ❖ We can't “mandate” embracing all, but I think that embracing all should be the emphasis: Universal acceptance within the universal Church would help us all be more like Christ. Acceptance of each other, no matter what.
- ❖ It would be to give women a place at the table.
- ❖ I am passionately against mandatory celibacy. The exclusion of married priests has led to a lot of the sickness in the Church today.
- ❖ I agree with everything. I might add, too, opening up the reception of Communion to other denominations. I understand it is because they say the others don't believe in the Transfiguration—so give them a 10-minute instruction and if they accept it then fine!
- ❖ Teach the Bible in greater depth, so that the body of Christ better understands the true nature and application of God's word.

- ❖ Break the impasse with women religious and women in general; if not ordination, then women as homilists and other important roles. ***A structural change.***
- ❖ The abolition of clericalism in all its forms.

The current process for the selection of bishops.

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Adult religious education.

Break up the uniformity, not the unity; more freedom and flexibility at regional and national levels.

Focus more on what Jesus says rather than on who he is.

Many agree that the ONE thing to change is to enable women in leadership roles.

Allow married clergy, especially former priests.

Others expressed the ONE thing the participants would change would be for all bishops to support Pope Francis and Vatican Council II because it is the way they want to practice their faith.

As a Church, we all should revisit mercy and compassion and how we encounter and exhibit them.

Teaching people how to pray as a personal relationship with God, and also how to develop discernment skills.

Develop more of a sensitivity to the Church beyond the walls, less exclusive, more inclusive. Parish at the center of the work of compassion and justice, and the work of compassion and justice at the center of each parish. Openness to new and surprising voices.

Encourage the formation of small faith-sharing groups. There appeared to be a unanimous feeling that religious experience is most meaningful and most genuinely felt when it is shared with another person or with a small group of like-minded people.

One participant spoke of how her husband accompanied her and helped her during her conversion to Catholicism.

Another described a priest who begins his homily by sitting down immediately after reading the Gospel and inviting the members of the congregation to comment on what they heard. He then summarizes what they have said. Our participant said that the effect is powerful and memorable and has also led him to read and consider the day's Gospel before Mass.

Another participant recommended accomplishing this sharing through "lectio divina," scripture sharing in a small group, a common practice in Evangelical churches. Another participant, a member of a Catholic "megachurch," said that his church aggressively promoted small groups like these, and he felt that it provided an intimate faith-sharing experience that would be difficult to achieve in the large congregation of the typical Mass in his church.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 3—If I could change one thing in the Church ...?

It was also suggested that the Church is failing to “exercise a prophetic voice,” by speaking truth to power and tying its words to action. “All we hear about is abortion. The other sanctity of life issues—euthanasia, assisted suicide, capital punishment, just wars—are all being ignored.”

Eliminate clericalism. Change how we think about priesthood and how to form priests. Clericalism is not just a creation of clergy and hierarchy, but an attitude of the congregation as well. The congregation has to recognize that and get over it. We must all learn to “walk together and embrace in humility and love.” That would resolve many of the issues now facing the Church (e.g., power issues, the oppression of women, the conservative/liberal divide).

Social Justice issues and participation on an ecumenical and civic basis in social justice actions.

- ❖ One participant said that she wanted to change so many things in the Church that she didn’t know where to begin. Later she said that, if she had to name one, fully implementing the teachings of Vatican Council II would be number one.
- ❖ Several participants said that increasing the influence of women in the Church was their first priority. If women can be astronauts, presidents of nations, Fortune 500 executives, and so on, why can’t they be deacons and priests? Most denominational and non-denominational (Protestant) churches have female pastors, ministers, and even bishops. Then, why does the Roman Catholic Church insist on an all-male hierarchy, dominated by top-to-bottom administrators and thinkers? If a woman feels called by God to be a disciple, an apostle, a priest, then who am I to block the Holy Spirit’s initiative?
- ❖ Several participants said that the Church must expand its social-justice programs and endeavors. All we need to do is turn on our TVs, or open our newspapers, or look to the right or left of us, and we will see suffering people.

- ❖ End clerical power and allow for balanced power between lay and clergy. In need of an organizational strategy:
 - Increase lay involvement by living out Vatican Council II promise.
 - Noted increased lay involvement in parish life in South America, Central America, and Asia compared to lay involvement in the U.S. Explore why this is “squelched” in the U.S.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 3—If I could change one thing in the Church ...?

- ❖ Law of love should always be foundational to every decision process and actions. (Follow the example set by the apostles and early disciples as noted in Acts).
- ❖ Need to increase faith-sharing groups, such as bible study and study of early Christians.
 - More lay actions to organize faith sharing, such as spiritually-based book clubs.
- ❖ Need for courageous lay leadership to “jump in” and organize groups around social justice issues, such as sponsoring immigrant families.
 - This can lead to personal growth in spirituality.
 - And need for others to join in actions that build a sense of community around response to an issue.
 - Increase sister parish efforts within U.S. and with parishes in other countries.
 - Increase social justice ministries led by the laity, even as paid pastoral position.

Get rid of those who came out of seminaries in the last 10-20 years (only said half kiddingly!)

Imitate the simplicity and inclusivity of Jesus.

Do not appoint anyone bishop who has not served as a pastor for 20 years.

Train seminarians properly: e.g., in one CA area seminarians are sent out into the community for “real world” experience. A new priest should not be expected to do “social work, counseling” with no experience.

Let anyone with the necessary talent handle a specific job in a parish, leaving pastor to pastoral work.

All parishes should have parish councils though only financial councils are mandated

Women should be on the altar.

Acceptance at all leadership levels everywhere of God’s radical welcoming acceptance of everyone.

Pastors seeking laity input regarding all activities and programs.

Allow priests to marry. Have women in higher governance positions.

Be more hospitable. Invite others to join you at Mass or programs.

Evangelize by deed and word.

Session 2/Question 4

4. What actions can each of us take and what can we do collectively to make our church better?

- ❖ Symbolically: value women in the church.
 - The Christmas and Easter collections go to help retired priests while offerings to help retired nuns are relegated to the second collection one Sunday in November. Having the Christmas collection one year and the Easter collection another year (alternating) be earmarked for retired nuns would say a lot about understanding women in the church and how women are valued.
 - One member of the group said she puts a letter in the collection box saying “I’ve made my donation to the retired sisters” during these collections because it’s a symbolic collection.
- ❖ Social justice
 - One member of the group said that a parishioner at her church recorded the last words of seven victims of police violence as a demonstration.
- ❖ Homilies that speak to action
 - Appreciate homilies that speak to the scripture but there are opportunities to speak to current events and parishioners need reminders to do good acts.
 - If pastors speak about these issues, people listen. But how many pastors speak about social justice?
- ❖ Speaking to other members of our own churches
 - Congratulate the presider for speaking up when it happens, talk to someone else in your church about the homily, etc.
 - Start a group—a spiritual group or group discussing an article—sometimes these groups morph and change into something bigger. Invite people over for tea. Our job is to “plant seeds” and be the sower: The farmer plants the seeds and doesn’t understand how, but God and the Holy Spirit provide. Even if we do not see the fruits of our work (no instant results), we can trust we are having an impact.

Carefully consider what we finance through our contributions to parish, diocese, and universal Church. Should we redirect our funding?

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

These Synodal sessions are what we need and should be doing. They should be the normal *modus operandi* of who we are as Church journeying together. Insist on this process going forward at every level in the Church.

The women and men religious congregations are the most experienced persons in the Church in this process. For half a century, they have used it to deepen their understanding of who they are, their mission, and what they are to do in and for and with this world. We recommend the USCCB ask them to share their experience in implementing the Synodal process for the U.S. Church.

We can communicate openly with our priests, even when they don't seek communication. We should agitate for needed change, attend any meetings available to parish members and volunteer for programs we think are lacking, like service programs for middle and high school students.

We should provide constructive criticism when it is needed to move the Church in the right direction, like following Francis' encyclicals. Work for change from within the Church, motivated by love for it. It will never be changed from the outside or through anger.

Try to live what Paul said, "Let there be no division among you." Have hope that the Church can change and believe in the promise that it will last until the end of time. If that is true, we are living in the early Church and it still has a lot of growing to do.

As members of the Church and as representatives of it, we should always be kind and helpful to others. We should be problem solvers for others. We should also speak out about the good the Church does. It is the largest charitable organization in the world and provides food, sheltering, housing for many.

Challenge and root out hypocrisy and double standards when we see them.

Serve on Parish Councils.

If you aren't being heard, hold your money back. [You] can give it directly to Catholic organizations that are doing work you support. Let the pastor know that you are doing this, and why!

Participate in these Synod sessions and encourage others to do so. This gives us a voice and hope that Rome will truly hear the concerns of the faithful.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to keep flowing through us. Use our voices individually and collectively. Have the courage of the prophet.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

- ❖ We can love more and hate less; we can forgive more and condemn less.
- ❖ We can refuse to be discouraged even when Church leaders and/or Church followers seem to be walking down a path Jesus would have avoided.
- ❖ We can speak out often and loudly when we think the Church is promulgating teachings Jesus would have rejected.
- ❖ We can form support groups like the “women’s community” in one diocese. Not ruled by any cleric, this community is the product of women sharing their unique understandings of the Gospels.
- ❖ We can reclaim the sacraments. In particular, we can reclaim the Eucharist. To be enacted, the Eucharist requires a community of at least two or three believers, not a chief celebrant. Jesus celebrated his Last Supper together with His 12 apostles. Without them, He could not have had a genuine meal and authentic sharing of food for the body and soul.
- ❖ We can always ask ourselves the question, “What would Jesus do if He had the same problems I have?”
- ❖ We can always act for the good of all, setting aside our individual preferences and interests as needed. In other words, we can try to do what Jesus did: be selfless.
- ❖ We can get together with a diverse group of people who share our concerns about the future of the Church and who are willing to work hard for its renewal.
- ❖ We can join a lay association like the Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) in which we can genuinely listen to each other respectfully.

I think the synod is an opportunity of a lifetime. The bishop has done something, but his typical style is to have the clergy do everything. I know my diocese can be hit or miss [inconsistent in its Synod response]. I use social media a lot so people can speak up and advocate for the synod. Let people know that the pope wants to hear our voice.

Kids love stories. If churches did this kind of thing, teaching what Jesus taught. It’s only rituals and memorization right now in church; it’s not the spirituality.

Continue to remain active within your church and then look beyond our little group. If our church has a multitude, beyond its walls. Comes from us demanding it and promoting it to the extent we can. Inviting people in.

To have the courage to say what we are feeling continually. Echoes being active in our parishes or wherever we are interacting in our groups. Because the ideas are there. Not just saying but doing. Maybe it will be effective.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

The one thing I can do is daily prayer. I have to be careful in not getting lost in anger and frustration and remain in the walk with Christ. To bring the presence.

Remembering all the good and looking for the good has helped me. We are trying to transmit the faith with the kids. Faith was fun when I was young. It was enjoyable [with activities like] the church bazaar. And there are lots of signs of hope. We could be the answered prayer for other people many years ago.

We should pray to the priest who decided to stay. I'm thinking about the pastor of our parish. They could use our prayers.

Basically the “what can we do” question was answered as “doing more synod and keep doing synod.”

There was strong consensus that the creation of/participation in small faith communities in parishes was a key step in renewal.

One other suggestion: Affirm priests who are servant leaders—and sensitively engage with priests who are not—to deepen their ministry beyond clericalism.

- ❖ Speak up on the local level; object when we see people being excluded or an adherence to ritual instead of social justice. Make our voices known.
- ❖ Participate in Synod sessions like these.
- ❖ Form a small Christian community for yourself; be active in at least one of the progressive groups: Call to Action, Voice of the Faithful, Future Church, Pax Christi, so that each of us has a support group.
- ❖ Pray for the Church and individually do help the poor and marginalized.

- ❖ Individual and collective prayer and being open to live in the presence of God in our daily lives and finding what fulfills our spiritual needs.
- ❖ Participate, communicate, and engage in respectful dialogue, such as in the Synodal process, listening to others and our own consciences; also forming groups for mutual support to enhance our spirituality and to keep abreast of ongoing topics and issues; need to join together and use all available structures for change.
- ❖ Work for a just Church by responding to local needs of disadvantaged populations.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

- ❖ Ensure safety of children in schools through safe environment protocols that are set up in every U.S. diocese.
- ❖ Accept what we cannot change and find courage to work for change guided by wisdom to distinguish between the two.
- ❖ Recognize that this is our church, not a clergy-only entity.
- ❖ Speak out. Catholic dialogue is alive and well in reform groups and university settings but is dying within dioceses and parishes because people are not being heard.
- ❖ Encourage more involvement by the laity to advocate for change in Church governance, including enhanced lay involvement in parish and diocesan governance.
- ❖ What does it mean if I/we who were raised in the Church, now decide to leave?
 - I am responsible for my own faith journey.
 - Need to listen to and respect others on their faith journeys.
 - Better for all if we do it together.

- ❖ More candor from leaders and response to criticism
- ❖ Attach to and join groups to run in parallel with the traditional Church (“find your tribe”)
- ❖ Encourage homilies addressing practical needs (where the rubber meets the road), and social issues that are within the category of Catholic social teaching (not just abortion)
- ❖ Establish (where non-existent) and strengthen parish councils
- ❖ Allow women homilists and commentators
- ❖ Revise seminary training, which now clusters seminarians with little contact to the outside world
- ❖ Encourage lay elections of bishops

We need to participate in the Church, pay attention, and hold out hope for our children to remain and return as Catholics.

We need to be prayerful and joyful.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

We need to stay informed and speak up by writing letters and emails to Bishops. We need to withhold Church contributions and follow up with an explanation on why our money is being withheld.

Keep your eye on the prize when speaking out and try to acknowledge the positives as well as the areas you'd like to see improved.

The Church has prophetic voices. Are we called to be prophets?

Get involved and support good priests. Encourage people to get involved in Diocesan finances because the parishes are the ones who financially support the Diocese.

Bring your talents to the Church and get involved.

It was a Lay group through VOTF that formed a team to hold the Church accountable for financial transparency.

We are the Church, so we should not wait for pastoral approval to take action to strengthen our communities. We can build community by meeting together in our homes to share faith and scripture.

Many lay people have had leadership roles in religious education. We should reach out to the people in our communities who have gifts to share. Talk with one another. Step forward to teach adult classes in your parish.

Ask for and support opportunities for adult education. Study Dorothy Day, or others. Recommend *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr. Build connections one by one.

Talk to your priest(s) not just to say “good sermon”. Communicate with them in whatever way works best. Try e-mails. Write/tell them what is missing, what YOU want from church. Don't think you have no power.

Build up the church, act your faith. Love the people God sends to you and keep your eyes open for them. Pay attention and treat others like family. Build community and provide a welcoming atmosphere. Have a noisy Church.

Read books that strengthen your faith and reach out to others to talk about them.

Join a small faith community, love others and be nurtured; it can be life-giving.

Communication through acting as though you were a Christian, an openness to learning.

For us in a parish where we recognize things are not as they should be, we should speak up and listen to others.

“Arise” was an easy way, through small groups to bring about renewal.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

As the pandemic recedes, we can sign up for charitable works.

Pray for change.

Things in the Church that could help us.

Understanding and adapting to the time stress under which families, particularly young families live today.

Racial issues should be addressed from the pulpit. As should other vital, down-to-earth issues globally and locally, for example, homelessness.

Homilies are so important; one has a captive audience that is not to be turned off by drivel. This brings us back to Seminary training.

We ended the session by trading sources each felt sustained them.

Individually: to teach and speak about the suffering and situation of abuse victims; to teach “freedom of religion” and “primacy of conscience”; to engage in public programs that carry out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Collectively: to engage in ecumenically based social justice ministries, to create and engage in health care services to seniors, to insist on synodal collaboration internally and externally at all meetings going forward as essential to our faith journey forward.

- ❖ Show others that the Church is more than the hierarchy.
- ❖ Encourage each other to speak out and step outside of the patriarchal paradigm. Related to this is the reality that many clergy are closeted LGBTQA+ and thus reluctant to speak about sexual morality or sexual abuse.
- ❖ Speak out if there is injustice.
- ❖ Seek constant faith formation by continuing education in scriptures, Church history, inter-faith dialogues, spiritual development, etc.
- ❖ [Have] Laity elect Bishops.
- ❖ Attend enrichment programs. Example: Catholic Theological Union located in Chicago provides excellent summer programs.
- ❖ Affirm priests/bishops who are servant leaders. Encourage those who are not to expand their thinking. (Perhaps start with praising their positive traits.)

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

- ❖ To understand each other
- ❖ Listening with open minds
- ❖ To speak up about what we want
- ❖ To model the church to be inclusive; to increase the faith community
- ❖ Develop a sense of purpose

Refocus on prayer and get lay people more involved. Small faith-sharing groups should be encouraged to gather, pray, and read the scriptures together. One participant thought that there should be more emphasis on the Bible, not just scripture readings in the lectionary. Another suggested encouraging more “secular institutes,” Church-recognized organizations of consecrated lay people.

There were many expressions of gratitude for the synod process, but also skepticism that the voices of ordinary Catholics will actually be heard. Two participants who attend more than one church reported that the synod had not been mentioned in their own parishes, although it was actively promoted in their other churches. **There is fear that some pastors (and bishops) are managing the synod process in ways that will ensure that their own views will be dominant.**

Be involved. Be present. Listen. Participate.

Help the marginalized. Progress isn’t made by yielding to those in power but by standing with the marginalized. That is how things change and get better.

Be more kind to the clergy, be more forgiving.

We won’t see overall change in our lifetimes.

It is God’s grace that is predominant. “I just roll up my sleeves and get to work.”

Institutions don’t change because they want to; they change because they have to.

Perseverance is what is necessary but be open to what God has in store for us.

Be more generous. Reflect the value system that I want to see in everyone else. If I am loving, inclusive, forgiving, maybe generate a circle like that around me.

Think global. Act local. Remind self that we are all the Church, not just the hierarchy. Be the change you want to see.

Better spiritual formation for laity.

Invite others to join us for bible study, spiritual counseling, literature. Expose others to things that can be meaningful to the entire congregation.

I can fly beneath the radar and plant seeds that the Spirit will bring to fruition in time.

I can offer to teach a class on Vatican II in my parish, since many of my fellow parishioners seems to know little about it.

Responding to what others said:

These sessions are wonderful, and it is comforting to listen to one another. I believe the Synod means the Pope wants to listen to the people.

The Spirit is working through the Synod and through the Pope

All participants were concerned about priestly formation and had many examples of pre-Vatican [Council] II attitudes and actions on the part of newly ordained priests. They felt clerical treatment of all lay members of the Church was a problem, but lack of women's voices and dismissive treatment of women were particularly widespread.

The American Church is split along political lines, and the problem is getting worse, not better. A significant number of American bishops, along with some lay people in my area, would impeach the Pope if they could. The press does not pay attention to the people who support the Pope, and reporters seem to spend all their time covering the dissenters.

Many diocesan seminaries, including one right next to my parish church, are forming new priests and cassock-wearing seminarians who are firmly convinced of pre-Vatican Council II theology and have access to school children in my parish. One young priest told second graders that he really regretted having to let them receive communion in their hands instead of on their tongues which was the correct way to receive the sacrament. My parish is not pre-Vatican II and my pastor promotes dialogue, but he is getting close to retirement and I fear what our next pastor will be like.

Too many priests, especially younger ones, are arrogant, not pastoral.

Racial injustice within the church needs more attention.

We can redistribute our wealth. If we belong to a privileged White parish, we can consider writing at least some of our weekly-offering checks to a poor and struggling church, especially if that church is nearly all Black or all Hispanic.

We can set up food pantries in our parishes (if possible) to feed the hungry, irrespective of their church denomination, if any. Jesus did not ask for ID cards when he fed 5,000 people loaves of bread and fish.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

We can continue on our synodal path by active participation in lay associations like the Voice of the Faithful. We can set up our own small-group prayer sessions, book clubs, bible studies, and home Masses.

We can learn or pray with and for each other. There is a time for contemplation as well as action in a Christian's life. Prayer helps us focus on Jesus's salvific message, the Holy Spirit's guidance, and God the Father's continuing creation in our lives.

We can push for equality of women. The secular world did this over a century ago. Certainly, we can do this now if we really want to.

We can encourage each other to resist pomp and circumstance and pre-Vatican II liturgies in our churches. Kneelers, communion on the tongue, veils on the heads of women, washings of only men's feet, and so forth must be questioned publicly or at least privately. Getting rid of clericalism requires the laity to express their true views of their priests, bishops, and fellow churchgoers. "Father" does not always know best.

We should recognize that because the Church is an international enterprise, it needs to be staffed and managed accordingly. It is important for the Church to resist "fads." But it is also important for the Church to be nimble when it is confronted by new challenges and opportunities. Currently, the Church is a top-heavy, slow-moving bureaucracy that has trouble changing out-of-date roles and responsibilities.

- ❖ We need to be Jesus to each other. We need to stay in the fight. People need to know we are Christians by the way we act.
- ❖ For me, the concrete actions we can take is to work with VOTF. It's the ONLY lay organization grading the efforts of bishops in the U.S. – the Finance working group, the Governance group, Protection of Children working group, they are all measuring what the bishops are doing, and the bishops are paying attention. That will have influence on the Church in America today. These are very concrete, on-the-ground actions that we collectively take, which is why I think it is such an important organization.
- ❖ If we are concerned about the way a particular parish is handled, then stop donating. Do not support them. Go to a parish that works better. Speak with our money.
- ❖ I think we all need to be active ...
- ❖ What we are doing now, the synod sessions, is one way, so be faithful to this kind of engagement. Some say, oh it's a lot of bunk. No, it needs to happen more, with all kinds of people. I believe that if this process is faithfully carried out, it WILL change the Church.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

- ❖ Reaching out and getting everyone's thoughts is one way, but how many people will it be? But the reaching out, living out our faith, if we could all continue to bless one another with recognizing everyone for all their strengths and honor those. Be Jesus to one another and love one another.
- ❖ Women with gray hair are marginalized!
- ❖ It is so important to help Pope Francis. He is so wonderful for setting up this synod.

Continue synods and listening sessions.

Encourage homilies addressing practical needs (where the rubber meets the road), and social issues that are within the category of Catholic social teaching (not just abortion); homilies provoking engagement and involvement.

Encourage a welcoming atmosphere, more than only a welcoming committee.

Do whatever it takes to make our voices heard.

Improving reporting of sexual abuse

For an individual to have to deal with a diocese or religious order, an investigator, police and a board of review is retraumatizing and sometimes re victimizing.

SUGGESTION: Perhaps an advocate needs to walk the journey with the person reporting. Perhaps [two advocates]: one pastorally and one legally.

*Bishops promoting politics and interfering with individual consciences

Clergy, especially some pastors are also at fault.

SUGGESTIONS: solution ??? First amendment reminders!

Bishops elected by the laity?

*Synods

SUGGESTION: Synod meetings to continue on local levels without filters by pastors, clergy etc.

Listen to SNAP [Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests] to get to the *root cause and cancer* that is hurting the church so badly.

Listen to and minister to each other.

Call the clergy out when what they say is out of order and hurtful.

Appendix D: Session 2/Question 4—Actions we can take individually, collectively

Continue the synod process of listening and sharing.

Treasure and delight in the diversity in our U.S. Church: Black Catholics, Hispanic Catholics, Native American Catholics.

Individually, most of the group are seeking a supportive Catholic community they can “mesh” with so they can feel strengthened again. They want their community to be prayerful and truly dialogue, stay connected but keep searching. We can’t change the Big Church, but we CAN change our local churches by listening to others : synodality!

As we begin to learn to dialogue well, take a breath before responding (as opposed to reacting).

Canon Law must be changed to empower lay leadership. The Parish Council or a Lay Administrator should be the leadership in each parish, not the pastor.

We can continue to push for change in the Church by staying connected and participating in whatever ways we can, such as the synod process in our own parishes or groups.

Join and support a reform group, like VOTF.

We, as Church, can exhibit our belief in the Resurrection by being truly joyful and open!

An aside added after sessions: Almost all the participants requested that the Jesuit priest offer a Zoom leadership session covering several topics discussed in these two sessions. Topics could include:

- Adult Faith Formation to Teach the Laity to:
 - Recognize the power they have
 - Understand the Church’s traditions
 - Understand and reclaim Vatican II
- Learn how to Pray
- Learn to Dialogue
- What does Mercy mean?
- Learn to be responsive rather than reactive
- How to appeal to the common good

Also, a request was made that maybe VOTF could help us develop a subgroup of those who have given voice, via these groups for the synod, to stay connected for support and encouragement.

Encourage more lay people to be ministers (greeters, lectors, communion ministers, etc.) to foster a sense of community in the parish. Support and participate in programs like The Amazing Parish, which help parish priests learn how to improve that sense of community.

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Marriage encounter programs were also mentioned as proven ways to open the eyes of priests to the realities of married life in the parish.

We can reflect on our own unique gifts and talents and seek to use them in engagement in the Church and in our communities and our world. In the Church, leadership positions should be held by people with talents for leadership, and the Church should provide decision-making opportunities for lay people with those talents.

- ❖ Open dialogue with each other instead of us haranguing each other on the issues.
- ❖ Participate.
- ❖ Allow the local bishop to be bishop rather than constantly restricted by Curia regulations.

- ❖ One participant said that on many days, her first “action” was simply to not walk away from the Church once and for all. Other participants agreed with her, hypothesizing that “once a Catholic, always a Catholic.” It’s hard to walk away from 2,000+ years of traditions, celebrations, legacies, and so forth.
- ❖ One participant said that “lay-led” organizations, discussions, and programs are empowering. The men in his Men’s Club take turns reflecting on newsworthy issues, meaningful scriptural passages, and so on. As a result of engaging in this process, the laity assembled gets to see that they don’t necessarily need a priest to “get the ball rolling,” so to speak.
- ❖ Several participants have developed relationships with people in historically Black churches. Some have given their “treasures” (i.e., money) to these churches. Others have given their “talents” to these churches, writing articles and/or giving talks about the “Black Church” in the United States. Still others have given their “time” to these churches, sharing in their liturgies or taking strength and solace from their Gospel music.
- ❖ Some participants are gathering in small Voice-of-the-Faithful (VOTF) sessions led by retired priests, former priests (with or without partners and children, learned women who have taken all or most of the classes ordained (male) priests take, and/or people who are simply willing to share their ideas in a communal setting.
- ❖ Some participants routinely go to “home masses” in each others’ neighborhoods. The homilies are given by the people assembled with no one being the “authority figure.”

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- ❖ All the participants valued the opportunity to listen to each other's "Spirit-filled," energizing ideas.

- ❖ Need to understand why evil spreads but not goodness and kindness.
- ❖ We need to stay in the Church, not leave it; one participant said she has written her own creed based on loving, sharing, and helping.
- ❖ -Try to be the things you would ask of others.
- ❖ Get others to understand what we are called to do.
- ❖ Email and speak out on things.
- ❖ Give money to support things, issues, you care about.
- ❖ Be aware of cultural differences in religious practices: e.g., Mexicans celebrating Our Lady of Guadalupe; Filipino tradition of reenacting the Crucifixion; Day of Dead celebrations.

Program to address sexual abuse and addiction; need a 12 Step program

Continue to be pushy—let clerics know that we are the people of God and have more to say

Join progressive groups like VOTF

Start listening groups in your parish

Individual Actions:

- Each person can directly communicate with one's pastor/bishop.
- Each person can engage in direct personal contact with those in need.

Collective Actions:

- We will use the synod session model for future meetings.
- We can hold social events that build up community.
- Once the diocese submits its final document to Rome, publish that document online along with each of the diocese's parish submissions to the bishop. This is an example of transparency.

Interim Sessions

As an optional exercise after Session 1, and a way of hearing other voices, participants were asked, if willing, to hold a dialogue with their adult children or other people close to them or those who would not attend a Synod session because they feel too marginalized or disconnected from the Church. These were the questions used as starting points:

- 1. What gives meaning to my life?**
 - 2. What effect has the Church had on my life? Good, bad, a little bit of both?**
-

Replies from two adult children who are no longer Catholic:

Q1 response

(a) For the last 20 years—trying to do best I can for my family. Now, do the best I can for those who need help most.

(b) “Whatever good or happiness or sympathy or good effect or appreciation of others I can bring or share, helping make things better to a degree when possible, living well with others, respecting beliefs, lighting my corner.

“Indeed, not hiding my light under a bushel... a phrase whose knowledge I can probably attribute to my Catholic upbringing (with perhaps a small shoutout to Godspell)!”

Q2 responses

(a) As a child, I liked the institution, the goal to be good, and the stories that were about morality and being a good person, helping others, for example like the Good Samaritan. For me, that’s what I wanted to teach my children: morality, ethics, and trying to be good to others. What I didn’t like were the stories such as a parent willing to sacrifice his son, or stories that literally put “the fear of God” in me. It wasn’t necessary to make me fear someone to keep me in line.

As a teen, I did my teenage eye roll at going to Church but I did use the lessons learned to help me with the morality choices that a lot of teens face, and it was grounding. It did also cause a lot of guilt and some negativity—the church should not exclude, women, LGBTQ ... or any person. I always was fortunate to have good relationships with people in the Church and respected the priests, nuns, and educators I interacted with.

I have ZERO tolerance for the abuse that has occurred in the Church and even more disgust for any kind of cover up, and that, more than anything else, has led to a lack of trust and inability to really stand behind the “Institution” that allow(ed)s that to occur.

(b) I’d say it gave me some very good cultural literacy and understanding of Catholicism and Catholics, of Jesus and God and the Bible and all the stories and context. It also gave

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me an appreciation for many in the church (including many nuns, teachers, people who work internationally, many lay people, many priests) who really try hard to be humble and good people and help others. However, too many things to be guilty about and an overly rigid idea of what rules and path a person needs to take—annoying and upsetting to me and perhaps very harmful to others.

As a child, the religion of the Church vs. its structure was fine. As a teenager, the power structure and rigidity in the Church became more obvious and it became increasingly difficult to relate to as I became an older teen with my own thoughts and perspective. For example, women not being allowed into ministry, or many other parts of the hierarchy, is just completely not good. It is only a Church of its people if it allows a framework that includes all the interested people.

I opted to not raise my own children in the Church in favor of allowing them a more direct “how do we become good people” approach with less other overhead and less rigidity.

I know they have missed out on some of the rituals and stories and particular understanding of Christianity and Catholic lore and to a degree the clarity that the Church provided. On the plus side (as members of a Unitarian church), they also missed out on guilt and fear as a motivator and were able to see many sorts of people in positions of spiritual leadership and they were empowered to think about their own beliefs, express their thoughts and take action. Not that Catholic kids can't do that, but it is less obviously a part of what they are encouraged to do.

Principally find meaning in life from *family and nature*

Three of the four [I spoke with] married non-Catholics, and three of the four have no attendance at Catholic liturgies

One is comfortable with the Episcopal Church.

Principal objections to the traditional Catholic Church:

- ❖ Clericalism
- ❖ Child sex abuse (by which the Church lost its moral standing)
- ❖ Position of women (not welcoming)

One mother spoke with two of her children, ages 18 and 30. What she reported clearly resonated with many of the session participants. Many felt that their children had been marginalized by the Church.

Q1: A sense of community gives meaning to my life, and receiving support from like-minded people.

Q2: I had many great female role models within our Church community as I was growing up. While in college I experienced a community of like-minded people and support to live

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according to shared values. I felt joy in attending church there and felt welcomed to come as I was. I was accepted and allowed to question.

After college, at my parish church, I felt judged for my dress and appearance, and for an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, after which I gave the baby up for adoption.

I still love the rituals and traditions of the Church, but do not feel supported by my local faith community.

Group Response

Others ranging widely in age had the same experience of loving their college Church community and feeling stranded after they graduated. Parents have seen the Church through their children's eyes, seen them driven away from the Church by hypocrisy in the response to the sexual abuse crisis and by politicization and disunity. Some have left the Church because their children have left.

One participant also had a child out of wedlock and kept her daughter. She felt judged for her choice, too. Her daughter also feels marginalized and is without a faith community.

We also ended that session with a discussion about speaking to those outside of the Church, whether of another faith tradition or those who have left. We began answering the question with that issue. In speaking to those close to us, the issue of pedophilia, and the many 'rules' of the church was prominent, as well as bad confessional experiences with a priest. Fr. Bryan Hehir's description of Catholicism as, "A church with thousands of rules, but only two commandments, ... love God and love your neighbor..." was noted. Here the comment was expanded to "rules get in the way" [and] the issue of birth control should be an easy fix.

We began our session with reports from those who posed our questions to people (family, friends, associates etc.) who have left or on the fringe of the Church.

These comments represent three contacts. All had some amount of Catholic education. Religion had become less important in light of scientific explanations for things.

- ❖ Some became agnostic because of hypocrisy of the church, i.e., Catholic Social Teaching taught but not being practiced
- ❖ While acknowledging how the Church meets some of the needs of others in spreading love, charity, and faith, many felt the Church was overly judgmental, seeing people as good or bad based solely on Church rules.
- ❖ The Church thinks they're right and [thus are]unable to change and fix problems.
- ❖ The Church needs to have more understanding, compassion, and dialogue.
- ❖ It's too politicized.

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- ❖ The Catholic Church does not understand human sexuality.
Examples: outdated view on sexual behavior, “Objectively Disordered” is a term very offensive and does not make any sense - does God make defective products? Church needs married priests. Leave the sexual education to the Education System.
- ❖ Fundamental disagreement with Catholic Church’s stance on many issues
Examples: same-sex marriage, abortion, inequality by allowing only men in most of the church hierarchy, have to speak through trained individuals such as priests; too much corruption and human greed.
- ❖ Not comfortable with a traditional parish and can’t find a place to worship.
Outside of urban areas there aren’t many choices.

The Church’s problems would be solved with married priests and women priests

These two optional questions were addressed mainly by Catholics, age 55 to 80, most of whom have one or more adult children (or grandchildren) who are no longer practicing Catholics.

- ❖ I left the Church because the music was terrible as were the homilies. Moreover, I thought the Mass, as a whole, was repetitious and boring.
- ❖ I am attracted to non-denominational churches. The music is vibrant, the scripturally based sermons are relevant to everyday life, and the atmosphere is welcoming.
- ❖ I left the Church because I never felt “holy” enough or “perfect” enough or “sinless” enough to attend services.
- ❖ I left the Church because of its condemnation of the LGBTQA1 communities; similarly, I left the Church because of its rigid policies on divorce and/or the use of “artificial” contraceptives. I also left the Church because of its absolute focus on abortion.
- ❖ I left the Church because of its lack of social justice programs.
- ❖ Although I raised my children as practicing Catholics, as soon as they entered their teens or young adulthood, they distanced themselves from the Church partly or wholly. Still, I believe my adult children (or grandchildren) are good people. They are willing to go the extra mile for people who need help, be they friends or strangers. Moreover, they are the kind of people who provide for their children’s needs, no matter the cost to themselves.

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#1—from a couple who were born and raised Catholic but now attend a Unitarian church

My friends were born and raised Catholics and they raised their children as Catholics. The children still are [Catholic]. However, the couple now belong to the Unitarian church, because they could no longer abide the Church's teachings on so many positions. They just don't believe in the Church position on so many topics today. This situation is the opposite of what most of us experience: that the children leave and the parents stay—this is the opposite! For the parents, though, their inability to accept the way the Church treats LGBTQ people, divorced people, and so on, is a [barrier]. They wish they could be back in the Catholic Church but just cannot.

#2—from my daughter and her husband, who are both divorced from their first spouses. My daughter was raised Catholic, and her first marriage was in the Church, although her first husband was not Catholic at the time. Interestingly, he did convert prior to their divorce. Her present husband is not Catholic. Their marriage was witnessed by a Protestant minister. NOTE: The daughter and husband answered some of the same questions as the participants.

Daughter: Here are some thoughts regarding the questions you sent.

I think there needs to be a means of teaching both kids and adults about their religion. This includes having active youth groups that are fun but also teach. It's also difficult bridging the gap between the Catholic school kids and the public school kids but it needs to happen. I know some churches are doing this but having more available classes for adults to explore and learn about their religion would be great.

The exclusion of people in the Church really needs to be addressed and changed. If you get divorced, you cannot participate fully in the Church- No Communion. If you hurt or kill someone, you can! Why then would most divorced people stay with the church when they can find other denominations that accept them? Of course, you can get an annulment, which is time consuming and can be costly. Or you can just marry outside of the church, pushing you another step out of the Church.

The Church should be more accepting of the LGBTQ population. Put more energy into acceptance than [into] excluding. The Church would grow so much if it embraced the differences of its people instead of excluding them

These days it seems silly to think that only men can handle the job of being priests. Women have a lot to offer in this role. I remember when it was a big deal to have a woman usher or be an altar girl. It doesn't seem like many doors have opened for women since. In the same vein there are men and women who want a larger role in the church but also want families. Other denominations are able to work with this balance. I think the Catholic church's time

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has come to move from the celibate lifestyle for priests—unless they choose to remain so—and allow priests to marry.

Not allowing birth control is insane

I do love the traditions and rituals of the church. I love that you can walk into almost any Catholic Church and find the same Mass, the same smells, the same music. It is time for the church to allow its members participate as fully as they wish and not be limited by archaic exclusionary practices.

Husband:

From the Session 2 questions, Digging Deeper, Moving Towards Action:

1. What issues in the Church do we need to pay more attention to?

Inclusion: Having been officially baptized as an infant in the Methodist church, then baptized once more by submersion, as required for acceptance as a member of the Baptist church, I am struck to the core when not allowed to take communion in the Catholic Church.

I served as a Protestant Lay leader (appointed by the commander and authorized to perform religious services (per “MILPERSMAN 1730-010/MARCORMAN” under the authority of SECNAVINST 1730.7) in the U.S. Navy. In this role, I conducted worship services, led bible studies, presided at burials at sea, and provided support and counsel to my fellow servicemen. One of the prevailing threads was inclusion—all were welcome. So, when I hear the words found in Luke 22:19, “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ [20] In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you,’” I am deeply saddened and wonder why so many Christian brothers and sisters are not allowed to commune with God in the Holy Catholic Church.

2. Who is left out or suffering today? Who are at the margins?

As stated in the one example above, many Christians are struggling, suffering, and searching for love and acceptance in a very unstable, uncertain world. The Church should always follow Christ’s example in Mathew 19:14: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” He never turned anyone away, in fact he surrounded himself with the sick, the poor, the sinners. Who more needs the Great Physician, the Savior of the World, than these?

The mere thought of a movement within the Church that would regress back in time to try and erase the reformation of Vatican Council II, is heartbreaking. It mirrors the divided world we are living in today. The Church should be a beacon of hope that draws the masses, not a spotlight seeking to separate and alienate its children.

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3. If I could change one thing in the universal Church that I think would help us all better follow Christ, it would be:

Teach the Bible in greater depth, so that the body of Christ better understands the true nature, and application of God's word. Ephesians 6:17 states, "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." A better understanding of His teachings will prepare us to use the spiritual tools that He has provided.

4. What actions can each of us take and what can we do collectively to make our Church better OR

For you what are the positive things about the institutional Catholic Church today?

What are the negatives and what would you like to see changed?

When I married the love of my life, a beautiful woman brought up in the Catholic Church, I looked forward to uniting our spiritual lives in the fellowship of the Church. I consulted our local priest and explained the painful realities of my first marriage and my struggle with Christ's teachings on the subject. He wisely helped me understand the nature of the "death" of that relationship and gave me peace. As a fellow Christian, I want my marriage to my true soul mate to be recognized and celebrated in the Church.

#3: The third person from the session asked the two between-session questions of her husband, two daughters and their husbands, and the youngest daughter who is single.

Husband on what gives meaning:

I believe that practicing being happier and developing healthier behaviors such as a better eating habits, exercise, and following the talents and gifts that God has given me are important.

The gift of family provides me with special feelings, and I realize how blessed I am that both my immediate and extended family enjoys each other's company and our time together.

Also, taking advantage of being outdoors; being in nature and enjoying our environment provides me with greater well-being.

Husband on the effect of Church on his life

Born into a Catholic family and attending Church regularly has always given me a sense of community, a place to worship, ministry opportunities and a spiritual support system. For most of my adult life, attending Mass, hearing the "Word of God" from the priest's/ deacon's homilies has been a connection for me to grow in Christ.

[However,] within the past several years St. Matthew's parish has become more restrictive with guidelines and less welcoming for many individuals. Too many "old" traditions and

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rituals are now more dominant, and the priests and deacons are extremely conservative. These men seem to lack a connection to the community and have lost their understanding of their role in continuing to share the work of Christ in the way that God intended.

Oldest daughter (33), married, mother of two:

Question 1. My husband, children, parents, siblings, extended family and friends, (including pets). Faith in God.

Question 2. I would say [effect of the Church is] good. Obviously now it seems to be less of a priority, but I would like to change that, especially now that the kids are getting older. I think it is important to have a foundation of faith. I think the fact that we went to church and Catholic school growing up taught us good morals. I would like to get more involved and do more volunteering and would like to instill these values in my children as well.

Husband of oldest daughter (34), also a lifelong Catholic:

Question 1. The pursuit of happiness

Question 2. Church has positively served a series of perspectives and stories to help me interpret and navigate modern life.

Middle daughter, married, mother of three:

Question 1. My family and achieving good

Question 2. Positive—turn to faith for support in hard times and always trust in the things that come to my life that they are serving a bigger purpose.

Husband (36) of middle daughter, practicing Catholic until after 1st Communion:

Question 1. My family

Question 2. The Church has had much less of effect on my life than my relationship with God has. I don't like the "church" atmosphere, regardless of the form of Christianity. The Catholic Church seems like a semi-cult. I don't understand why priests aren't able to get married (it would drastically cut down on the issues, in my opinion), and there's a lot of rituals that I've yet to find in the Bible. On the other hand, the non-denomination churches that I attended and participated in are no different from a cultish feel.

There are issues in every denomination, and it's really turned me off from the entire church experience as I've become older and somewhat wiser.

Youngest daughter (29), single:

Question 1. My friends & family give meaning to my life. Being around those I love makes me the happiest. In addition, being outside with nature makes me feel calm and at peace. I wish there were fewer outside stresses — work, societal, beauty pressures, finances, etc. that got in the way of that happiness.

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Question 2. I am grateful for the Church for being an outlet for my family to always be together, and for providing structure and routine in my life. Even when apart from my family, it's nice to know that weekly mass is a ritual we all share — hearing the same readings across the globe. I also appreciate the Church for bringing me many close friends, as I went to Catholic school and feel I am so lucky for the community that gave me. Unfortunately, I feel the Church has strayed very far from being community-oriented and I no longer feel very aligned with the Church. It's devastating. The Catholic faith now feels more about rules and belittling those who may not fit in a specific mold. The Church doesn't feel accepting of anyone but the "perfect" Catholic. It has become too conservative and too strict, and I feel shunned by it.

I would just add that power gets to people's heads (more tactfully) and the Church seems more about serving itself than serving those in need.

Input from friends/adult children/former Catholics about why they are no longer involved:

*Tradition and sense of community was important but today there is no sense of community. People keep to themselves.

*Can't understand what the priest is saying.

*Women excluded

*Church circles around problems but never accepts responsibility for them.

*Rigidity around divorce issue—forced to look for another community

*Rejecting the transgender members

*Patriarchal

*Intolerant and unaccepting attitudes keep children from returning

*Using rules as a weapon

*Controlling and not listening leads to a loss of trust.

*Hypocrisy

What gives meaning to my life?

*Marriage, Family, and Community

*Being trusted by both my family and my community. It increases my sense of self-value to know that I am valued as a trustworthy person.

*Being socially and politically involved.

*Growth in Faith

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*Prayerfully following the Holy Spirit

*Supportive Faith communities and organizations

Effects of the Church on my life

*Felt dictated to by the hierarchy

* Not allowed to hold my personal opinions, choices or discernments

* Not encouraged to think for myself and follow my own conscience

*The hierarchy's agenda seemed to be about secrecy, suppression of feelings, and controlling by shaming.

*Sexual repression which blighted the lives of many women and men, causing emotional immaturity and mental health problems.

Only three participants consulted their friends and family about the role of the Church in their lives. Everyone said that being in a welcoming, loving community gives meaning to their lives. No one said that the Church has had a major impact on their lives. Bad music, boring homilies, and unfriendly attitudes toward LGBTQ+ communities led some young adult Catholics away from the Church.

One participant's child has never had a good relationship to the Church, and the more he hears about the "sex abuse scandal," abortion rights' politics, and a return to the Latin Mass, the less inclined he is to ever set foot in a Catholic Church again.

However, another participant's child spoke affirmatively about a mission trip outside U.S. borders. She was moved by people's efforts "to love one another, as I have loved you." Still other participants said her young adult child would consider coming back to the Church if it allowed women "full citizenship" in it.