

COMMENTS SESSION 1
2/12/2022
Carmelite Sisters of Baltimore

GENERAL EXCLUSION ISSUES / MORE OPEN AND ACCEPTING / MORE WELCOMING

- How can we come together and be accepting of each other?
- Jesus included and welcomed everyone. All were seen and not rejected. Jesus did not turn away anyone.
- How can we heal the way women, gay people, and others have been treated by the Church?
- Unless you are “known” you don’t even get a handshake. Have been away from the catholic church for a while - accident and pandemic related - hesitant to go back. Some issues regarding the Pope, anxious where this process will lead.
- Desiring Hospitality after church; would be helpful.
- Be a welcoming Church to ALL, especially marginalized people.
- We must take people where they are and welcome them all.
- Hopefully the Synod will create a church that embraces and listens to the marginalized (LGBTQ . . . Divorced . . .) where all are truly welcome.
- Half of the members wished there be more inclusivity in the Church, more acceptance in regard to the ones that are different, less judgmental attitude such that all feel loved, regardless of their gender, language, culture...
- Capitalizing on global connections from the pandemic to be amore global church
- The Anglican priest spoke especially about being able to receive communion when a guest or when visiting a Catholic Church. Spoke of understanding the theological reasons operative, but also the pain of exclusion.
- A more inclusive church in every dimension (gender, ages, sexual orientation, culture, etc.)
- Being able to launch a clear and concrete message to all: “You are accepted, all are welcome, all are loved”
- Expressing more tangibly inclusivity, respect for all cultures
- Do not exclude anyone from Eucharist
- Be a Church of inclusion to all
- ‘Opening’ the Church, or encouraging the Church to ‘open’, to ‘allow’ it to grieve with and provide healing for its people
- Openness to different expressions or ways of being a church because of different cultures.
- Finding ways to include all, especially those whose lives are perceived to be ‘outside the lines’
- Our church needs healing , listening without judgment The church needs to minister to the marginalized and welcome them in our present communities of worship
- Churches and Homilist need to speak more openly about racism, judgments on the LGBT community, the poor, the separated community members and be willing to dialogue about the role of women in the Church to include Ordination.
- Our small group is a global group and our Church is a global Church. All voices need to be heard.
- There is a hope that the Church extends a hand to bring people back to the Church, especially young adults.
- Church has to learn how to deal with and welcome “messy humanity”
- Church needs to be inclusive the way Christ was
- God loves everyone without exception. That was witnessed in the words and actions of Jesus. Our dream for our church is that we will become a welcoming community both lay and cleric for everyone regardless of ethnicity or color or gender or sexual preference. All exclusiveness will end.
- All should be welcome in the church
- The church needs to accept divorced people and encourage them to receive communion rather than exclude them from participating/giving their gifts (this was a particularly painful sharing where one of our partici-

pants shared that she had been doing all sorts of volunteer work with youth, etc. in her parish but when the priest discovered she was divorced, he relieved her of her duties. He also suggested she apply for an annulment, but she declined saying that she could not annul the love she had for the man she married. Many applauded that stance.)

- The church should not deny the Eucharist to Baptized Christians of other denominations because Jesus would not deny his body and Blood to anyone (WWJD?).
- The church should celebrate the lives of single people – acknowledge when this is a calling from God.
- We can learn something from peoples of other cultures about how to pray and how to celebrate.
- We hope that the Church’s services and ministry will hone in on the excluded: the divorced, the LGTBQ, those who have walked away, the migrants...
- “Are we listening to the hungry poor?”
- Hoping for a Church that is not stagnant but surprises us with love and openness
- Churches and Homilist need to speak more openly about racism, judgments on the LGBT community, the poor, the separated community members and be willing to dialogue about the role of women in the Church to include Ordination.
- Echoed throughout the session by many: the church needs to preach acceptance of all people and put into practice the beatitudes.

LGBTQ

- I am looking for the church I loved as a child before I “came out” as LGBTQ. Now, I feel I am no longer welcome.
- Do not alienate young people by preaching on issues that will turn them away, e.g. LGBTQ
- Churches and Homilist need to speak more openly about racism, judgments on the LGBT community, the poor, the separated community members and be willing to dialogue about the role of women in the Church to include Ordination.
- Hopefully the Synod will create a church that embraces and listens to the marginalized (LGBTQ . . . Divorced . . .) where all are truly welcome.
- I belong to an intentional community. Not connected to the church because of gay son. But loves the church
- The Church needs to welcome Gay people

POVERTY/SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Need more outreach to the materially poor and show care for everyone
- More radical love in service to God’s people - social justice programs and opportunities
- Church that is more attuned/involved and taking actions on social justice issues.
- ‘Enabling’ marginalized / ‘groups’, such as poor, hungry etc, not to be ministered to, but to lead aspects of the change
- Perhaps we need to sell the riches of our churches to care more humanly for the poor.
- Need to reflect on The Beatitudes as a Mission Statement of our Church.
- Exploring our own poverty, hunger etc, as well as the poverty and hunger of the institutional Church, to determine the scope and scale of these terms prior to considering what positive change might look like

OLDER

- This was mentioned by three participants in my small group including an Episcopalian woman: Older members feel left out; focus on the young. The hope/dream is that both younger and older members will be respected.
- The Synodality Process makes me feel that I am finally respected as laity! Do not feel included in my parish, seen by the clergy. As an older person I am one of the those left out mentioned in the Beatitudes. Do work in

the parish: Sacristan etc.. but clergy only sees me in regard to my work, not who I am.

YOUNGER

- How can we attract more youth to this process so that they can be the change they want to see and experience for the Church?
- The youth do not believe that change comes through institutions.
- Working more with the young
- Do not alienate young people by preaching on issues that will turn them away, e.g. LGBTQ

WOMEN

- How can we get women to be recognized as ordained Priests?
- Women deacon and women priest would be a big help.
- How can we get women to be more involved and empowered to participate in the church?
- We need women to work from the inside of the Church?
- Need Women leadership at all levels: Need to respect the gift of women leaders in the Church. The Carmelite Sisters are a wonderful example of this.
- Using the voices of women religious, many of whom might have felt they did not have a voice previously, to give voice to others
- Women religious are often the public face of the Church – not the priests, and definitely not the hierarchy.
- Hope for ordination of women – justice issue and even much more.
- More participation of women - allowing women to preach!!
- My granddaughter (who is not Catholic) went to a Catholic school. She learned the sign of the cross and said immediately, “how come they are all men?” (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
- Women need to be recognized for the gifts they can bring. Women tend to be more collaborate and work models different from those that men use. Decisions made after listening to women’s voice could be very different from those made now. (Someone described a beautiful experience of this kind but examples are few and far between.)
- Women are often anxious to minister but are being held back by Church structures. They sometimes find way outside the official Church (Episcopal Priests, Women Priests, licenses to perform marriages, etc.) to do the kinds of things that would be so helpful to the health and welfare of the Church.
- The Church should be aimed at animating women so that both women and men might be involved in preaching and in sacramental ministries together rather than discouraging women from doing what they feel called to do.
- Importance of women’s leadership (e.g. in positions where ordination is not necessary)

RACISM

- Racial injustice, clericalism, structure of church hierarchy (riddled with pathology-how do we get beyond rigidities?)
- How can we resolve the white supremacy image of Jesus as white?
- How are we going to come to a resolution for all the different types of injustices?
- Churches and Homilist need to speak more openly about racism, judgments on the LGBT community, the poor, the separated community members and be willing to dialogue about the role of women in the Church to include Ordination.
- Listen to African Americans in the church.
- We dream of a Church that stands firmly and unequivocally against racism, white supremacy, and white privilege.

CARMELITES / CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

- According to Jn 17 chapter: “that all may be one as we are one...” A strong pull towards contemplative prayer as a basis to action. What the world needs the most is the holiness of the ones ready to go on the journey. Let us not stop halfway. The Baltimore Carmelites ZOOM initiative was given as an example of radiant ministry, likely stemming from a life (and an inner disposition) completely given to prayer, completely open to the Spirit, without holding back.
- Incorporating practices such as contemplation and meditation in a more mainstream way
- Very high praise for the Carmelites and the creative ways they have included and involved so many people.
- Most of us have had a strong spiritual support via various meditation, reflection or formal religious communities
- We hope that the church will move from moralism to mysticism.
- Liturgies in places like Carmel, Holy Trinity Parish, where people experience community and are offered homilies of rich spirituality, good theology, and challenge in relation to contemporary concerns and not only abortion and fund raising.
- Testimony was shared of the growth of hope, faith, love, knowledge, understanding and companionship which participants which group participants experienced during lectio on-line throughout the pandemic. Many shared it was their life line providing daily sustenance and new ways of faith experience .

POWER ISSUES

- How can we as a church change so that so much control is not in the hands of the few?
- How will this process lead to change if only the Bishops get this information? Where is the inclusive representation?
- I belong to a non-ordained church/group in which everyone takes responsibility. Why do we need clergy?
- Discipleship is about risk and trust. The church (hierarchy) is afraid of risk because they are afraid of losing control / power / security.
- Less of an attitude tied to Clericalism
- Question the church current leadership will not want to give up their power or change the structure . Need for prayer, persistence on church members.

NEW MODELS

- We hope that the church is being redefined to be more than a structure or institution.
- There is hope for different models of church.
- Church has become a business. (run like a business)
- All have to take up the torch; move away from clericalism.
- Modify Sacrament of the Sick (for laity to administer – especially in remote areas)
- We need to engage the Nuns...those who are spiritual and have a relationship with God but have moved from the institutional church.
- More participation of and encouraging the involvement of laity, the people at the bottom. Change in the structure of the church; diminishment of clericalism.
- Empowering people/laity through liturgy and teachings that has more relevance to people’s lives.
- Our dream for our church means that Eucharist will be celebrated in all places at all times not necessarily with a celibate or male or cleric as presider.
- A Protestant member suggests we look in the windows of Protestantism when considering priestly celibacy and women priests.
- Importance of preserving some of the “old” practices and incorporating the “new”; yearning for stability, but also seeing the joy of a new direction, which is more collaborative and interactive

CHURCH STRUCTURES / HIERARCHY

- Church “Leadership”: Many Bishops and priests are not open to synodality.
- Many leaders, (Bishops) could have stepped up and provided leadership in supporting vaccine mandates.
- It was helpful to recall how Mary Ann had said in her introduction that Francis was flipping the synodal plan back to what it was originally intended to be – the whole Church in dialogue and discernment, not just the Bishops gathered talking to themselves.
- Change in leadership
- Continue to involve the laity more and more in the church leadership. All have a voice to give, and each voice is important to hear, consider and incorporate.
- The current Church Hierarchy needs change
- Level the Ground within the church community.
- If church becomes inclusive, the hierarchy will disappear
- The hierarchical structures of the Church need to change
- We dream of the day when Patriarchy is overcome and abolished; that is, when equality between women and men is fully realized in the Roman Church in all its roles, Councils, Congregations, and gatherings. Patriarchy intimately connected to clericalism and the hierarchy’s handling of sexual abuse. It is also intertwined with white supremacy and racism.
- Feel hopeful in changing the major structures in the church, creating small groups within each church community, allowing and supporting women and married men ordained, open forums with the “laity,” the people in the pews who make up the church. Desire change focus from the hierarchy to the people in the church. “The people” in the church have truth to share, desires and many have made a life-long commitment to the church need to be heard and allowed to provide leadership.
- Church needs to evaluate leadership and create ways to implement institution desires.
- Church hierarchy needs to have transparency and need to participate in ongoing personal spiritual direction and education.
- Church needs to be organized from the bottom up, not the top down.
- Church leadership needs to be more transparent and deal with the sexual abuse that continues throughout the world ...and begin a healing process throughout all parishes.
- Hierarchy of the church needs to recognize the people are the hearts and souls of the church and recognize they have truth and desires and the Spirit works through them.
- All of the Church hierarchy, teachers need to have mandatory spiritual directors to insure they are faithful in their daily work as well as ongoing continuing education as all professionals are mandated to do who work with the physical, social, mental, educational needs of people. Clergy have been unchecked in many parishes.
- Hope the hierarchy will desire and create a Church of the World, hierarchy will trust in God’s inspiration and love by their commitment

PARISH LIFE

- Many have left the church because of the pandemic and the inability to be IN church.
- Most parishes are not “feeding” the faith of the people.
- Some parishes – perhaps even because of the pandemic – have become even stronger, choosing creative and innovative ways to engage parishioners and welcoming others. Some have not and may have lost many congregants whenever they attempt to re-gather
- Church attendance is diminishing and aging quickly
- We operate within a sense of not really knowing others in our parishes and meeting places
- Fewer and fewer priests stretched over many parishes – and they are also aging. Sometimes the homily is good, but as a tool for ongoing formation of persons in the parish, it is ineffective.

- Are parishes too large to know its members?
- Too many people at Mass on Sunday as churches have combined. Nobody knows each other.

SYNOD PROCESS

- This process of Synodality gives hope for change.
- We are being called to a new way of **BEING CHURCH**: Gathered to walk and listen to each other in respectful dialogue
- Synod sharing sessions might not work because the church never cared before what the laity think and the laity can not just turn on this trust and share although it is a wonderful idea.
- Concern that whoever is putting together the results sent in from discussions will not pass on the real results / truthful results to the Vatican in the report.
- Expressed trust that God and Pope Francis as a prophetic leader are guiding us in this journey and it will bring forth good results.
- The group was respectful, faith-filled, listened to the Spirit and is eager for the change and challenges of the Synodality Journey
- Reference was made to article by Jenny Sinclair- quoting Pope Francis - “the fundamental purpose of the Synod is not to change the Church. It is to prepare the Church to save the World.”
- Hopefully the Synod will create a church that embraces and listens to the marginalized (LGBTQ . . . Divorced . . .) where all are truly welcome.
- Can’t get my hopes up about the SYNOD. I was around for Vatican II and we haven’t come far from that time.
- Our dream for our church is that through listening to each other, through discerning dialogue, we will end the divisiveness in our church.
- Several of the women’s closing remarks had to do with having women attend and participate in the **BIG SYNOD** at the end of the information gathering and assessing pieces of this process—not just Bishops and clergy, etc.
- The Synod has the potential to help change happen.
- We (the people) must be bolder than we are if we really want change.
- Skepticism about outcome of process. A fear that there will be no change and we will go on as before without real inner transformation and change in systems and structures.
- Will the input sent “upward” end up being censored and processed by bishops, many of whom are not sympathetic with Francis’ approach.
- Joy of having a voice and of being asked to present our perspectives
- Joyful sharing of our understandings of Church
- It’s been a long time since Vatican II and I am disappointed that we have only come so far. Don’t want to get my hopes up for change with the Synod process.

WE ARE THE CHURCH / LAITY

- The hopes expressed has the general theme of church of the people.
- We are the church and we have to do the work (of creating church).
- Church can’t change unless we become part of the change.
- The people of God are the church
- One of the participants summarized what she heard: The need for change and new life, to encourage people to participate. We have to bring forth the change that we want to see and the new life that we are hoping for.
- We (the people) must be bolder than we are if we really want change.
- During the abuse crisis, many in my parish were complaining and the pastor challenged us to do something

about it; tried to empower us as the people of God

- Lay people are important in the church / The church needs a deeper realization of who we – the church- are

JESUS /SPIRITUALITY

- How can the Church develop the presence of Jesus and make him more present in our lives?
- How can we bring the power of Jesus into the Church?
- Becoming the Community of God again
- Deepen the spirituality of the Church - relationship to Jesus
- Communicate more the love of God
- It is a time of the self-emptying of doctrine
- The church needs to listen to the Holy Spirit- to be contemplative
- Covid has taught us a new and different way of relating and an expanding theology of “Presence” that is important for our Church’s future. (The LatinX have a different way of relating.)
- Liturgies in places like Carmel, Holy Trinity Parish, where people experience community and are offered homilies of rich spirituality, good theology, and challenge in relation to contemporary concerns and not only abortion and fund raising.

OTHER

- How are we going to come to a resolution for all the different types of injustices?
- The church needs to be relevant and relational.
- The church needs to move outdoors. We need to have outdoor baptism, services, and gatherings.
- We have a hope to become a self reflective church.
- We need to recognize the contributions of Nuns and science.
- To become a Community of God again
- Saying that helps: “We don’t know what the future holds but we know who hold the future.”
- It took a while getting to the synodal questions – for many it is an unfamiliar concept and even the pronunciation of “synodality” does not come smoothly!
- Some recognize that the Church is in a state of collapse, even if the official church does not see this (with the exception of Francis).
- On the whole, the group felt that collapse might be necessary for genuine reform – otherwise there will be cosmetic efforts to patch things up rather than allow the institution to be transformed.
- All of the participants have had a strong walk with the Lord, the church and its mission over time. All of us (females) appeared to be above 60 years old, all having nurtured consistently over time some kind of ministry, directly or indirectly off shooting from our faith. The activities were related to serving the poor, the immigrants, going to the mission field in Africa, teaching in college, schools... Even though the engagement with some kind of mission was present for each of the members, a definite need “to do more, to extend one’s attention to more” was very keen.
- A sense of tension between spiritual values present in the church and those of the world at large. It is a true challenge to breach both and in that context, not just dipping but soaking in the sacraments offered by the church is simply life sustaining. One of the participants served in the Boston diocese at the time of the Boston Globe scandal
- There is a hope that people rediscover their faith.
- There was a sense of witnessing the Church at its worse, and yet, at other aspects at its best through immense self-giving, humility of other church members...
- There was a heart felt call of conscience and change in consciousness of our Church today to acknowledge our present Church as a suffering Church

- We need to ask ourselves how are we influencing each other?
- Pastoral transformation required
- Learning to learn compassion
- Rethinking catechesis
- Finding ways to nurture and promote truth
- Moving from a position of people ‘coming to’ the Church to the Church going outwards
- I have too much guilt (from my childhood church) and when I speak of these things I feel guilty.
- I worship in many different ways and many different religions, and to me it is all church.
- This is a continuation of Vatican II
- The church should be kinder and gentler
- some needed attitudes
 - o Collaboration is needed on all levels
 - o The Church must be open to new ideas
 - o The Church must be willing to risk, as Jesus was.
 - o Clergy needs to update their theology and their spirituality
- We have dealt with impasse before:
 - At Vatican II, when bishops listened to more voices, things changed.
 - When the chapters of our religious congregations opened themselves to more of their members, things changed. They looked back at their roots to see why they were founded and began to choose new ministries more in line with their charisms rather than simply doing the bidding of the bishop.
- “I am a Public school kid”: hopes we will ask the “neighbors” for input.
- Virtual liturgies, lectio, changing how we experience Church, how we experience “Presence.
- Ecumenism, esp inter-communion with the Orthodox churches
- Church failed to carry through the goals and mission of Vatican II !! They failed to plan and undertake the commitment to create a strong process of implementation for priests, bishops, cardinals sisters and lay people . Leadership was not committed as the people.
- Church needs to return to early church model of small communities.