

## Synodality Listening Session 3 Comments

March 12, 2022

Carmelite Sisters of Baltimore

### **What do you dream of regarding the role of women in the Church?**

Ordination of women to the diaconate and/or to priesthood. This dream was situated alongside the simultaneous dream of changing the current clerical structure of the church.

As a preliminary step, open preaching now to women.

Learn from the experience of Anglican/Episcopalian churches who have ordained women for decades; don't re-invent the wheel.

Women working in every aspect of the Church.

Modeling upon women religious who were the most faithful implementers of Vatican II and whose prayerful discernment during the painful Vatican investigation was an example to the whole Church of another way of being, another structure.

That the legacy of all the women of the Church over the centuries be recognized, that their lives and work be carried forward, and that by being faithful to our lives of prayer and communal discernment we can see the small changes happening and also help bigger changes to occur.

A parish that inclusively supports women (whatever their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc).

Restore descriptions of women's leadership in the early Church (Lidia, Phoebe, Junia, etc) that are in Acts and the Epistles but were carefully excised from the passages proclaimed at Mass

Planting seeds to bear fruit in future by helping both lay people and priests to think more expansively about women's roles in the Church.

Women have been and continue to be unrecognized, marginalized, underappreciated in the Church.

Women's gifts, contributions and leadership seem to go unrecognized and taken for granted because the church simply does not see women

Are we asking "the right" questions? Are there more "beautiful questions" that we are not asking? Are we talking about "women's role" or about all of the roles of being a church" welcoming women?

Women need to be more visible, involved, and included at all levels..

All roles need to be open and accessible to women who are called to serve the church as such deacons, priests, bishops, and pope.

Religious women who are called to priesthood need to have access to fulfill their calling

Women or Men who are called to priesthood should not be married

Women and Men who are called to priesthood should be allowed to marry and serve the church

Women should have a woman representative at the diocesan pastoral council who voices women concerns and issues about the church

Gender should not limit who is called and able to fulfill their role in church

Women are equal disciples and need to be encouraged to give voice to the voiceless and be leaders

Re-do the Lectionary: incorporate all the scripture about women; will help to advance women's leadership

Universal agreement that women should exercise whatever role their discernment reveals is the Spirit's call, including presiding at Eucharist.

It's amazing that we are still talking about the equality of women in the Church! Patriarchal church is completely "behind the times." Barrier to this is entrenched clericalism: clergy, especially diocesan clergy have inappropriate power.

We have an incredible legacy of brilliant women in our church---martyrs, Madeleva Wolff (education of sisters), religious communities, work with poor, teaching, hospitals. Teresa, Catherine of Siena, Kim Harris, Bonnie Thurston, Dorothy Stang.....

Women need to be empowered to preach in our churches

Men and women need to work together with equality; hierarchy is a stumbling block; LCWR has been prophetic, especially when investigated

New models for Communion Services would be a start

In Venezuela the Sisters do everything (maternal love); church is horizontal

Ordination of women: structures need to change for this to happen...

Start with women deacons (no reason not to); groups of people gather to celebrate the Eucharist

Women in all levels of leadership in the Church

Equally represented, integrating people of color, races, etc.

Being able to participate in the Liturgy as celebrant

Be able to test, to trust – be willing to be open to new ways of doing, being

Women and layMEN have never had a real voice in our church

Women have always been the silent backbone of the church...now finding their voices

It is important for women to sit at the table of decision-making.

There is no reason women can't do everything a man can do in the Church.

Women sustain the activities in most churches.

Yes – women need to be able to be ordained to the priesthood – but not in the current model of the priesthood (this would just be rearranging the chairs on the deck.) a non-clerical model is needed – example: in an Anglican church in England a "grandmother" priest acting in a temporary position, but some of the male parishioners felt there really ought to be a male pastor. Not all women are called to the priesthood, but having women priests would make a difference to women (and men.) Women need to be ENCOURAGED and told that there is a "place at the table" for them.

Other denominations have had women priests for decades. One of our participants belongs to a Chabad Synagogue where the Rabbi is a woman – and pregnant at that!

In other countries in Latin America there is often no priest available to the people so they officiate at services such as funerals and blessing the people with holy water. Someone in the local community refers to one of the nuns as "the Sister who is a priest." When there is no priest they arrange chairs in a circle with the people to gather prayerfully. They do not feel they need to be given authority from anyone to do this. The Church needs the flexibility to leave room for the Holy Spirit.

There is dream and real desire and need for Inclusion of all diverse groups of persons in our Church communities. These dreams would include persons of all ages within the practicing Church,;

to include those who have left the organized Church for multiple reasons, laity, religious and

Clerical , LGBT community, poor, homeless, those persons of lesser educational status, diverse age, race and ethnicity, gender , immigrants , etc. This activity alone would change the face

and function of Church. It would also include the role of woman church to include ordination.

An Anglican religious woman stated she was not there yet but participated in the discussion.

There are dreams of true and welcomed Participation a diverse gathering and worshipping persons ... all welcome and engaged. This participation would challenge destructive structures

Deep desire and need for Inclusion of all diverse groups of persons in our Church communities would also include the role of woman church to include ordination.

Change that reflects more dialogue among the people in the pews who have insights to share on the Word of God in their lives. Need of a 2 way communication among the people as well as with the clergy. There was a feeling that one does not meet a faith community, a hearing of the lives and stories of other parishioners. We do not know one another. Women do not feel listened to or expected to speak. The focus of the preaching comes from priests' views on life and spirituality.

Change that recognizes our equality, that all have something to contribute, that all need to have voice and be heard and respected as children of one God. We are equal when we are given the opportunity to speak and listen and be listened to!

Change that honors the sharing of leadership roles among women – hearing their perspectives and acknowledging their giftedness by sharing in the leadership roles in the Church, including ordination of women.

What would this Gospel story be like if Jesus had met with three women on the mountain. Surely they would not have encouraged the building of tents or churches - symbols of their sovereignty. The women would probably tell him to come to their homes, neighborhoods so others could share in the awe they experienced.

Equality on every level of the Church's life:

The overriding concern is for women priests.

Laity want, are OK with, women priests, married priests.

Academia and all professions have equality: women and men sharing gifts equally.

Anglicans/Episcopalians have shown the way.

Some have had or are having GOOD experiences of "catholic" women priests.

Discussion centered mainly around priesthood for women. Much cynicism that this will occur-- certainly not in the lifetime of anyone in our group. Hopes for change that we had 20-30-40-50 years ago have not come to fruition.

Male clergy seems to be afraid of women; conservative younger priests in particular. Lay women being removed from positions of responsibility in parishes; roles of female seminary professors being limited and, in some cases, women profs being fired. What are they so afraid of? Priests seem to be afraid of women serving on altar (even as server), much less as priest.

German women legitimately served as priests during World War II - if it was okay then, why not now?

Women ARE the church -- seeking to be who we are, true to our call to follow Jesus

Would like to see a whole new model of priesthood, one that honors the gifts and attributes that women bring. Women as gatherers (family, friends). Symbolism of feeding, nurturing, preparing the table, offering meal. (As opposed to sight of solitary male priest standing apart from community).

Example of early church, NT women who followed Jesus and financed early disciples. Deaconesses. Catacombs of Priscilla showing women priests at eucharist.

Women "doing" church in ways that are more meaningful.

Can't just "add women and stir" (Mary E. Hunt?). Must address issues of male dominance and misogynistic

attitudes among current clergy. Clergy acceptance of female priests? Younger priests described as “scary” in this regard. Does ordination of women lead to greater division?

Life of church goes beyond the Eucharist-- inclusivity extends to whole range of ministries, social justice concerns, working with and caring for people in the margins, homeless, migrants, elderly, etc.

What about deacons? Sense that the revival of permanent diaconate created little more than glorified altar boys. Ordaining women to diaconate and not to priesthood-- second class treatment that misses the mark. Complete inclusivity is the goal.

Would like to see faith community that understands the power of baptism (prophet, priest, king).

Church perspective on women tied to menstruation, women as unclean-- messiness of childbirth-- this thinking and tradition of “churching” after childbirth still influence church thinking around women even today.

What if we just did it? (e.g., RC Womenpriests, intentional communities lead by women)

The Woman in the group were extremely similar in their dreams for woman, their primary desires is for the church is to transform the role of woman in the church.

Woman must have the right to participate as equals in every position within the church as priest, bishops, cardinals, deacons, spiritual director, parish life coordinators.

Marriage permitted for priests, sisters, brothers and an end to the domination of men in the Catholic church.

In 1920 American woman won the right to vote , it is time the church allows women to participate and have voting rights in each and every structure within the church. The church needs to be united in supporting respect for all women and men insuring all people are listened to and are respected.

We have missed 5 decades of young woman. The decline in young woman joining and creating religious community within the church has resulted in the church not accepting and listening to religious woman’s desires and dreams.

Universal agreement that women should exercise whatever role their discernment reveals is the Spirit’s call, including presiding at Eucharist.

It’s amazing that we are still talking about the equality of women in the Church! Patriarchal church is completely “behind the times.” Barrier to this is entrenched clericalism: clergy, especially diocesan clergy have inappropriate power.

A suggestion was made for the development of an academy of women wisdom figures who will share their insights and draw others to recognize the wisdom within each person. Graduates will then have leadership roles in the academy.

Future Church will be neither patriarchal nor matriarchal but an interplay among all people, a church which manifests social justice, human and civil rights, and advocacy for all the faithful, a reflection of the Trinitarian divine dance.

All men and women should have their competencies and opinions recognized by the hierarchical church not dismissed.

Woman should have equal partnership and more acknowledged for bringing about the story of salvation to its fruition.

There’s nothing that women can’t do in the Church. Women can do everything in the church. Catherine of Siena when she was told to out among the people she said “I can’t do that. I’m just a woman” Jesus said “Man or woman, it makes no difference to me. I do everything equally.” The spirit calls us equally.

There is no theological basis for woman not to be equal to do anything in the church

A rally sign read “If you can’t ordain women stop baptizing them.” Who says that a penis is a condition to be able to embody the Messiah, both in the church and society. Women need to be heard more. In the last 15 years. There are 2-300 validly ordained women worldwide. Powerful to hear “This is my body and blood” from women. They are prophetic voices.

Women and other cultures add life and diversity to a living church. Breaking down the current rigidity of the church and offering compassionate cultural aspects of tradition unifies the Church. In this country we let ushers let us know when it’s time to go to communion when in other countries like Latin America and other parts of the world cultural you go when you want, as the Spirit moves you to go.

For women priests to be equal and full participants in a newly envisioned church they need to be equally involved in developing the new structure experiencing the fullness of the church.

Women have so much to share women. We don’t need “ordained clergy in skirts” but a new and different vision of a clerical image.

We don’t want to see “a women in the same chair” we want to see “a woman in a new chair” bringing fullness of presence to a new church.

There are “women priest” parishes and other Christian Churches that incorporate governing councils/collective governing.

### **What are your dreams about new models/structures in the Church?**

A de-clericalized church.

Ultimately no priest class.

Horizontal church where lay and ordained work side-by-side as is done right now in some Latin American countries’ parishes rather than the hierarchical model seen here in USA.

Small lay groups/small Christian communities within parishes who are authorized to celebrate the Eucharist among themselves.

Change seminary education so that seminaries teach priests to be servant community leaders instead of expecting adulation and so that priests learn a real (and liberating) theology of sexuality.

For one’s parish to be your home where you are truly known loved and supported, where you belong, where you can be honest about who you are and what you struggle with, where you can be healed and not judged.

The church needs to be a model where the parish has input on who their priest, bishop will be.

The church needs to have a structure that invites feedback and evaluation about priests, bishops, and other church leaders

The church needs to have a shared leadership model where there is a feminine and masculine voice that meets the needs of the church

The church needs to have women representatives at diocesan pastoral council and all levels.

The church needs to integrate contemplative prayer and mystical practices in the new models for how we do church

Contemplative prayer can be an interfaith practice that prevails in parishes, schools, law offices, everywhere

The church needs to go to where the young people are and invite them to reform the church

The church needs to find a way to share sacred spaces with other faiths

The church needs to have a systematic approach for implementing change .. For example, first have religious women who are called to be priests, and then allow married people to be priests.

Universal agreement that structures should be completely inclusive, “catholic” in the sense of holistic without being uniform. Women’s communities are very often examples of this model.

Start with small church communities, welcoming all to develop the ministry of Jesus through the eyes of each with newness and integrity ~ recognizing the needs of others and not allowing previous boundaries and structures to interfere with the “how” of meeting the needs of other

No one has all the gifts-people have a calling –respond in faith in what we see in that person

Intentional communities (some gender-diverse and clergy – non-clergy diverse) work together in harmony.

During Covid, when no priests have been available, the Carmelites have been able to celebrate Mass for themselves.

Secular groups where there is ethnic and gender diversity function better than those that do not have diversity – it would seem that the Church could follow that lead.

The current Church model is a medieval structure that is still tied to Rome.

Vatican II invited people beyond the hierarchy – the Church is the People of God – not just the hierarchy.

The Church springs up around the table – it comes from the community.

We need to get rid of the role of “Cardinal” because it has become an end in itself.

There are dreams of true and welcomed Participation a diverse gathering and worshiping persons ... all welcome and engaged. This participation would challenge destructive structures that may exist in our current organization of Church. Church would value the gathering and participation of all within this inclusive group. A role of such an inclusive gathering would affirm the possibility of each idea shared, It would ease the pain of woman church, many of whom have been forced to bury their gifts.

There are dreams of structures that are the mark of partnership.

There are dreams of times for adaptation for new structures.

Church building and sacraments have confined and defined us – what if we break out of this model into neighborhood cells - faith groups of prayer and service, where we come together as equals. And we could meet as the larger church membership several times a year.

The Mass would be more inclusive in its language and structure. Have more participation, dialogue in the actual ritual of the Eucharist – again the model is a circle at the level of the people. Go back to the way Jesus lived and met and prayed with and invited people to follow him. “Sometimes I wonder if the Church teaches the Gospel as Jesus did.”

Structures that really act on the belief that women’s gifts and leadership are fundamental to the Church. Put those gifts into practice in roles, structures and systems at all levels. Involve the laity in reframing those roles and structures and systems that now are patriarchal and hierarchical in form, function and decision making.

Patriarchy has to go.

We need to shift narratives, stories, to create change.

Conversion of what “church” means.

A new era is struggling to be born.

Prophecy needs to be for communion.

## **Liturgy**

People of God want a service, a “faithful gathering” like Mass at Carmel  
eucharist – lower case

Homilies at Carmel give hope. Homilies in parishes discouraging and alienating.

Concern there are few younger people. Nativity parish wonderful example of drawing the young. How do we do this?

Zoom liturgies and Lectio help older people. This is important for the future.

Need new theological/scientific understanding of “presence”.

All the rituals we have are Church.

Male clericalism can't be supplanted by female clericalism - need a new model that is circular, not hierarchical.

What is impact of Covid to this issue? People not returning to parishes in droves; strengthening of domestic church and alternate forms of liturgy and prayer available during Covid. Has this changed our thinking on role of priest and importance of ordination?

The hope echoed in our group : to end the patriarchal hierarchy of the church and create an inclusive structure including men , woman and lay people at every level will help religious communities blossom.

Parishes struggling with the absence of priest need to have Parish Life Coordinators using the model described by Pope Francis outlined in his encyclical letter which has been implemented Amazonian region and 200 churches throughout the United States .

94. A Church of Amazonian features requires the stable presence of mature and lay leaders endowed with authority[136] and familiar with the languages, cultures, spiritual experience and communal way of life in the different places, but also open to the multiplicity of gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows on every one. For wherever there is a particular need, he has already poured out the charisms that can meet it. This requires the Church to be open to the Spirit's boldness, to trust in, and concretely to permit, the growth of a specific ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay. The challenges in the Amazon region demand of the Church a special effort to be present at every level, and this can only be possible through the vigorous, broad and active involvement of the laity.

[136] It is possible that, due to a lack of priests, a bishop can entrust “participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish... to a deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons” (Code of Canon Law, 517 §2).

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20200202\\_querida-amazonia.html#\\_ftn136](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html#_ftn136)

Dream that parishes will join together with all denominations and churches within their communities with a goal of creating stronger communities of faith with mutual agenda to strengthen faith communities within every state . Church partnering for collaboration not competition transforming communities with faithful love and action.

Develop ongoing spiritual and pastoral adult education classes to insure each adult recognizes Jesus wants everyone to be on a personal spiritual journey with Him. Having Spiritual directors available within each parish. Implementing healing groups by professional to heal the wounds of people who have been hurt by the church .

Create in parishes, woman groups to discuss woman role in the church and begin exploring the wishes of the woman parishioners.

Having woman groups for young woman as well as young men to hear their dreams for the church.

With the parish life coordinator primary goal of creating small communities within parishes.

Church needs to open the doors and windows to be open for the existing needs of the community.

Parish need to identify, integrate and respect and use the gifts that parishioners bring to the church.

Pope Francis needs to know that some parishes, bishops and cardinals are not implementing the necessary structures to create synodality listening session. A commission of local religious men and woman as well as lay persons need to be created throughout the world in and states to insure all voices are heard for the synodal process to be effective.

Universal agreement that structures should be completely inclusive , “catholic” in the sense of holistic without being uniform. Women’s communities are very often examples of this model.

Future Church will need a quiet revolution of how we think about reality, a realization we need to think in terms of complementarity instead of hierarchy.

As faith communities we will need to craft responses through contemplative discernment rather than “top down” directives. We will need to develop the listening process in relation with each other and the needs of the people of God.

FutureChurch will need to expand Orders (e.g. order of preachers, presiders, sacramental administrators, etc.): Ministries will need to be open to all who feel led by the Spirit to serve regardless of gender or marital state.

FutureChurch may benefit by reconsideration of the early women saints of the church. The patriarchal system needs to yield to give women their rightful position in the faith community.

A suggestion was made for the development of an academy of women wisdom figures who will share their insights and draw others to recognize the wisdom within each person. Graduates will then have leadership roles in the academy.

FutureChurch will be neither patriarchal nor matriarchal but an interplay among all people, a church which manifests social justice, human and civil rights, and advocacy for all the faithful, a reflection of the Trinitarian divine dance.

We should have smaller Christian communities so we can learn intimately about in one another.

Dangers of hierarchical structures were mentioned by a few people in our group as well as a need for small church communities.

Structure – we’re silent in the pews. Some traditions, churches offer a dialogical experience during services where the people in the pews speak to the faith leader (for example the homily is more of a dialogue).

Structure - truth and reconciliation commissions could be used as precursor to moving forward with our dreams and vision.

A need for clergy to be more involved and present in its own church, community structures, and faith communities. Imagine the clergy supporting and showing up at their own church activities, other neighboring worship communities as well as local social events.

### **Other**

Opening doors to all: races, cultures, LGBTQ+, a church of hospitality and openness, welcoming all with their gifts, personality, energy, weakness, without family, home, money, poor, rich...

Pope, Bishops need to speak out to defend justice (Ukraine).

Accept LGBTQ people; do not be afraid to speak out; all need to be accepted

Finding a “place” in the Church feels like asking permission, trying to get in, hoping for access.

There are other communities and groups similarly excluded within the Church – by gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.

We cannot just wait for the synod to wake up. We are called to be synod now, to contribute to and to initiate communities where we are, to explore the questions the Church needs to face to have any kind of future.

The complexity of what needs to change can be discouraging and overwhelming – cannot happen immediately. But even having these conversations is a beginning.

Foster that which needs nourishment

I Dream of a Church...

- Where we ask the beautiful (instead of right) questions
- Where we seek to release the new life that wants to come forth
- Where all are welcomed, as Jesus welcomed all to the table
- Where the gifts, leadership and strength of women are recognized and celebrated, where history is told from both (i.e., genders) perspectives.
- Where diversity is seen as gift, not problem – diversity of gender, race, culture, generations, sexual orientation, etc. – all can find a welcoming home
- Where all are welcomed and supported equally as each lives a call – single, married, divorced, religious, ordained

One woman's female friend told her at Mass that she didn't just want to watch "the show" – she wanted to be part of it.

There is dream and real desire and need for Inclusion of all diverse groups of persons in our Church communities. These dreams would include persons of all ages within the practicing Church,; to include those who have left the organized Church for multiple reasons, laity, religious and Clerical , LGBT community, poor, homeless, those persons of lesser educational status, diverse age, race and ethnicity, gender , immigrants , etc. This activity alone would change the face and function of Church. It would also include the role of woman church to include ordination.

There are dreams and needs for a time of reconciliation for ills of the past.

A dream of an attitudinal change of Church.

There was an emphasis in the group for the need of groups that were life giving, not necessarily closely tied to a parish that could really be home for believers who have special needs or in parishes that offer little variety. This group also would like to see the groups sanctioned by the church....not necessarily by a local church...and would be a Eucharistic community. That did not get teased out even though the implications were that essentially a group would choose someone for the role.

Change that concretely reflects openness to all- LGBTQ, divorced and remarried, women preachers; Church needs to include other religions and cultures in open sharing of faith perspectives to learn from them as well.

Change that actively welcomes the communities that are marginalized.

Change that reflects that there are many different ways of being Church by having the grass roots involved in naming the many ways of being Church and by having the grass roots participate in what happens with the results of this synodal process.

Change in the size of churches. Churches are too big- need to break down into smaller churches. Pandemic and virtual church has helped us to see that possibility and helped us create community in new ways.

In many instances, lack of a priest has helped communities form where the Word is shared among the people and gifts have been recognized and discovered among the people.

We have to look at humanity (women AND men) before God.

Human beings embrace the whole of humanity.

Church must be open to the cosmic dimension of Christ.

More integration is needed among people, cultures, and ways to celebrate. Mass, the sacraments, and ways of praying offer richer community both in church and the community at large.

Silence, contemplative prayer offers richness to the community – for example Quakers or Buddhist practice. Merging of interfaith practices in local communities brings the community at large together.

Parish priest changes would include the women, laity during the transition phase so priests, clergy don't become "Popes in their own parish, diocese."

Awareness of different traditions in different parts of the world.

Catholic churches in US are too segregated.

### **Today's Synod Experience/Synodality in General**

were inspired by Sr Maria's share

the picture of the Native American players in the Transfiguration made us aware of the need for multiple cultures accepted and appreciated

synodality like democracy is messy but the other hampers growth

We are not whole until all voices are heard

Disappointment that Vatican II's "fresh air" has become stale

Read the book, Why Priests? Intrigued all as Christianity did just fine for 100 years without priests per se

If those on zoom use bread and wine, couldn't it become Eucharist?)

Climate change may force acceptance of all to survive

Most of us on the screen know we won't enjoy the fruits of this labor but want to work anyway...May be the best definition of hope as an action word.

It was happily noted that (in our group) two men were part of the group – it would be good to have more men participate.

There are dreams and needs for a time of reconciliation for ills of the past.

There are dreams of times for adaptation for new structures

And finally a dream of an attitudinal change of Church.

They would like to find a way to listen to prophetic communities. Covid has found ways for various groups to get together and could model. The members would need to be able to live experimentally.

They dream of finding ways to be church together where they could be nourished. The fruits of what has happened during Covid won't be known for a while.

Group felt that some are living synodality here and there, and a few in places where there is an exceptional priest.

One expressed a need for a giant reconciliation service and acknowledgment of the cost and damage of abuse. She wanted a big, public service...not a Eucharist...of reconciliation she feels that it is an elephant in the room everywhere. Others agreed. There was a suggestion that Tutu's message on reconciliation be made public so more could hear.

It is hard to become open and familiar with the variety of ways Scripture presents Eucharist.

People want this synodality.

The prophetic images preceding the breakout sessions were prophetic. They speak to who has the right to preach and speak for the Church.