

Women's Synod April 30, 2022

Feedback from Towel and Basin listening session for synod and Jesuit work with women

Date: April 30, 2022

Place: **Seattle University, Seattle WA**

Leaders: Jeanette Rodriguez, PhD, Professor and Director of Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture; Jessica Palmer, MA, MA, Assistant Director of Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture; Sharon Henderson Callahan, Professor Emerita, Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry

Some data:

130 people registered and attended an all-day session (9am-4pm)

About 15% were ages 20-35

About 60% were ages 60-90

About 25% were ages 36-59

More women – about 75% than men – about 25%

The group included Spanish speakers (Latinx) and African and African -American participants. Combined they constituted approximately 25% of the group gathered.

All participants represented areas of the Seattle Archdiocese of Western Washington

The event hosted representatives from Catholic sponsored groups throughout the diocese: Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center, Mercy Housing, Catholic Community services/ Catholic Housing services, Ignation Center, Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life, the Black Catholic Caucus, The Theology and Religious Studies department of Seattle University.

The session incorporated three movements using the Ignation discernment model. Special speakers prepared and delivered remarks related to each movement. Twenty small groups of 4-8 participants considered questions related to each movement and recorded their responses on butcher paper. A representative from each group named one thing on that groups' recorded contribution to the whole and all sheets were gathered to compile the items in this report. A panel closed the day with brief summary statements of what they heard throughout the day. Prayer, including ritual and song, guided the participants throughout the day.

The following summarizes the written notes from the group participants collected after each movement.

Movement One: Gratitude/ Consolations. What in our church works and inspires and offers hope and sustenance?

First, people expressed deep faith in God:

- The movement of God as mystery in our lives.
- God has given me a wonderful life. I have my faith (2)*
- Jesus gives us peace. We need to give to others.
- Jesus, his teachings and Bible (2)
- We have confidence in the Holy Spirit

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- Doing everything for God's glory; nothing without God

They also identified the church as home, community, our place in the world:

- We find the Catholic Church our home, it is our place of peace, our second home. It is community (7)
- The church is my saving grace
- I want to be a better Catholic
- As a mother I want to give the gift of this faith to my children. Family is so important (5) Life is so much better when you have God. Connections need to be intergenerational- include youth who are passionate about issues. (2)
- The priest is always there, I pray for priests.
- I'm loyal because of the nuns. They saved my life (from domestic abuse).

They further acknowledged the kind of life they live with subsets related to:

Prayer and spirituality

- Eucharist (3)
- Liturgy (5)
- Forgiveness of sin
- Moral life and learning from past in faith development (2)
- Chorus/ choir/ music (2)
- Theology (2)
- Mystical tradition- spirit presence; spirituality (2)
- Spiritual ancestors (3)/ communion of saints
- Exposure to various spiritual traditions in church: Jesuit, Franciscan, Benedictine, Dominican, etc.
- If victims of sexual abuse don't lose hope, how can I?
- The spiritual exercises
- Spiritual direction (2)

Social justice tradition

- Tradition of justice- social justice teachings; connection to the world; (7)
- Prophets
- Direct contact with folks on the margins; resources for those in need; food security; helping others

Transformation through the work of the Spirit in the church through its leaders and documents

- Vatican II (3)
- Laudato Si- (3) comment: God has a sense of humor. . . nature is a living book of the secrets of the universe. . . open up and enjoy."
- Pope Francis re-emphasizing Vatican II hope in the Spirit moving in our Church; a hope for change
- Pope Francis- the Eucharist is not the food of saints, but the food of sinners!
- The synod- opens to listening and honest story sharing (4)

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They valued small groups- lots of women groups, ministries, and potential service and leadership

- Small groups that share faith, discernment, questions, stories, prayer, moments of light and pain and struggle and call for vulnerability; being supported by those who invoke the Holy Spirit (5)
- Small groups of women; their stories (5); Jesus' first words to disciples after death "woman!" women see and respond; grandmothers, lay women leaders, women's bodies; lay women preaching
- Ministry by, for and with women- their contributions (5)

They imagined the Church as a "big tent" that expands while also holding the tension of expansion and selection:

- Being a big tent: Welcoming the stranger; love and accept others who are different- we can all learn from each other; expanded dialogue among people of no faith and different faiths (6)
- Non-traditional ways are welcome- express religion your way with open mindedness radiating inclusion (3)
- The Church is Us and I feel support from the Church, priest, family and Holy Spirit.

Many of the people who gathered are people who have loved and served communities through their entire lives. They know they are the church. They mourned for the loss of the Vatican II vision that invited them to use their gifts well for the whole people of God. While they focused on gratitude, they acknowledged the cost- children distant from church is a major source of grief and loss. In some instances they searched hard for things that kept them faithful, and as you can see, they found the core identity of their faith: trust in the work of God through the Spirit; sharing faith and life with others in small communities and in their parishes; practicing their own sources of spiritual sustenance, including sacraments; and depending on their peers, priests and nuns for guidance and support.

Movement Two: Desolation. What in our church causes anxiety, fear, desolation? What needs to be addressed so that the church (and Jesuit institutions) more adequately reflect God in our midst?

One group wrote: "we feel resigned and it leads us to numbness and closing down. It could have been otherwise." Another simple wrote "the Church must change!! And it will change whether the leadership cooperates or not." Several declared "the church, the Jesuits, just don't understand women. They don't get us!" Finally, all deeply mourn the insensitivity to the impact of the pedophilia crisis. "these are our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters! How could the church prioritize it's own structure and reputation over the deep wound of abuse perpetrated on the thousands of children, men and women around the world?" These statements capture the tone of the items listed below.

People called for more dialogue and refined teachings on several critical issues in today's world. The teachings are impacted by emerging understanding of what it is to be human, yet they remain rooted in ancient understandings. The main issues concern the lack of acknowledgement related to understanding what it is to be human in today's world. Thus, the church's rejection and designation as sinful great numbers of people: divorced and remarried, LGBTQ, women. The pain women and men expressed at being considered 75% of what the ancients (Aristotle and Aquinas) considered the ideal of human- white western European male. The same exclusion applied to BIPOC peoples with the resulting issues of slavery, schools for indigenous, and closing of parishes related to BIPOC congregants more prevalent than those related to majority white populations. The people hope to see more enlightened teaching based on current understandings:

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- The church's stand on the humanity (NOT DEPRAVITY!) of the GLBTQA++ community (8)
- Instead of looking back 2000 years, look to today and forward to transformation (6)
- The Church seems to have an entrenched opposition to change and thus becomes unwelcoming; as one person stated: we don't practice the small "c" of catholic.
- Divorce and remarriage should not leave people without access to sacraments (2) "mommy why can't you go to communion?"
- The Church has changed rituals and language and it seems the movement is backward rather than forward or inclusive (2)
- Instead of a preferential option for the poor, we see a preferential option for the wealthy, privileged, and male
- The church's stand on abortion
- Lack of inclusiveness of vocations- women, LGBTQ, Married people (6)
- Exclusion for LGBTQ and peoples of color (4) Black women and Native Americans experience constant desolation (3).
- Need to reconcile for past sins: racism, Native schools, pedophilia, oppression of women,
- closing churches, schools, parishes, Archdiocesan services rather than expanding leadership and ordination. Feels as though "the church is killing us." (4)

Significant discussion concerned issues related to power and equality- One said it well "without women's voices the Holy Spirit is not at work fully and completely." Embracing Pope Francis' call to move the church and its priests to the margins as if in a triage world, the people called for the hierarchy to recognize its privilege and power. Sharing stories of deep pain at being excluded from participating in the sacraments, contributing gifts and education, and racism and sexism, individuals mourned the current state of the church in the world and in Western Washington. Those in the room knew a church of hope and vision and courage led by Archbishop Hunthausen post Vatican II. They mourned the loss of leadership and care.

- Several noted that we are all made in the image of God. Yet, some are more privileged with power bestowed by the Church. Many feel desolation in relation to this unequal distribution of power and privilege. One person's question contemplates the loss of some if all are equal: Who loses power if all are equal and treated that way in the Church? Another comment responds that "Organized religion and dogma are not inclusive". Within this discussion, people agreed that "Dualism needs to go- we live in a non-binary universe."
- The Church practices and laws privilege men and oppress women; Archbishop Brunett (retired and deceased from Seattle Archdiocese) claimed "women are just a server" and "women do not have a role in the Church." Yet we argue that "God is not a white male!"
- Not ordaining women discourages over half the faithful (9) We need to use the gifts of the 99 as well as the one. The Spirit gifts all of us as images of God. We are not a male only Church, thus women need equal voice, power, leadership; the patriarchy excludes (5) Another mourned in despair "My voice does not matter so why bother?"
- Indeed, Eve is not the first and key sinner- it's a story! Thus, women are not by definition more egregious sinners than men. Women are not impure by nature- even though clerics, theologians and even those canonized as Doctors of the Church claim, teach and believe women are sinful and impure by nature. The theologians that demean and relegate women to "75%" of maleness

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encourage all to believe this and act accordingly. There is a total lack of understanding women's experience (4) the church doesn't recognize how the Spirit works in women.

- The Church needs to get rid of the "cult of virginity."

Some spoke of the restrictions of their perception of narrow walls closing the church. Specifically the pedophilia scandal and the closing of the hierarchical structures to protect the hierarchy not the people of God resounded throughout the discussion.

- Clericalism has to go (6) Anti-Vatican II movements narrow the Church (2) even new priests retrenched in pre-Vatican preparation and theology. Change the structure, not the people (6); The hierarchy remains removed from the poor and doesn't hear the smallest voices (5) We experience dead silence when people try to contact the hierarchy or speak. When we try to contact priests or the Chancery we get no response. Our new priests have no relevance to our experience and lack the ability to engage social teaching. Indeed, most of them lack social skills and ability to engage as humans with humans.
- The pedophilia scandal continues to scandalize and names the hierarchy as the source of deception- so lack of trust (5) This lack of trust impacts priests and bishops and the laity sees them as desolate (3) more about butts in pews than building reign of God. They seem to be cowards. They are more concerned about raising money to pay for priests to have retirements than to help the people in the pew have access to sacraments. Fear seems to motivate the hierarchy and restricts their ability to move with the Holy Spirit. The US bishops politicizing our faith. Access to Eucharist is not a conformance weapon (3)
Our young people can't find a place in our Church (4)

Some spoke of personal desolation: they mourn the loss of young people; violence, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and hunger for something more than consumerism. They acknowledged that socio-economic strata divide the community of faith and also note that the hierarchy lives in privilege, while Pope Francis tries to live with the people. They want the leaders of our church to walk the talk.

Movement Three: Hope/ Action. What in our church (Jesuit institutions) offer hope for the future? What can we do to ensure that these organizations move toward the call of God for holiness? Love? Peace? Joy?

One group wrote: "None of us can do this alone. Do not put so much on a few. Let each small light become a blazing fire." In agreement with this statement, several groups mentioned the willingness to develop community and small groups. They offered ideas for the diocese and the Jesuits to pursue with them: opportunities for More Involvement and leadership; companionship and small group gatherings (13); invite people in and celebrate their gifts as co-creators of the people of God (13). They felt heard and enlivened with renewed hope that the Church can change.

They agreed they would continue deepening their spiritual lives to sustain them on a long journey of change and transformation of the Church. They are already practicing self-care that includes interior freedom, self-compassion, hope, remember my worthiness, self- forgiveness, autopoiesis is a way of knowing the deepest self- identity both individually and communally (8). They pray and look for ways to discern next steps and act; ask for grace to know and to teach my belief (9) They recognize they need

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the grace of perseverance and staying in dialogue and conversation and are willing to go more deeply inside seeking Christ; especially in moments of crisis; be honest and transparent and inclusive.

Embracing the spiritual richness of the Church, they named several treasures for renewal they practice and hope the diocese and Jesuit leaders will continue to provide and expand:

- Spend time in nature (Thomas Berry steps in new creation- Teilhard de Chardin) Cosmos, living life in land (7)
- We need to ask, what needs to die in order to birth new life. Thus we are a Good Friday church AND an Easter and Pentecost church (life in the people, spirit of the gospels with new lens, the Spirit dwells in each person. The wind and fire are uncontrollable!)
- Foster the grace of listening- where is the pain?
- Foster the grace of humility to let others lead. Let go of the need to control. Know when to step aside
- Keep on keeping on (9)- baby steps of grounded resilience with patience and courage
- Silence to listen to the Spirit (7) include prayer, meditation
- Softening to be present to the Now (3)
- Loving persistence- open to dialogue; we are planting seeds for fruit we may never see (6)
- Make spiritual space. Pray, Listen, Open to the positive, offer grace, expect surprises (8)
- Connect with God, we are from God (4)
- Live more intentionally as living beings of the Gospel. We need to live the change we want. (11)
- Authenticity- loving/ living (2)
- Be wisdom keepers (4)
- Have a more open heart- open to where the Spirit takes you (5)
- Jesus dealt with similar struggles- maintaining integrity, looking to God.

Some groups strategized steps to take to support change in the Church

- Letters to those in authority
- Refuse to stay silent, eg the sexual abuse crisis and eliminate clericalism- courage to truth tell (9)
- Refuse to accept wrong teaching
- Resist binary classifications
- Emphasize the pastoral- not limited to church (2)
- Eucharist for all- not in tabernacle (2)
- Embrace Vatican II teachings fully (3)
- Push limits without waiting for clergy (2)
- Move into home church model- even without knowing exactly how to do it
- Be aware of my own complicity in a sinful church and stop
- Embrace justice and mercy (4)
- Mentor and open space for young leaders.- How old was Jesus when he started his ministry? (6)
- Pope Francis has the "pulse" of the church and the sacraments are for sinners- US! (2) We pray for him (2)
- We are creating new rituals in absence of ordained celibate males.
- Empowerment in the context of Philippian women- make a difference
- Embrace Vatican II (2)

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- The synodal process can break divisions, move us forward and open us to hear each other. The synod is global and similar issues and understandings are emerging around the world. Practice listening to one another without judgment or blame. Reestablish the practice of seeing the good in each person. (3)
- Stand up for racial justice (4) and all social justice (4) Recognize the generational trauma for Black and indigenous Catholics and move toward solidarity.
- Women are now in the Curia, maybe there is hope for change – a break in the pattern of leadership (3)

The process allowed people to think through how they were contributing to their own spiritual and ecclesial health as well as ways they could move others to do the same. While the list is long and varied, it represents hope and commitment as well as longing for support and understanding. The group remembers a time in the 1970s through the mid 1990s, when the Archdiocese of Seattle offered significant support to lay ecclesial ministers and parishes. The lacuna in the diocese now impacts every parish and the people gathered harbor longing for a more responsive priestly and hierarchical understanding. The pedophilia crisis impacts everything. The deep wound is not healed and remains festering underneath everything else. The “business as usual” operation of the diocese with unabashed closing of parishes and placing priests with no social skills or understanding of the people in parishes confirms a hierarchy completely removed from the people it serves. The hierarchical focus on language, priestly gestures, kneeling and other liturgical movement, as well as meeting individual bishops’ criteria for faithfulness in sacraments, rather than on people and reconciliation and repentance and renewal of life in Christ continues to scandalize and divide members of the church. This gathering welcomed past superiors and leaders of Vowed religious women’s communities as well as three Jesuit priests. While a representative of the diocese attended part of the day, no priest or bishop from the Archdiocese of Seattle listened to what was said in any group. Several of the participants also facilitated listening sessions in other arenas in the diocese including parish groups. They reported that they had not a single priest or bishop in any of their listening sessions. This remains a major problem in a synodal process. If the bishops are not listening to the stories, if the priests don’t hear the people of God, how are they to understand what the people are saying? The power of the day is in listening, deeply to the stories of faith in the people assembled. This summary barely communicates the level of pain, apathy, discouragement and anger present in the faithful who assembled. It also fails to represent the accompanying willingness to hope in the Spirit, participate as faithful disciples, and deep commitment to remain faithful to the Spirit of God who calls them through their baptism to a life of death, yes, with the hope and guarantee of resurrection.

*A note about the numbers in parentheses by each item.

We hosted 20 groups of 4-8 in each group. Each item then represents the consensus of at least 4-8 people gathered. The numbers show the number of groups that listed similar items, thus (2) would mean 2 groups of 4-8 or 8-16 people shared this idea, hope, action item, desolation or consolation. I think this helps give context to the ideas. We noted each contribution, since it was from a group and therefore represented more than one person. We tried to group things in themes so that items that seemed to support themes were highlighted.