

June 20, 2022

His Eminence Cardinal Mario Cardinal Grech

c/o General Secretariat for the Synod

Via Della Conciliazione 34

Citta del Vaticano 00120

Your Eminence:

I am a member of a multi-state group of about 125 persons from various dioceses. Since the group is from many states, there is no one vehicle to present our concerns to the Synod Preparatory Committee. We are all men who attended St. Joseph's Minor Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for four to six years between 1955 and 1965. Six of the attendees are from the Class of 1961 and are active Catholics. Several other former seminarians from St. Joseph's who did not attend the listening session offered comments as well. We believe we offer a unique perspective for this synod based on our experience in a pre-Vatican II seminary. We have great camaraderie as a result of attending that seminary and have held many class reunions.

We really appreciate the initiative of Pope Francis to include the laity in a discussion of the future of the Church. It is with this thought that we present our views.

Sister Melanie Di Pietro,SC, is a member of a prayer group of which I am a member and I have asked her to include our synthesis, which is independent of the prayer group.

Thank you and all of the persons who work to make this important Synod both a symbol of extended care of the faithful and the integrity to fulfill the mission of Christ.

With esteem and gratitude, I am

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Report on SYNOD listening session

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Participants in the listening sessions in March 2022 for this synthesis were six men aged 80 to 81. All were classmates at St. Joseph's Minor Seminary in Grand Rapids Michigan for four to six years between 1955 and 1961. All are active Catholics. Some comments were added from a general listening session with other students from this seminary who are about age 75. Three general questions were used for the basis of the listening session:

- A. How has the Church, both the institution and the people of God, helped you on your journey of faith? Please look at this from the local (parish) and universal perspectives.
- B. How has the Church, both the institution and the people of God, hurt you on your journey of faith? Please look at this from the local (parish) and universal perspectives.
- C. Also add suggestions for preventing such hurts in the future.

Participants were also asked to share any seminary experience relevant to these questions.

A. How has the Church helped you on your journey of faith?

I think that the local People of God have been very influential in my faith life. Family, parish, and pastor were supportive of me and my goals. Parish was a big part of my life. Loving family. One priest emphasized the social justice teaching. Others followed Vatican II and softened the rigid discipline of the institution.

Church was important at home and parish.

Seminary gave me a good education and long-lasting friends

I had good mentors most of my adult life, one bishop, priests, religious, lay

Seminary was a gift for all my life in guiding me, although I am not Catholic today.

The positive Universal are the examples St. Francis, the Church Fathers, St. Thomas More, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero, and more...

The teachings of the Vatican II Council

Renewed emphasis and meaning of Eucharist

Teaching on social justice

John Paul II was charismatic and drew thousands to public gatherings

He helped bring down the iron curtain".

The lives of the saints are a great gift from the Church

B. How has the Church hurt your journey?

Vatican II was not fully implemented.

Clericalism is a local and universal hurt – clergy at all levels act as if they are monarchs in charge of a fiefdom, not a parish or diocese.

It sets him apart from the people he serves.

Seminary life caused me to bypass adolescence and left me floundering after leaving it

Friends and family have been rejected by their priests.
Secret Appointments of bishops cause damage to the Diocese and parishes.
Gay friends feel rejected.
Newly ordained priests talk and act as if they never heard of Vatican II. This is hurting the people they serve.
Mishandling of orphans in Ireland, Canada, and United States
The teaching on sexuality by celibate males hurts many people. Mandatory celibacy must end.
The cover up of sexual abuse caused untold damage to the Church's moral authority and of course to all Christians, not just Catholics.
Some Cardinals, like Burke, and archbishops, like Vigano, who openly oppose Pope Francis is scandalous.
The politicization of the Eucharist and other issues has hurt many people.
Seminary life had little to do with being a priest but about following rules and following a course of study.

C. Suggestions to correct the hurts

Holy Orders must be reexamined. A priest is not ontologically different. Before ordination a person must do mission work in a parish, like the Mormons, or in social assistance organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services, Immigration Services, Catholic Worker, soup kitchens, hospitals, college campuses, etc.

Pastor must work with and make decisions collaboratively with lay people.

Priesthood must be available to men and women, married and single.

Lay women and men need to be allowed to preach.

Leaders should be for a term and they must be evaluated.

Allow nuns and lay to baptize.

Declare all infallible doctrine as fallible and proceed accordingly.

The dissonance between Church teaching and science is a problem.

Eucharist is a communal meal – Jesus is present not because of the priest but the community. As Jesus said, where two or more are gathered, there am I with them.

Women need to be in all areas of leadership and authority.

Married clergy would be able to relate better to their parishioners.

Lay people need to have a say in who their pastors are.

Foreign priests who do not speak English well or do not know the local culture must not be recruited.

They are a disservice. Priests do not perform magic.

Divorced and remarried must be accepted, not ostracized

Priests are not marriage counselors but must refer couples to professionals.

Social justice and climate change must be taught and practiced.

Clergy must promote interfaith activities.

Centering prayer must be encouraged.

The use of technology must be encouraged in proclaiming the Gospel.

Young people have been leaving the Church in droves. Efforts need to be made to meet their needs.

The LGBTQ community needs to be admitted into full membership.

Teaching of sexuality needs to be updated to modern knowledge.

Seminaries must be required to teach Vatican II.
Priests must be taught to be pastoral, not sacramental magicians.
Open faith sharing groups must be encouraged.
Seminary studies should begin after high school or during college and in an open environment, not closed from the rest of the world.
Preaching and action needs to be based on spiritual growth and social justice.
Doctrines and actions that engender exclusivity need to be discarded.
Homilies need to be relevant to the people, not doctrinal statements.

CONCLUSION

We acknowledge that the Church has given us many gifts and blessings for which we are grateful. It has offered us heroic men and women whom we admire and strive to emulate. The Second Vatican Council has provided a roadmap for us to follow as we grow to become truly a People of God. Unfortunately, the Church has not robustly implemented the recommendations of its own Council.

We envision a Church that fully implements the spirit of the Council and follows “the way of Jesus”, that lives out the message of love, justice and peace by having a strong commitment to the social Gospel. Clericalism should have no part in the Church. It has been the cause of the pedophile scandal and the accompanying cover-up. It has separated the priests and bishops from the laity, setting them apart from their communities. Priests must be chosen from their communities and answerable to them and their education and ministry must be grounded in servant leadership. Celibacy must be an optional requirement to the priesthood.

In this Church women should have a key role and placed in positions of authority. Women deacons should be ordained immediately, because of the pressing need. Synodality must reign, with all the baptized having a voice and working toward the goals of the Church. The Church must warmly welcome those who have been hurt, marginalized and even ostracized by the institutional Church, such as divorced people, the LGBTQ community, and women who have had an abortion. The laity must be voting participants and not just observers in the governing of the Church.

The Eucharist is the lifeblood of the community and must be seen as nourishment for those who need it and not a reward for the perfect and definitely not as a political tool. Following the guidelines of the Vatican II Council, more emphasis must be placed on the Liturgy of the Word and how is proclaimed to the community. Homilies should be well-prepared, understandable and meaningful to the people in the pews.

All of these goals should be undertaken with the advice and support of other faith communities. They are facing the same issues of a decline of membership and the loss of young as the Catholic Church.

We pray that the Synod will strongly consider these suggestions because they are the fruit of hours of prayer and discussion. We thank Pope Francis for initiating this process and allowing our voices to be heard. We truly believe that they are the result of the workings of the Holy Spirit. We pray for the swift implementation of these measures.