

July 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 faith sharing group in Midland Michigan. I was so inspired by Pope Francis' request for input from lay people that I urged this group to express their views about their Church experience. Six of us attended this listening session and want to share with you our synthesis. we shared them with our parish as well.

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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Faith Sharing Group Response to Synodality and the Roman Catholic Church

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Nature of this Faith Sharing Group

This group currently consists of nine women and men, each at least 60 years old. Several have been group members for 15 years. The “faith sharing group” effort was initiated by their parish about 2007. Blessed Sacrament Parish is in Midland, Mich.

Six group members participated in the March 2022 listening session reported in this document.

All members attend weekly mass and are also active in parish life serving as sacristan, lector, Eucharistic minister, homebound minister and trained lay ministry. Several participate in Bible groups which meet weekly. One person identifies as gay and another has a gay child.

Outside group activities, members consider each other as friends.

Collective Responses re: good, bad experiences and Church growth to Synodality follow:

What has been your experience of journeying together as equals in the Church?

1. What has been good?
2. What has been bad?

3. How can the Church become more synodal?

What has been your experience of journeying together as equals in the Church?

1. What has been good?

- Bishop Kenneth Edward Untener, Bishop of the Saginaw, Mich. Diocese from Nov. 24, 1980 to March 27, 2004. His humility, leadership and pastoral skills were felt deeply by members of this group and many others. Sadly, the three bishops appointed since Bishop Untener's death have not shown a glimmer of the pastoral skills Bishop Ken consistently led with. The current bishop seems a bit more pastoral but along with his two predecessors, he is locked into pre-Vatican II theology and control. We deeply miss Bishop Ken but understand many in the parish and diocese will disagree with us.
- Our parish and its many pastors have offered parishioners a great spiritual home to love and grow in our faith and the opportunities to serve in many ministries and activities. Our current pastor demonstrates "meaningful reverence for liturgy and delivers meaningful and insightful homilies. He never puts himself above the laity in any way."
- As members of a faith sharpening group, we believe strongly that our pastors over many years have contributed to growth and understanding of our faith.
- However, one member writes: "The "'community' experienced in my faith sharing group far surpasses that which I only sometimes at Mass."
- Vatican II provided us with sincere and welcome hope that the Church would grow to be more Christ-like, understanding such a journey would happen neither quickly nor easily. Most of us were 18-25 years at the time. We were young and not experienced in many of the specifics of the Council, but we understood a priest celebrating Mass in Latin with back turned and the prevalent "Yes, Father" and "No, Father" language did not seem Christ-like or obedient to Jesus' "Love God," and "Love your neighbor."

1. What has been bad?

- The almost-immediate rejection of Vatican II's guidance to grow to be a more inclusive and loving force in the world.
- Clericalism in all its many faces; among the most despicable is the widespread and years-long human tragedy of wide-spread sexual abuse by clergy at all levels against mostly naïve, young and trusting children and young adults and mostly male.
- The "Church's insistences that It alone has the answer to "The 'way' to eternal life." We believe people of all faiths and no faiths are all pilgrims.
- The institutional church continues to be "tone deaf" to the needs of "the people of God." Consider: the role of women in the church, stances on abortion and discriminatory treatment of LGBTQ persons and the marginalized and powerless. It is as if the Church has been – and continues to be largely out of touch with the real world --dealing with these matters not with compassion and love, as Jesus mandated in the Scriptures, but rather to preserve the power of the clergy at all pastoral levels and to maintain 'control' over the laity.

2. How can the Church become more Synodal?

- Be welcoming to all; respect for each other, especially among clergy of all levels; acceptance of women, LGBTQ and other marginalized communities
- More focus on the gospel and much less on the institution
- Welcome women in seminaries who hear call and ordain them, just as done with men, when studies are completed.
- Freely and gladly offer the Eucharist to all
- Eliminate the physical trappings and grandeur of clergy, especially that of diocesan bishops and the "The Sacred College of Cardinals"