



THE THOMAS MERTON CENTER
for Catholic Spiritual Development

Listening Session for the Synod on Synodality

Conducted via Zoom

March 5, 2022

Summary Prepared by and Participants Comments compiled by

Jim Davis

Thomas Merton Center Spiritual Education Committee Co-chair

I. TMC Synod Listening Session General Summary

Participants in the sessions seemed to be open and generous with their comments. Many expressed joy from participating in the work of the church and a desire to be more active in carrying out its mission.

While most experience church in various ways, some indicated that they are enlightened by readings and publications of Catholic organizations and attend seminars and events outside of Mass.

Many were highly critical of Church leadership as being top down, dogmatic, and insular; however, they were supportive of Pope Francis's reform efforts.

There was a desire to see the church move toward small faith communities wherein the laity would take more responsibility for their own spiritual well-being. This included having a say in the appointment of priests and bishops and assuring that women be more equitably and appropriately represented in the church hierarchy.

There seems to be no appetite for tearing down the church and starting anew but rather a desire to participate in making it better with a strong outreach to marginalized communities and those in need throughout the world.

II. Synod Listening Session Process

Members of The Thomas Merton Center and friends who had attended past events sponsored by The Thomas Merton Center's Spiritual Education Committee were invited. They were encouraged to spread the word and invite others who expressed interest.

The Listening Session was conducted online using Zoom. The event was moderated and managed by Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM). The Session opened with prayer and an explanation of the Listening Session using the Synod process described by the Diocese of San Jose and reflecting the process set out by the Vatican in their reference documents. There were six groups in break-out rooms after the introduction. Each group consisted of approximately five participants who were asked to respond to a set of questions in two sessions. Each group included at least one notetaker. Participants were encouraged to speak and listen to each member of the group without criticism or comment.

After the group sessions, the moderator brought the groups together and asked participants to comment on their respective sessions. The group notetakers then forwarded their notes to The Thomas Merton Center for compiling. Editing has been done for clarity and to reduce repetition. Comments may be paraphrased but are as close to the intent of the speaker as possible. There were no audio or video recordings.

III. Session 1, Questions:

A. Where and How Do You Personally Experience Church Today?

Responses:

- Mass on most Sundays and Days of Obligation
- I participate in Zoom Masses of my choosing. This allows contact with people all over the world.
- I will never set foot in a Catholic church again
- Thomas Merton Center Masses that model Vatican II values
- Readings of Richard Rohr (Franciscan Priest, Faculty at Center for Action and Contemplation [CAC]).
- Fr. Jon Pedigo's model of social justice and compassion
- Holy Mother Church is global, not just institutional (In Rome)
- *National Catholic Reporter* gives good overview of recent events in the Church
- Catholic publications that are worldly, inspired and reflective, such as *America Magazine* and *NCR*
- Experience church at home, work, nature, helping others
- Active in Women Priests' advocacy group
- Enjoying the liturgy, music and camaraderie when going to Mass
- Experience Church through prayer at home and thanking God for family, friends, food in brief prayers
- Working with others of different faiths
- Attending services of other faiths
- Participation at Mass as lector, Eucharistic minister, altar server, sacristan, and by studying the readings before Mass
- In the public arena at school when the opportunity arises and sharing experiences of the church with others
- Experience church in committee work and TMC service

B. What Joys Do You Experience?

Responses:

- Being together with a caring, like-minded community
- Participating in opportunities to help those in need in our community and the world
- Find joy in serving as a Eucharistic minister
- Enjoy hearing about the experience of other Catholics
- Socializing after Mass over refreshments, hearing the stories and experiences of others
- Being greeted by name and being caring and cared about
- Singing and hearing the community sing
- Studying Theology, especially as a woman at the graduate level academically.
Mentoring young students at St. Patrick Seminary
- Prayer groups
- When there are inspiring sermons
- When someone compliments my scripture reading at the ambo
- Feelings of gratitude, comfort and friendship in TMC (The Thomas Merton Center)
- Love of nature
- Personal freedom of conscience
- Values of Vatican II
- Pope Francis, who models true Christianity and compassion for all

D. What Difficulties and Obstacles Have You Encountered?

Responses:

- Frustration with Institutional Church's obvious, cringe-worthy failings
- Church Leadership does not represent the laity and needs to be more involved in community outreach
- Disgusted with Latin Mass advocates
- Sermons that are not related to everyday life
- Unable to speak directly with bishops
- There is no sense of community in the institutional Church
- Angry with Church in general and continue to communicate with many bishops for change
- Inequality of women that exists in the Church
- Evangelization being left only to the laity
- Need for married priests, noting married priests exist in the Anglican Church
- Hierarchy (US Bishops) only concerned with orthodoxy
- Judgmental and punishing attitudes (Not stated by whom)
- More listening needed, including by laity
- More inclusion needed for those with differing views/ experiences (divorced, gay, etc.)
- Refusal of Communion to good people
- Not enough support of racial and social justice issues
- Lack of bishops speaking out; they need to be more accountable
- Influence of conservative members and political connections/ influence
- Miss some rituals from childhood (hymns, bells ringing, Benediction)
- Church needs to do PR work to attract new members
- I struggle with Right-To-Life issues. I don't like abortion, but I don't think I should be the one rendering judgment on a woman's discerned decision.
- Hypocritical clergy who ignored abuse of young for a long time, yet are critical of LGBT Community
- Other Catholics who question my faith because of the direction Pope Francis is taking the Church. It makes me question my own and their belief system. This has resulted in a lost friendship.
- I wish I could bring my family to church. They are non-believers, and it is my fault. My sons are 19, 22 and 27.
- Critical but loyal describes me too. There has been a sea change over the last 30 years about being a Catholic. 30 years ago, Catholics were respected and esteemed. No longer after the abuse scandals. That was the #1 problem. What is the Church going to do about that? Penance – We must work 3X harder to pay for our sins.

Listening Session on the Synod on Synodality

- Catholic all the way through and have not experienced the disappointments of the Church. Enjoy people in the Church – priests and sisters. Have not been involved in the institutional church. Understand the issues about the abuse (bishops and priests) – it is terrible but am not personally involved. She has enjoyed the people she has met through the Church – remaining positive.

E. What Insights Do You Have?

Responses:

- On the individual level we must all be open to the other person's opinion. Listen and learn from each other, mostly accept opinions and differences. Think before speaking.
- For 'All', not 'Many'
- The Church would be better off foregoing cultural wars and not getting involved in national or local politics
- Meet people where they are
- The Church is not fulfilling its mission when it focuses purely on individual piety and orthodoxy
- Clergy needs to lead by example and their actions
- We don't vote for our bishops; we get who they send us. We should be able to do that

IV. Session 2 Question: What is your dream/vision for our Church in the future?

Responses:

- A place where we truly listen to each other and accept each other as we are
- More worship groups (Small Faith Communities), similar to TMC for example
- Married priests
- Women deacons and ultimately women priests, equal formation for women. Church leadership needs more than the male perspective
- Priests that minister, not only administer the parish
- Administer to individual spirituality
- More guest homilists
- Laity-run liturgies
- A Church more engaged in social issues
- Seminary education open to all
- Competent administrative management of parishes
- A more welcoming, friendlier Church, one that is less rule bound. If “catholic” means universal, the future Church must live up to that and become more accepting and less judgmental. Stress forgiveness, not punishment.
- A Church that more strongly embraces the reforms of Vatican II. There has been little additional progress in 50 Years. The Church seems to be reverting to the old ways. Pope Francis is pointing in the right direction, and he should be supported rather than vilified.
- A more up-side down (inverted?) Triangle of Authority wherein the laity is at the top.
- Bishops selected by the laity
- Defeat clericalism, the “Father Knows Best” mentality doesn’t fit anymore
- Steering away from wealthy control with conservative political/cultural alignments. Strong separation of Church and State.
- More welcoming outreach to youth
- More emphasis on and ministry to marginalized communities such as LGBT, Immigrants, Ethnic Minorities...etc.