

Church of St. Vincent De Paul, Albany

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May 26, 2022 addendum

Reflections on Synod Questions:

**What have been your experiences of the Church? What have been your joys, hopes and disappointments? When have you felt connected? When have you felt disconnected?**

**Early experiences of the Church:** Catholic school, nice nuns who didn't hit us. Late 1960's, beginning of Vatican II, so nuns taught us folk music which was sung in our weekly masses. Deeply impacted by the stations of the cross, and Veronica's encounter with Jesus. Saw my parents' involvement in Cursillo retreats, and synod meetings of the early 70's. Dad was very involved as usher, CCD teacher, parish council and eucharistic minister. Moms didn't take on any of these roles. Assumed that being ushers kept the men from having to sit and pay attention during mass.

**Felt disconnected as a teenager:** Parish priest uninspiring, spent homily time complaining about how we young people dressed for church. Not much value placed on youth and their involvement in parish life. The absence of women in any roles during liturgy (other than singing in choir, which was behind us, out of sight, in the loft) was painfully apparent. Assumed that meant no place for me in the church other than the pews, or rosary societies. I was not well-suited for a life of unquestioning obedience. Church became irrelevant as a teenager as a result. However, my belief in God never wavered. I felt the presence of God most when playing the piano.

**When I felt connected:** Rediscovered the beauty of my faith in college. Felt prodded by protestant friend to better understand my beliefs. Campus parish relied heavily on leadership and involvement of the students, which gave us a sense of agency with our Catholicism. This deepened my connection to my faith. Chose studies in religion for a major – exploration of richness of other faiths helped me to understand/appreciate my own.

**Disappointments** have been the retrenchment by the institutional church from Vatican II. There is increasing emphasis on strictly male authority, control from the top, and form over Spirit. This stubborn insistence on male priesthood, requests to pray for vocations and for money to pay for men's seminary training is pure hypocrisy.

I am deeply angered and disappointed in the absolute silencing of discussion of women's ordination. I consider this silencing to be a form of **abuse** to the Spirit in all of us.

Growing up in the first decade following Vatican II, I had come to assume that there would be growing freedom and involvement of laity, especially women, not only in liturgy and local parish life, but in the larger institutional church. During recent visits to my childhood parish in Detroit Archdiocese, I was extremely disappointed to hear the parish priest giving anti-gay homilies to 8<sup>th</sup> graders attending weekly mass, and in the lack of any real choice in music for my father's funeral. Music for funeral liturgies was limited to a short list of songs, dictated by the bishop, for all parishes in the archdiocese. I found this extreme level of control from the top to be very disturbing and insulting to the membership.

**Joys** have been that, despite the retrenchment by the institutional church, I can still find a parish home that encourages lay leadership and initiative, provides richness in liturgy and music, nurtures inclusive community, and connects my faith with service of others. This parish life links my experience of the sacraments to the reality of my everyday life and has given me the perspective needed to face my own

humanity and mortality. I cannot separate my connection to the sacraments from myself any more than I can sinew from my bones, and thus, as long as I have a parish that can feed my spirit, I remain in the Catholic church.

**What might the Church learn from your experiences?**

It is essential, in order to build and maintain a vibrant and faith-filled community of believers, to respect the intelligence and faith of the laity, to provide opportunity for agency and leadership of ALL members, regardless of age, orientation, gender or ability. If we fail to do this, attendance and connection to the church will only continue to decline.

**What new dreams and surprising visions for the Church might the holy scripture be inspiring?**

Jesus' openness to ALL persons without judgment as to their transgressions or gender, continues to challenge us today, as we need to welcome all to the table.

The resurrection was radical and unexpected, and completely transformed the lives of Jesus' followers. We have dressed it up and hollowed it out. A renewed reflection on that first encounter with the resurrection, and the transformative power that it can have for our lives and our world, can provide us with the vision and courage to bring love, justice and healing to our wounded world. It was women who first discovered the empty tomb and shared their discovery with others. They were, tragically, then swept aside given the customs of the time. We need to include women in roles of leadership, priesthood and evangelization at all levels of the church.

**What actions can you take? What actions can be taken by the parish or diocese?**

Courageous and persistent communications with and to our bishop and other diocesan/national leaders on issues of concern – perhaps invitations for parish/small group encounters one on one with the bishop can be considered. I acknowledge, however, that any ability to listen to our concerns can only come from developing a trusting relationship where our concerns can be respected and not merely brushed off. Thus, more than one such meeting would be needed in order to build and nurture the ability to communicate respectfully. Not an easy task, given the “busy-ness” of the leadership in the diocese. Hence the need for persistence.

***Diana K. Bangert-Drowns***

June 14, 2022