

Synodal Church Sharing 2022-03-20. RESPONSE TEXT

NOTE: This is a close, but not exact, transcription of the Intentional Community sharing. However, the sense of any response has not been changed. The double-spacing in the text indicates a change of speakers.

Our Synodal Questions: In reflecting with the pillars of a Synodal Church: Communion; Participation; and Mission:

- 1) Where and how do you experience life, joy, and the Spirit in the Church?**
- 2) Where and how do you experience difficulties and wounds?**

- My life-giving experiences have revolved around small group, small faith sharing experiences
- Richard Rohr speaks of 5 Ms: human, movement, machine (structure), monument, memory. Life for me has been in the movement stage.
- When we get to institutional structures, life goes out. Fighting against that even when ordained in institution. Needed to jump out to find life.
- Most life in our Michigan parish was in Just Faith and outreach programs, found fulfillment in service. Same in TX – till new priests/pastors came in and destroyed these things.
- Even tho many of us are involved in (varied Church-related service organizations) eg CTA, but in many cases the institutional Church doesn't exist [in those social spaces]. Even tho Catholic Church and Catholic Charities have some of the greatest teachings and great service projects, at least in this country the hierarchy speak a few words but are not active.

- This group is a group where we can join together, share our faith, and just about everyone is active in some way. And we can do things together when we're in Texas. It's not like when I was growing up – pray, pay and obey, it's really a lot more involved. So even during covid we can still get together from across the miles.
- When we moved to Memphis we searched around for a community, then covid hit so this [online] community is ours now. [Pre-covid] in Memphis, we visited several churches, some Catholic, some not. We found a community, not Catholic, that we'll be involved with. A First Congregational Church. They've taken all pews out of the sanctuary, sit in a circle, they provide food for people on Sundays, have a welcoming area, it's a church full of people, including many "former" Catholics. So now I like this Intentional Community where we have the same values, can

speak on Sundays, and share with each other rather than listening to someone else telling us things. To me, that's the value of this community, and to be able to share by zoom because of covid has been a real blessing.

- The words movement and action are where it is and has been for me as well. When I was at home, going to church, sitting and listening but no participation in sense of interior growth and enabling me to be a part of [it]. It's like you're being fed, but if distasteful or you're allergic to it, you get it anyway. That how the parishes at home [in Iowa] were.
- I was rebellious in that I couldn't buy what I was hearing. When I was with the Presentation Sisters for 25 years, it was life giving in that we did a lot of small group sharing. I was involved in a lot of outreaches. It was difficult when I started going out to small parishes and working with the parish priests. My growth came from the small community I was living with. Oscar Romero was an important figure in my life. He spurred me to answer a call to be a missionary in Bolivia. I was ready to get away from the institutional church and be with the indigenous people. It was the most wonderful experience. After Ron & I married and joined Holy Spirit parish while it was alive and active, that too was very life-giving, uplifting, service-oriented, and growthful. After that [all changed], Ron and I visited several parishes but didn't find a home or a spot where we could grow. This IC has been a real joy, a spot where we can share, and be involved with each in the group. It's been freeing, life-giving, being fed where we can go out and share the gifts the Lord has given us. All are welcome, all are heard.
- When Ron & I married, we decided we needed to not support the Church as it was. We needed to bow out.

- We're kind of in the same boat. We've become protestant – we protest what the Catholic Church has become. I read Rohr's 5 M's also and the problem I have is that the Catholic Church appears to be locked in the memory portion, cycling between the memory and the monument and have lost sight of the man, the Christ, that we're all to have as our foundation. It's just not there. The magisterium keeps tooting about authoritarianism and domination. By and large, the USCCB has lost touch with most of the people and they're certainly losing our younger generation. If we lose the youth there's no hope for the future. That's very sad and seems to be the way it is.
- I'm kind of crazy about data and looking at the facts. The same kind of math applies to the Catholic Church that applies to the Republican party. When you do the arithmetic on what percentage of U.S. voters are Republicans, that's about

43%, then you look at what portion of the Republican voters are actively supporting Trump, which is less than 40%, you come up with the mouths of the Republican party catering to 17% of the American population. And yet that's driving the nation's politics and what's happening in the country. The same type of thing is happening in the Catholic Church. That the Bishops appear to be, to have a death grip on the ultraconservative, the right-wing people who pray to God that we go back to a Latin mass, the priest has his back to the people and you have to kneel before the priest to receive communion. And it's not where the majority of the people are.

- Deli and I talk about the big C, the hierarchical Catholic Church, and little c, the people of the church. And the big C is losing the little c. The people who make up the small church don't have much of a voice.
So we find our spirit, our joy, elsewhere. Deli's letters and our communication with the 10 kids we've adopted through Unbound around the world, and find out what's really going on in Kenya and northern Mexico and other places around the world. And the relatives that are now filling in the gaps of the history of Deli's family and her father, and relations we didn't know we had. It's wonderful how things are filling in.
- And that's where it is. We don't find it in the local parish and not much of it in the Catholic Church.

- There's a big difference between religion and spirituality. I will always be centered on God. But Church, big C, is a different story. I don't have to be in Church to love God. As Steven said, our lives revolve around God's will for us. So every single day, we fill our lives with the mission that is uniquely ours. I was going to Church and for the longest time I felt like a hypocrite, because I didn't believe what they are saying. Many years ago there was a penitential rite just before Lent, all different priests invited to the Church so we could go to confession. And I didn't want to because I don't care for so much... anyway, Steve said let's go. Next thing I knew, the woman who went to confession before me with that particular priest, rushed out crying. So then it was my turn... I went in and he was not satisfied with my sins. He told me, he chided me in a very ugly fashion, "I know you have more sins to tell. I know you've done something BAD so why don't you just spit it...!" You know, for someone who's here in the house, working on creating cards, sending letters of... you know, my focus is people, people who are hurting. My focus is what can I do to help them? And that's what my work involves. So I'm thinking I haven't had an affair with anybody, I haven't even lusted in my mind, like Jimmy Carter would say. He started in on me and I said, you know what, you're just a guy! Who do you think you are? You made the

other woman cry, Who do you think you are? And he said, I'm Jesus Christ. I said no, you're not! You're just a guy! And I walked off. I was so upset, not for me. It's not about me. Who else is going through that? I felt for them, it wasn't that the priest was being ugly to me, it's because he had made Olga cry. That's not what Church is supposed to be about. So having been a hypocrite in Church, I kept telling Steven "any moment now I'll fall off the fence!" I tried so hard to belong, people were so damned rude to me, how many others at our church put up with that. It's a small church a lot's of people come in. Faithfully we were there. But I'm not going to love God any less if we're not here. So finally, what was going to be my last weekend going to mass here – right now we have a wonderful priest from India here, and he said the next Sunday the Bishop was going to welcome him as pastor, so we went one more time. Then God was so merciful – covid happened! I told Steven, I'm not going back. Then that ended. I've been doing mass every day [on zoom] on my own time, in my own way. Just for me. Just to hear what the message is that day, if I agree or disagree, whatever.

- But I feel like what we're doing in life has so much meaning and fulfillment. I don't need to go to church to hear someone tell me I'm sinful when I know I'm doing my best, for others. And that's all that matters. You know St. Teresa of Avila's 7th dwelling place, and I know we shouldn't be talking about which place we're on, it's service. How many of us are into service?

- Oh, Deli, we've missed your voice so much! Joy, Spirit...I look at this arc for myself, an army brat, grow up where institutions really matter. When you grow up as a military child that's engrained in you. It doesn't need to be preached; it's lived out. Father goes off to war, comes back and has nasty things to say about how stupid the Captain was. But that doesn't matter, the institution matters. Catholic school, grades 1 – 12 and all that.
- When I was a university student, University of Dayton, I joined the religious order just as the [Vatican II] Council broke. The education we got in formation was fascinating, we studied what the good priests teaching it taught us were "the wrong things, but we have to teach you that stuff so you will know how to defend the Church." Sartre, the existentialists, and...and everyone was saying hey, there's some pretty good stuff here, let's not throw it all away!
- There was a huge amount of optimism and excitement about what the Council was doing and what it said. I think that was very inspirational for lots of people. I look back, 60 years, and that period beyond, and you begin to realize it's not happening. The things we read about and thought and saw the open window, we were going to return to the foundations of things, what we can draw from the early Church... And so that begins to erode you, and it becomes clearer and

clearer that the institution cares much more about the institution surviving in its current form, and those who have power and influence are able to maintain that. You understand the motivation, sort of, but when the institution becomes more important than what the institution is supposed to be doing – its purpose isn't to sustain itself, right? Its purpose is to allow people to come closer to God, through his work and so on.

- Then as you get even older and reflect on what you are hearing from younger members of the clergy... I'd walk out of mass Sunday after Sunday saying "where the hell did that guy go to school?! He's the most misinformed, egotistical nut case that I've met in my life. And you'd go from parish to parish, city to city, and it's everywhere. There are a few of the younger guys, that means the older guys! Younger in spirit, but people from when I was a kid, Berrigan and those kinds of folks, and you're encouraged.
- And you begin to realize that the institution itself is never going to change from the inside. They're never going to change themselves, because people don't give up power, they just don't do it. Maybe in the big scope of time, the Church is in its pre-adolescent days, and has a long way to go. It's been through all this stuff, but maybe there's some sort of kernel we can come in contact with, read Scripture in some different way.
- But ultimately, we have to find some sort of community to be part of. It's very difficult to make that happen and I think that's what pulls so many young people away from the institution. Institutions, in fact, are part of the problem. That's what the young always say, isn't it? We're going to do things differently. That sort of breakaway way of thinking, everybody goes through that, I think.
- But ultimately, we have to find some way to be part of something that's not just all a head trip. There has to be other real-life people we can be with and remember that "where two or three are gathered..." and actually believe that. We're not calling down Jesus, but we're all believers and that's where the Spirit is. There are problems with making some of that play out, and I think that's some of the question, but, I'm convinced you can't make this work [alone]. I know there are mystics who find the answers who find answers to life's questions in a solitary way, but I read that and take it in, and at some point, it has to be expressed out of yourself, knocked around with what other people think, and that's where the community has to come out.
- A book called *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, about four who had a correspondence: Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Flannery O'Connor, and Walker Percy, is marvelous. That community of people and what they bounced around, it's very powerful.

- I'm hearing a lot so far about community, and small faith communities where people can know each other and be known. The struggles with institutions that become sort of solidified. And the calls and values of action, what flows from that community life. That's a pretty high level of summary, but I hope fits with what's been said so far.
- Where I've had the best experience of Church is where I've had the experience of small faith communities, beginning in college at a small Jesuit school in Los Angeles, daily mass there. The informality, the sense of community, the ways we were invited to participate as students, for me was an incredible new experience.
- I've found some of that in parish communities, but it's more often been hard to find. I've not found it here in the Valley.
- A couple other things that haven't been mentioned yet. For myself, the Catholic Church's struggle for catholicity, for a sense of oneness amidst huge diversity. Not just anything goes, but we struggle with what does go? For me there's value in saying we do hold things in common even when we can't agree on just what those things are. I value that struggle and that striving. I value the ritual that's so rich in the Catholic Church, and I reflect on that in attending other Protestant churches with my siblings. While I find things I appreciate there, I'm always missing the richness of the Catholic traditions of ritual.
- And the social teachings of the Church are a huge treasure, as has been said, that's not well enough attended to.
- Another piece for me of late is being grateful for kinds of awarenesses Pope Francis has brought into the Church. Laudato Si has been a watershed encyclical at this time in our history and is something that doesn't get enough attention. As I've heard one Franciscan theologian say, if we don't tend to the needs of creation, we won't really have to worry about any of the other issues the Church is concerned about because we won't be here. For me, those are part of the life and joy and Spirit in the Church.
- Looking at the wider Church, I came across a Synod session from the Voice of the Faithful, and I so identify with the global things they speak about. For example, and I don't know if this is a problem just in the U.S., but the isolation of the training of priests shows up in so many ways. I think that has to be changed and a lot of people are calling for that. As people have mentioned, going from preaching to action. Here in the Valley and in the wider church, preaching doesn't lead to action. Somehow that has to be solved.
- And the power of women and women's groups for the good of the Church. In the local Church, it's just being touched and it's denying all of us a great power, energy, new insights and that's so obvious to me.

- In the U.S. and elsewhere, the lack of respect for the Pope. The way they attack and treat him bothers me very much. And I do think that the extreme clericalism is connected with the sexual abuse, together with the lack that goes on in seminary training. So it's clear those are huge issues in the U.S., and elsewhere, in India, Indonesia, and other places that I'm aware of at least.

- When we first moved to Muskegon we found a church that really met our needs. It was our kumbaya experience. We were involved in RCIA. We did a Renew group, we were involved in a lot of social justice issues. That's where I found the joy, I did not find joy in going to mass on Sunday, I was there, present, but my mind wasn't. I was thinking of Sunday dinner, of what was going to happen. And so for me the joy, I did get a lot of joy a lot of years when we had a good and compassionate priest that wasn't about the Church. He was about the people. Father Mel was probably the best thing that ever happened to us. But then the joy went away when we got another priest that was completely the opposite.

- So I have a lot of good memories about joy that I found in the Church, and I think it's helped me to continue. I respect some of the aspects of the church, but most of them I don't. The social justice could be a lot better. So that's my joy.

- I'll follow up with a story. My life in 1992, when I was still an active priest in the diocese, and I went to an ordination in the springtime. And I came almost late, so was sitting in the back of the Cathedral. There was one young priest being ordained, and he was a short guy, maybe 5'6" or so. I was sitting in the back looking over this whole crowd of priests in the Cathedral, in their albs and stoles, most with bald heads or gray hair. And it struck me that this man being ordained, a line I'd read somewhere, "The elephant groaned and gave birth to a mouse." [from Horace]. What was going through my mind was: here is an institution that is trying to perpetuate itself and not doing so very successfully, and it's an institution that needs to die. And that was very strong with me: this institution needs to die. I don't mean the Catholic Church, but I mean the hierarchical institution, as it is, was, and it seems, forever shall be. But it needs to die. And what began to grow in me was that my continued participation as a priest is propping up a dying institution and prolonging it. That's when my separation from the ordained clergy began, and it was only completed three years later. And so when people say did you leave the priesthood to get married, the answer is no, I did not. I left the priesthood because I saw that the institution was dying and

- I could no longer be a part of it. Subsequently I got married. But it wasn't a cause and effect kind of thing.
- When I look back on it, my 28 years as a priest, to get into the second question about where have you been hurt, it was the institution that inflicted the greatest pain on me. And it was a relief to be out from under it.

 - I can jump in again. When I think about the Church and what it's about, and I think that's what a lot of the Vatican Council was trying to do with some of the documents, you know, we read the early Church, Paul to the Corinthians, is writing all these things, the problems they have... how many families do you think were part of Paul's community in Corinth? Ten or maybe twenty families at the most. I don't know, but it's certainly a small group, not 2000 people gathering in some physical space built specifically for that purpose. That simply wasn't true.
 - So why is the institutional church today so damn afraid of that model? I don't understand it. Logically it doesn't make any sense. It seemed to work pretty well till Nicea, that's 500 years or so, a long time. And we know the reasons why, but deep down, did they really think that if we broke this thing up into small communities, and if we had some way of feeding those and providing resources to them, and so forth, that things are somehow going to be worse off than they are now? I don't think so. It just seems to be lack of faith, actually a lack of faith in Christ himself and his mission. We've got to hold onto all these buildings and property and elaborate things because it's efficient. Yeah, you're driving people out at a pretty efficient rate!

 - A joy and a wound. Part of the joy for me, I kind of identify with some of what was said about the possibilities in the ritual. But the joy is spoiled by that it's so infrequent, the difficulty of finding a Church [that's life giving] is so common for anyone looking for depth in their spirituality.

 - But another joy for me is that Catholic scripture scholars have come to the forefront in interpreting scripture. That's a joy for me and I've been privileged to study it in a deep way, having two years to be imbued into that. But that doesn't seem to be a part of Catholic priests preaching hardly at all. And somehow that has to be reconciled with, and so much of what R said I identify with as well.

- For me, back around 1990, I had a lot of joy after Vatican II with the liberation theology. I took a class, Gustavo Gutierrez and Matthew Fox, I really got inflamed and excited. It was very exciting. Then around 1990 when Ratzinger started silencing everybody and throwing them out, I thought I'm finished. That's when I went to Bolivia. And I was away from the church institution and I needed to be. I was with the Bolivian people in a small area, Entre Rios, for a year. I was right next to the Church, I really did not want to be a part of it. It's not where my heart was. What I experienced with the people was so different than being in the Church building.
- In fact, after the first year I went out deep into the campo area and was working with the Guarni Indians, and truly, it was an experience of the early church. There was no priest, there was no Church [building]. There was a community of people who shared everything in common. They had so much joy even though they had absolutely nothing, no light, no water, no electricity. They were slaves when I started. But it was the most joyful experience that I've had in my life in terms of community. It was just awesome. I knew I could never return to a parish situation and work with a priest. It was over for me. I guess there was so much joy in finding the spirit of God in all of the people around us. And many times it's the little people, the people without power, without all kinds of stuff out here that they get caught up in, it's what comes from within and it's so life giving.
- Dorothy Day has this famous quote: The Church when they see that I help the homeless and give the hungry something to eat, but when I ask why don't they have a home and why are they hungry, they call me a communist. It's a common quote for sure. Again, it's the institution. There's an important social justice term "mutual aid" that it's important for a community to provide for itself, and to be responsible and all that stuff. They're not interested in charity, in having others come in and telling them what they need. We'll provide you what we think you need. And the Church is doing that all the time rather than listening.
- There was a good nun, Sr. Cecilia, an Edinburg woman, at Holy Spirit. She worked out in the colonias, she built a little building, and people would question her. What do you teach about Jesus, that sort of stuff. [She'd say] I'm just there to help them with what they need, and I figure that's enough. If I'm a witness for filling their needs and they see how I live, that should be enough, I don't need to preach. So it's a lot simpler than the church makes it out to be in some sense. That's true of so many things, isn't it? The institution has to make everything so difficult and complicated. So only the people with the special trainings can

understand it or are really worthy for it. So I myself, who have been “ontologically changed” am now different and I have a special connection. “He’s just a guy!” I love that line.

- A piece of what I hear too in listening to all of you is that the institutional church seems to have such misplaced priorities, as if the understanding of God is very narrow. As if God is first and foremost a rule maker, who hands us the rules that are interpreted by the high priests. Tho in fact the ones authorizing those rules are the ones authoring them. And so, the voices of lived experience and people not heard. It’s been talked about in terms of sexuality, the whole birth control controversy, women’s voices not heard, not listened to. We’ve talked a bit about the preaching issues.
- I read recently that there’s no canon law that women cannot give homilies, but in reality, it’s just that only the ordained can give homilies. But who can be ordained? Well, not women! So in effect, there’s no direct law saying women cannot give homilies, but the law says no, they can’t be ordained. So the voice that women have in the church... issues now that abortion is the litmus test, and I’d name myself as one who is pro-life, not in the sense of pro-birth, meaning that every life created must be born under any circumstances, no matter what, but that all life is to be nurtured and valued, including the lives of mothers and pregnant women.
- And I’m grateful that there are little cracks happening, that it’s possible to say we can even discuss some of these issues, even if the rules, about ordination, for example, cannot be changed. And I’m not one feeling a call to be ordained, but for those women who are, and for those women who want a voice in the Church, that’s a painful difficulty and an ongoing wound.
- Another joy for me is that I’ve been privileged to travel extensively in Central and South America. And what J said about her experience in Bolivia I can certainly identify with. It’s just totally different. And so it’s a joy for me because I believe that those people will bring something to the Synod that will just flabbergast people in the United States.
- If they can be heard and are not filtered!

- Well, I can't help but believe that after covid and so many churches closed for as long as they are, I can't imagine that any of the Churches, or very few, would have much of a congregation again. I can be wrong, but it seems as though a lot of people and many I've talked to don't feel the need to return there. They are looking elsewhere.

- In my experience, at least with the parish we're still involved with in MI, the people that are there are the ones who more accept the way things are. The people that are searching, they're not going back. They weren't going anyway. [yes nods in group]. Those left now, it's more like the siege mentality. Ok, the entire world is against us.

- Just as an example, when we moved to Memphis, we went around to some different churches. We're very familiar with Methodist Churches up north, and there they're fairly liberal. We went to a Methodist Church here and when the preacher started, he said "Well, you have to understand that Christianity is under attack in this country." And I said to Cindy, we're never coming back to this one! [understanding laughter in group]
- You mentioned South America... when we went to Haiti, yes, there was a church there and the services were awesome. The people walked for maybe two hours to come on Sunday. And those people have nothing, but what they have they share. They have that spirit. The parish [in MI] that we were part of had the twin parish in Haiti, and the Outreach Committee that we were part of, one Sunday after a priest from Haiti came to our parish, one lady went to our pastor and said "Why are you giving money to those people? They're used to having nothing! We need money here because we're used to needing more. This was the person's attitude. They're used to having nothing so why give them anything? And I just cringed when I heard that, I could not understand that people can actually think like that.

- Looking at the dynamics of post covid, and even before that of course, this business of the changing numbers of the church, I read somewhere, maybe a Pew Research, the rate and demographics of those leaving the church, it's now a higher percentage among women than among men. Not surprisingly in some sense given the way the Church deals with women. I shared that with the pastor at St. John's when I was still going there. You know, if you look 20 years down the road, there are not going to be any Church ladies left to run this parish and back

up the priest, right? There not going to be there in the numbers you have now, and it was prefaced with the biggest problem the Church has institutionally, certainly in the United States, it's women. The role of women, the opportunities for their voice being heard, their concerns being heard, and their gifts being honored other than that they're very good cleaners of the pews and that sort of stuff.

- It's just going to be very different. And when the Church decides the answer to the priest shortage is combine parishes, the answer to the priest shortage is go find them in Vietnam or India or Poland or wherever. That doesn't seem like a solution. How big do you want these parishes to be, you know? How many parishes does a priest have to serve on Sunday? Come on guys, grow up! Face some facts.

- I think it's the Spirit working in the fact that there's a priest shortage. I think the Spirit is purifying us.

- You were saying that in 20 or 30 year there won't be any women to take care of the Church, but none of us are going to be here in 20 or 30 years! What about the youth? How are younger adults and children being engaged, being invited in? I think of one example, a family in a colonia that I'm good friends with. I've been to the parish there before with them and have appreciated the liturgies and the preaching. One of the daughters asked me to be here confirmation sponsor last year, which was a new experience for me in this time and in this diocese. The big deal was going to the retreat day with the confirmands. Oh my gosh, I felt so badly for those kids. High school kids, at a time when questions about life, their relationship with their parents and peers, their own identities, who they are in the Church are just wide open for reflecting on and delving into. And it was a lecture on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit – that would have been excellent to fall asleep to. It was absolutely deadening. Nothing life giving in this, nothing that invites coming back, returning. For me it was a small window into what are probably some of the difficulties youth are in with the Church these days.

- That's why they talk about Baptism as the sacrament of admission to the Church and Confirmation as the exit.

- And you know, parents who are doing a good job parenting in terms of faith and religion, taking their kids to church, I remember my niece and her husband would talk about /scripture with their kids, and outreach, and Isabella came home from Church when she was 5 or 6 years old and said “I don’t think Jesus is such a great guy!” Her parents asked what do you mean, Ella? “Well you know, in that reading today Jesus fed all the men and he didn’t do anything for the women and children!”

- I got in touch with a post about the RCIA and it was clearly people talking about how wonderful this is the number of people now in RCIA. But please look at the numbers of those leaving!

- A case can be made that a significant number of my problems go back to my high school years, a five-year program run by the Jesuits with the Marine Corps ROTC. If that’s not enough to mess with the mind of a young man, nothing is. Five years of Latin and five of religion that got heavy into theology toward the end will do that. You think that would put you in the straight and narrow. My senior year religion teacher was a priest, an odd job (after the character in movie Goldfinger). He was a black belt in multiple martial arts, so the class had a legitimate fear in having him at the front there. He was teaching us fifth year religion, and we were very good young men, paying close attention just to make sure we survived. He used to smack a handball against the wall the entire hour. One day he said, let me tell you something about Jesus. Let me tell you something about the gospels. Don’t get so caught up in the words that you miss the message! And that stuck with me. It was 1965 when the effects of Vatican II were taking effect, and that stuck with me. And that’s what I see, that we’re missing Christ’s message. The words in Scripture were written 40-80 years after he died, so they’re not exactly transcripts of what he said. They have to be interpreted, what the guy really meant to say, and get that message across.

3) Given these reflections and that “Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family.”, where do you hear the voice of the Spirit? How is it calling us?

- I’d like to extend this witness beyond the family to the whole of creation.

- Those are wonderful words that they are saying, but the key is where is the action going to be to actually follow through on those words. I think the Spirit is calling all of us, if it's in any way, either to force that action through the destruction of the Church or whatever. That's our call, is where we are to do those things. Those words are wonderful, but unfortunately so many of the words that are wonderful from the Catholic Church are not followed, they're just words. That's where I see what the issue is. We're called to what we can locally where we are. Do those things, speak out and challenge that those words are not being followed.

- One thing I'm wondering – we are the Church. There's also the larger, the institutional church as we've talked about, so I think you are talking about Church on a couple of different levels, correct?

- Yes, and I agree, we are the Church, but so many are going to follow what the hierarchy says. Those words that they're expressing in the Synod, the question is when it's all said and done, will anything change from the hierarchy? I doubt it. And yes, I believe there are people like us in different areas doing these things and beyond, just the "Catholics you see" the work around the world for climate justice and in other areas. There are people doing good things. We just have to work together with those people to make things happen. I believe that's where the Spirit is coming from, it's not in the institution.

- I think that back in the late 1960 and 1970s, Cardinal Suenens from Belgium was a very influential cardinal. He had someone on his staff he sent around the world all the time to try to find where is the Spirit working among people. Not in institutions, but among the people. I think we have to, individually and as a group, I mean our Intentional Community or whatever group it is we are plugging into, we have to try to discern where is the Spirit working at this point, in this area, and then I want to jump on that bandwagon. And I'm not sure I can discern that by myself. That's why I think the Intentional Community or some group I can bounce things off of is so important. I don't know where the Spirit is going to lead in five years or ten years, I agree, I don't look to the institutional hierarchy to be that shining light on a mountain. But I think that the live organism of a small group can discern the working of the Spirit in an area. And even a wide area.
- If you want to go dig in the library, there was a wonderful novel in the late 60s – early 70s by Morris West called *The Clowns of God*. And it's a little novel that

talks about how the church survives through small communities, through small faith sharing groups. And I do not look to the hierarchical church, and certainly not in the United States, for any kind of inspiration and light on a mountain. I look to people like you people and others I'm connected with. Because that's where I'm doing to find the Spirit, outside the boundaries, outside the box, because structure is deadening.

- I'd like to give an example of how I feel the Spirit has worked in my life recently. When I was a Catholic priest, I could never preach asking for money. I found that impossible for me to do. But now there's a group I'm a part of that works to raise funds and make people knowledgeable about what's happening at the border. One of the sisters, and this ties in with creativity that comes out of groups, she's raised about \$12,000. Now she's started a new project, and the project is she's sent us kind of a prayer card [holds up card showing image of adult holding child standing at the river] with this logo on it and at the bottom it has a prayer. She sent each of us 10 of them, said you keep one and pay \$5.00 for it. And try to get others to pay for them. So I'm at breakfast with the deacon, my wife's best friend, and I'm thinking to myself, you know, maybe I should ask these people what they might do. So going beyond my normal ways of acting, I asked them, I wonder if you would be interested in supporting this cause. So the deacon looks at it and says I'll pledge \$100 if you pledge \$100. So I get home and look at the checks. The first was for \$100, but the second that was the challenge was for \$200! So \$300 from two people to go to a good cause.
- So sometimes you've got to get beyond yourself, and the other thing, it's kind of interesting. I used to write a lot of letters [to the editor] in the Monitor. But I stopped because the two that I thought were my greatest letters were never printed. But now I end up being called "do it again!" I think this is the Spirit working in me, I don't know, maybe I'm hallucinating...
- Three of us here are with the Immigration group, and Sr. Betty is a force of nature. I think that's the best ways of describing her, and she's something else. No task is undoable. She's mostly the one who leads us in prayer.
- A couple of comments. I went to a CTA talk one time and a good sister had been called in at the last minute to give the introductory address because the person who was supposed to be there got sick. She was from Chicago Theological Union, a scripture scholar. And she was just talking about women in the Old Testament,

about Ruth. Her point was that Ruth was not Jewish, she was not from Israel, she was an alien, from the outside. And she was the grandmother or great-grandmother of David the king. That change always comes from the margins. The birth of change is on the margins.

- Francis says this all the time. That's where you go, young Jesuits, who want to learn what it's supposed to be like as a Catholic priest. You're not going to sit in your comfortable chair and sip your brandy, and talk theological stuff. We're going to send you out to the poorest part of this city and that's where you're going to learn how to be a priest. And that's where the wisdom comes from.
- In the same sense, I think the Church is so damn afraid of letting go of some things and letting the Spirit work. They all talk about oh, we're guided by the Spirit. Like hell you are! Pardon my French. That's the last thing you want to hear is the Spirit from some person who doesn't have a collar. And even many of those who have a collar. To find some way of building a structure that has within it some way of renewing itself and gaining wisdom from others. Boy, that's tough to arrange, that's why you have to believe in the Spirit, right? That we have to trust that somehow.
- Look at [St] Francis! Get out of the monasteries you guys and start walking around and seeing the people and talking to them. You're way too comfortable. We think he was like the monks, but no, he wasn't like the monks at all! And he got in trouble with his own group of folks. Once everybody started to like him then all of a sudden, the guys liked being liked. And Francis kept saying these things that people didn't like any more, like you've got to help the poor and get rid of being rich.
- So you institutionalize looking outside the institution. Does that make any sense? It sounds like a challenge, right? I'm done.

- What's really important, for me anyway, is that as you've said too, M, we need to care for Mother Earth. And we can do that in some simple ways. By planting, by reaping...everything doesn't have to come from the store. It's just time to start caring for our earth in all kinds of ways. All the plastics, the cans, in so many ways we really raped and harmed what give us life. It's time we start caring for her.

- So what I'm hearing in these last bits of reflections... one is about being engaged locally, where we are, in the communities where we find and share faith, in the communities where we live. Maybe a sense of willing to risk doing this more deeply, more broadly, whatever that might mean. And for the institutional church to cast out fear, to not be afraid of letting go of what it holds so tightly to.

Maybe going back to being more concerned, as was said earlier, about the message of Jesus rather than the specific words. Top listen more deeply to that. And then part of that, a new sort of commitment about caring for creation.

- I think the whole idea of reverencing our innermost longings. You know, I have too many friends and relatives who are so stuck on what they learned as kids in the Church, and what continues to be said to them in Church because they are still going. And it's like infantile stuff they are still holding onto. It makes me really sad, it really hurts me to see them stuck there. We need to free people up, allow them to be themselves and come to know themselves and find the Spirit of God within themselves. And let that flower! They don't have that right, they can't free themselves. They need to be freed by the Church some.
- Thank you, everyone, for your sharing...