

Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative  
**Collected commentary for the  
Synod on Synodality**



Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative invited members and friends to share their thoughts and concerns for the Synod process during a series of 10 virtual listening sessions between March and June 2022. Sessions were held with about 200 participants registered from 26 countries: Canada, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, UK, Ireland, Belgium, France, Austria, Portugal, Palestine, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Myanmar, Fiji, and the United States.

During all the listening sessions participants were invited to discuss the following questions:

- If the Church were to adopt nonviolence as a way of life, how would relationships in the Church change?
- How can the Church best promote nonviolence and just peace?
- Can you share an example of how the Church promotes or undermines nonviolence and just peace in your community?

The collected notes from each session were integrated into a draft of this document, which was made available to all participants for their review to make sure the integration of so many different conversations was faithful to their experience of the sessions.

## The Beloved Community

*Participants were invited to reflect on the impact of a 'Church-wide and parish deep' commitment to nonviolence. One participant said that if the Church were really filled with love, oneness, humanity, respect - what the Gospel calls us to - that would change the world. That was a common sentiment throughout the many conversations.*

A commitment to nonviolence would lead the Church back to the person of Jesus Christ, who himself was a victim of violence and who is the foundation of nonviolence and just peace. The Beatitudes would become our 'manual', our way of life, bringing about peace and understanding, tolerance, justice and a preferential option for those who are impoverished.

The Holy Trinity provides us with a model of agape love wherein we begin to see our own interdependence, interconnectedness, oneness and how critical each of us is to the whole, to the Beloved Community.

A nonviolent Church would be welcoming, loving and compassionate to all brothers and sisters; it would be closer to the people - a listening people of God, following Jesus

who established boundary-breaking friendships with those on the margins. Collaboration would be the anchor of our spirituality.

The Church would model just relationships of equals, humility, respectful dialogue within the Church and with people of other faith traditions. The Church would change its relationship to women, welcoming the gifts of women to benefit all aspects of life in the Church.

The hierarchical structure of the Church would change. The structure would be more collaborative, more participatory, open to a closer dialogue with and participation of the laity, allowing the laity to cooperate and lead. More open and inclusive decision-making processes in which all voices matter would become the norm and

lead to more harmony, genuine community, agape. The values of just peace would become a reality, including love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

The Church's language would change; it would accept gender diversity and encourage various forms of friendship/companionship. More open conversations

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***A nonviolent Church would be welcoming, loving and compassionate to all brothers and sisters; it would be closer to the people - a listening people of God, following Jesus who established boundary-breaking friendships with those on the margins.***

would take place with the LGBTQ community, as well as about divorce, sexual violence, and abortion. People who are of an oppressed group would be welcomed by the Church to practice their faith and be who they are.

Relationships with the hierarchy would be gentler, nurturing and contextualized to the communities they serve. The Church would develop a model for consistent, fruitful interaction between the bishop and members of individual parishes with a process for discerning courses of action that would transcend the jurisdiction and boundaries of parishes. The functioning of parish councils, parish and diocesan finances and clergy placement committees would be transparent.

The Church would uphold nonviolence and just peace in its own interactions with individuals and institutions

and would create a platform to discuss the true meaning of nonviolence and just peace, with a focus on the voices of marginalized groups.

The Church would follow the example of Pope Francis in modelling and promoting a modest, simple lifestyle and would realign its use of resources, transitioning from

servicing wealthy parishioners to serving those in need. Smaller, more intimate Catholic communities would be dedicated to living the Gospel.

Church finances would be transparent. The whole Church would divest from fossil fuels, militarism and the like, so every investment would be socially responsible.

Parishes would always honour fair trade principles and one group proposed supporting veganism as a nonviolent way of life.

With youth the Church would be creative, seeking the advice of educators, facilitating more involvement by young people, listening to what is important to them (the gift of an inquiring mind should not be marginalized); engaging them on mental health issues; showing young people that good things are happening and that they can have fun with each other; sharing ideas and courses of action together; sharing music, especially musical versions of Gospel stories; engaging children as nonviolent peacemakers and as critical thinkers, particularly during preparations for first Eucharist and Confirmation.

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## A nonviolent Church engaged in the world

*Participants shared many examples where the local Church is actively promoting the social mission (see Appendix 1), but they also made clear that was not universal and repeatedly emphasized that Catholic social teaching should be at the forefront of a nonviolent Church.*

Significant concern was expressed that Pope Francis' encyclicals and statements are not being shared in schools and parishes. People in the pews and the classrooms are not educated about Catholic social teaching. Even the hierarchy and local priests do not seem to know much about *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti* or the Church's teachings on nuclear weapons and just war/just peace. The cry of

the earth and the cry of the poor are not being heard. The gravity of this should be spelled out at every opportunity, including at bishops' conferences and synods, at parish and diocesan meetings, through the Church's media, and by giving it a priority in the seminary curriculum.

The Church should include Catholic social teaching in catechesis and adult formation and make it more

prominent during the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments. Priests should talk about nonviolence and peace, linking Christianity with the love of the land and the deep unity we share with the earth. Seminary training should help priests prepare to preach about social justice even when it is not popular. Priests should practice nonviolence as a way of life and as a positive example; they also should be close to the people in order to understand their needs.

Church leaders should be involved in social movements and speak out for the marginalized. The Church should be a transforming agent in the world, acting on behalf of justice. Locally and internationally the Church should be independent, an antidote to the societal norm of violence. In some places the Church is considered the conscience of the state, engaging in politics for the common good and speaking up for human rights. But there is a disconnect between what is said by the Church and what is practiced – for example, on the worth and dignity of all people. This is undermining the Church's credibility.

Some participants said that a nonviolent Church would do more good in the world. One person noted that during the pandemic, when we were unable to go to church – too many turned to online Mass, not to charity or social justice. At the same time, respect is evident for those who lead the way to action on critical social and ecological issues such as climate change, biodiversity protection, refugee and migrant support, economic justice and opposition to war.

There are far too many examples of treating symptoms while ignoring root causes. For example, people are often keen to help refugees, support food banks, and so on, but have very little understanding of and action against the causes of forced displacement or hunger. Pope Francis invites us to see patterns and processes, root causes and ripple effects, not just events.

The Church's voice is muted on certain issues and there is a conflict of interest when the Church collaborates with people or groups that promote or engage in activities that go against Christian values. Too often the Church has been aligned with the empire; rather, the Church needs to align with the prophets (Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr., Dorothy Day). We believe that there is a strong reluctance to 'rock the boat'.

The Church should use its global stage to speak specifically about nonviolence as a way of life, a spirituality that is never passive in the face of social injustice and to advocate actively for nonviolence and just peace, challenging institutions that promote war and dialoguing with the proponents of the war system. Applying a just peace framework would help the Church engage conflict constructively, breaking cycles or dynamics of violence and building a more sustainable peace.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis said that it is 'very difficult nowadays to invoke' the just war tradition and more recently that 'there is no such thing as a just war'. The whole Church, including the local Church, should be much more active in criticizing militarism and all its serious consequences for humanity. We should hear talk from the pulpit about reallocating military resources to peaceful purposes, promoting nonviolent alternatives and meeting human needs. Too often the Church supports the military, and Catholic schools promote military service. Church leaders should listen to peacemakers as much as to businesspeople.

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***Liturgies, prayers of the faithful, homilies and faith formation should reflect a commitment to nonviolence.***

Some participants said that churches should not have military flags on the altar, glorify the military or have collections for military chaplains. Military chaplains should not bless the weapons of war. In the United States, the Church should address the gun culture, mass shootings and the second amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as well as violent language, including from bishops, and the persistent struggle for power and control.

*Laudato Si'* ought to be central to the synodal way and ecology, the new evangelization. The entire Church should be engaged with others in dealing with the violence to the earth and ecological aggression, taking care of the earth that is our home, rejecting the 'throw-away, disposable culture' and practicing the circular economy in parishes.

Prolife should include the defence of life for all:

pregnant women, people in prison, threatened social leaders and environmental protectors. A pro-life Church should be an anti-racist Church and out in the streets. It should care for babies being born and struggling families, address gun violence and police violence, work to end the use of the death penalty, prevent war, protect the earth and more.

The Church should call for peace, pray for peace, work for peace. It should explore the Universe Story, different forms of prayer and scripture sharing and listen to modern prophets. It should support ecological spirituality, women's spirituality, spirituality of sexuality and of diverse gender orientations. Liturgies, prayers of the faithful, homilies and faith formation should reflect a commitment to nonviolence. The Church should teach and practice nonviolent communication and conflict transformation.

One participant said that a Church that adopts nonviolence would not 'weaponize' the Eucharist or other sacraments.

The Church should work with all religions, reaching out to people of good will, learning about and putting aside negative ideas about other faith traditions and sharing the value of peace. People of other faiths should be included in our rituals. The Church needs to think beyond its boundaries – consider Gandhi, King, Lawson, Jewish community, Muslim, Hindu.

*The Law is Love*, one participant was told in prayer or perhaps *Love is the foundation of Justice*. If justice is only love-based, then justice is about right relationships. In this synod process will every nook and corner of the Church be examined to see where relationships are out of alignment with Love?

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## Experiences of the Church in different contexts

*Most often, participants based their contributions to the Synod process on their own experience of Church. Among their observations were the following:*

What Jesus teaches should be the basis for a community shaped by love, reconciliation and healing. Instead of striving to value, develop and sustain 'co-governance', the Church has developed a structure of power. Rather than studying, understanding and practicing 'servant leadership', the notion of 'infallibility', despite its circumscribed application, generally continues to pervade the life of the Church. All this can of course change if there is a genuine desire to listen, acknowledge failings and respond with *metanoia*.

Many participants spoke about dominance by the hierarchical structure over non-clerical members, the vast majority, who are denied the right to engage and participate in decision-making, an attribute that is central to being human. A denial of this is a form of violence at the very heart of the Church.

Too often 'Church' has come to signify only the hierarchy or priests. The laity are not being utilized to the extent they could be. Priests are spread too thin. The Church needs to become an inclusive community of equals.

Although the principle of subsidiarity suggests that the local parish is the basic building block, one participant noted that too many people have become uncomfortable with how in practice their own parish works. In some dioceses, parishioners' concerns are not heard or responded to effectively.

One participant asked if the model of 'Jesus people meet on Sunday' truly reflects the Jesus of inclusion, love, mercy, community? The attention of the Church should be on marginalized communities. Funds are being used to ensure fancy buildings for the wealthy; they should be devoted to the needs of the poor. Priests are so concerned about maintaining expensive buildings and paying the bills that wealthy donors have excessive influence.

Others expressed a concern about financial corruption in the Church. One person shared the experience of her grandfather's family whose land was forcibly taken over by a parish leader. Clean, transparent systems of Church operations are needed to gain and maintain the trust of the community.

Some have experienced a strong tendency to exclude people who have different opinions or who practice other religions. LGBTQ people do not feel welcome, which is very hurtful. Some priests/ministers do not follow God's message of mercy and compassion; they are not channels of God's love during sacramental celebrations.

At times the Church has undermined local cultures – such as, for example, in Africa saying 'don't dance in Mass', even though African practices can merge with Christianity in a way that honours one culture without undermining the other. At the same time, others

experienced a Church that promotes unity in diversity and respects interculturality.

Some noted that their experience of preaching in the Church is not good. The theology is often simplistic/childish. Scripture is not highlighted. Preaching is focused on the Church instead of the Gospel. They are not invited to reflect on the Scriptures themselves.

In Japan to object to anything is understood as 'violence' and is suppressed. Is Japanese society not accustomed to 'objection-criticism' or is the Church not accustomed to it? The voices of those who have suffered violence tend to be emotional because of the very violence they have suffered, but their emotional voices are considered violent.

One person said that Mass feels like a battleground. The separation is personal, societal, spiritual, global. Many on both sides of any conflict think the other side is evil.

In this way, they are enslaved to the act of opposing each other, and they call on God to help them in this opposition.

Some said that in their experience the U.S. Church has been silent about papal peace messages. Too often peace groups like Pax Christi have to spend so much energy balancing on the edge of the Church that they are unable to have an impact on the centre. The bishops have not been responsive to questions about these concerns. Others noted that the U.S. Church is active in prison ministry and restorative justice but could be more involved with interfaith work on housing, violence interrupters, civil rights and mental-health care.

Another concern raised was that the Church in Kenya has lost the moral authority to bring people together or to guide Christians on how to conduct themselves as citizens. This undermines peace in the country.

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## We are the Church

*Even as they were honest in sharing concerns about the Church, participants also expressed in different ways a recognition that we, the People of God, are the Church. They said:*

Christ is present in the community gathered, not only in the clergy and religious. We are all called to be 'other Christs'. The Church is made up of individuals, it is not a building or an institution. *We are the Church* and are called to live the Beatitudes as part of the Church. To adopt nonviolence as a Church every person in the Church should adopt nonviolence as a way of life. And if that process occurs, relationships in the Church would be more meaningful and would represent Christ more fully.

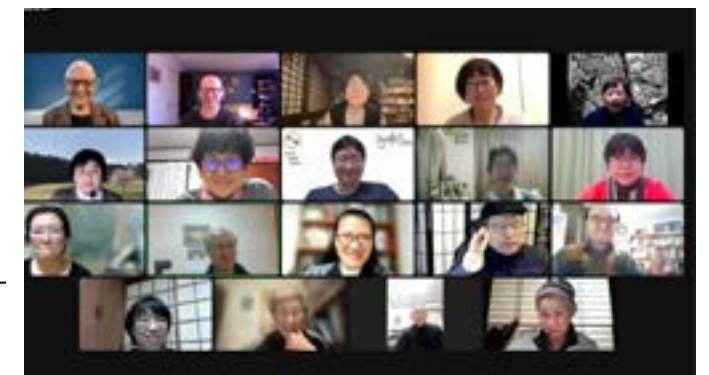
We need humility, relationships with others as equals in which we accept each other as we are. We realize that violence and discrimination are present within ourselves. Nonviolence is about loving one another and the enemy. How much are we willing to be open to others who have different beliefs, rather than thinking we are better than others? We need ongoing formation programs in parishes (such as Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and meditation) to help us become a Church that lives by the Word.

For example, we preach peace, yet live violence, sometimes in the structures of the Church and sometimes in culture. No one should be afraid to speak out, especially

about violence against women and the marginalised. We need to challenge the structures and cultures that prevent the Church from being prophetic. To be nonviolent is to be prophetic.

We need to respect and include more indigenous values that promote the well-being of the community and listen more to the grassroots through small-group, community-level structures that foster loving communities, reduce adherence to power-based law and authority and return power to the people. How well do we listen to the voices of those who have truly been hurt and have left the Church?

It is important that we laity put into practice a culture of nonviolence, moving from criticism of the institutional Church, despite many valid reasons, to a more active and nonviolent participation, whether in parishes or in other diverse spaces.



*Participants in the April 8 Pax Christi listening session for South Korea and Japan*

## Violence in the Church

*Violence in the Church was described in many different ways by participants from around the world, including violence in Church history – slavery, violence based on the Doctrine of Discovery, violence of Indian residential schools and more. Many spoke about hypocrisy in the Church, about contemporary violence through the sex abuse crisis, the criminal abuse of innocents, the exclusion of women, the marginalization of the LGBTQ+ community. They said that stories of survivors of clerical abuse should not be hidden. The Church needs to be transparent and accountable and engage in reparations.*

While one participant said, 'I love the Church, cannot conceive of violence within the Church, am happy in the Church', another called the Church 'historically and inherently violent'. Many described the hierarchical structure of the Church as violent and said that the Church needs to take a fearless inventory of violence in the Church. This is an invitation for all of us to look at the insidious nature of violence in our own lives and relationships. Some said that it is a big challenge to advocate nonviolence when the Church itself is so tarnished.

Deep concern was expressed about embedded racism in the Church. The Church has a racist history, with uninterrogated threads

of racism; cultures are dismissed. Who leads, who is there, whose voice matters, who is part of the conversation are critical questions. We need to respect and include more indigenous values which are essentially based on the well-being of the community. Some U.S. participants suggested that the Church must restructure itself; that white privilege has to be decentralized; and that those in need of justice and peace have to be centralized. Nonviolence was seen to be a tool to help this situation. Some participating groups noted that diversity reflects creation, but some Church leaders don't seem to see diversity as God's plan.

Cases of abuse, sexual and otherwise, humiliate the Church, making it difficult to promote a call to justice and peace. A closed group of men cannot correct this; there is a real need for co-governance and less hierarchical control. Abuse is not just about sexual abuse, but the power of the ordained to dismiss and devalue the contribution of the non-ordained.

One woman who participated said, 'As a woman, I do not feel part of the Church'. She pointed to the language used and even jokes made. Patriarchy is prevalent in the Church, along with clericalism. The first violence is that we do not include women in the priesthood. That violence

also takes a toll on priests – many are severely stressed, get burned out, etc. Another participant said that we have so many people with talents and skills among the laity. Why do we pretend or insist the clergy have all the skills?

Many others shared similar concerns. They said that Pope Francis is inviting us to see that everyone matters. Women bring a richness to the Church, but Scripture is used to justify the exclusion of women. This is violence. Women's voices are rarely heard or respected. When they are, it is so refreshing; they have different insights.

It is critical that women preach. Women make the bread, bring to birth etc., yet are completely brushed over. Could we imagine an open

Eucharistic table, open ambo (all preachers welcome), ordination of women and those of any sexual orientation who are called to the priesthood, democratic rather than hierarchical leadership?

Many women find it hard to trust priests. There is a need to restructure the institution to address clericalism, hierarchy, inequality, and paternalism. The structures in the Church are damaging and sometimes abusive, although the reality is different in different countries. For example, in Scotland, only one diocese out of eight had the problem of clericalism described by the U.S. participants.

Nothing fundamental can change until certain 'non-negotiables' are changed like women's ordination, same sex marriage, and married priests. The Church is top down, male dominated. Women are in subservient roles. Some older laity and some young ones don't want change; they are just as clerical as the clergy. Participation and inclusivity are key. Whenever women are involved in peacemaking, diplomacy, etc., it is more successful. It would be good for the Church to adopt the model of the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda. It is time to open up to everyone in the body of Christ. More effort with inclusive language is also needed.

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***There is a need to restructure the institution to address clericalism, hierarchy, inequality, and paternalism.***

Some participants said that inside the Church, the problem is not so much physical violence, but the violence of hate speech, gossip, discrimination, exclusion, and prejudice. Do priests see others as human beings like themselves? Often, newcomers are not valued, and there are unequal relations between men and women so that women's suggestions and ideas are often ignored.

Others said that we are too often preached at in the Church: condemning people, condemning groups and talk about going to Hell. This is violence. One person said that there are 'metaphorical executions' within the Church despite a ban on the death penalty.

One participant described the theological concept of sin as undermining nonviolence and just peace by, for example, promoting an ineffective manner of conflict resolution; reducing subliminal self-esteem; contributing to an 'us versus them' mentality; and removing the human community from metaethical responsibility.

In some places domestic violence is common. Many abused women do not feel they can go to Church for help because they too often feel accused due to the hierarchal or patriarchal attitudes. Anger in the community, domestic

violence and violence in our world are connected. Relationships between women and men in the Church should be nonviolent, more respectful. That could help mitigate the abuse that is happening to women religious.

Others described the violence of a culture of snitching in seminaries; circles of power rallying against outspoken voices; suppression and intimidation encircling the minority voice; the isolation of mandatory celibacy; treating issues related to human sexuality, including abortion, as absolutely black and white.

The distinction between 'us' and 'them' has its roots in violence. Regulations or even 'service' can separate people. If all are equal in Christ Jesus, we need to be very careful that charity is built on relationships of respect and welcome all to the table, even if it means bypassing some regulations that cause separation.

The Church in Portugal for many years was linked to the power of the dictatorship. It is psychological violence when people are not allowed to express themselves and if they express themselves they are not taken seriously. Also, in some countries there is a culture of competition between groups and movements.

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## Leadership in the Church

*Many interventions were about leadership in the Church with specific suggestions leading to Church as community rather than hierarchical structure. The emphasis was on shared, collaborative decision making - consensus decision making based on recognizing and valuing the equality of all people within the Church:*

The key word is relationships – a shift from power over to power with. The Church can develop more healthy relationships by modelling nonviolence. We should listen to Earth, our mother, and to people of all faith traditions and none, including especially indigenous traditions, about what it means to be human in relationship with all of life's systems.

Leaders should foster a spirit of inclusion, simplify the transactions and procedures of the Church and create opportunities to understand the reality of people's lives. Evangelical living requires not only compassion for the socially vulnerable, but also deep learning about society's issues. By moving out of diocesan and parish offices into the wider than Catholic community, listening to real people, affirming the wonderfully good things that people are doing, the Church will be recognized as authentic in promoting nonviolence.

Activities that reach out directly to vulnerable people

are easily accepted in the Church, but the study of structural evils and work for social justice are often shunned.

One group said that Pope Francis has already introduced radical changes in the Church, but that a lot more needs to be done, although with prudence since there are values and traditions that need to be protected as well.

Others suggested that local Church communities should be able to appoint who will serve them – so that priests are accountable to the communities they serve. Some thought the priest should be a volunteer alongside others who work for the Church. Also, parish councils should be more than advisory bodies; they should have decision-making roles.

Listening goes from top to bottom in the institution. The Church must be in dialogue with many actors in order to build nonviolence; the challenge is immense. One participant said that people need to be able to meet and share ideas, not just sit in the pews and be talked at.

## Formation, education and seminaries

*Several groups highlighted the importance of seminary training, formation programs and education in general:*

The curriculum of seminaries should include education about a synodal church, Vatican II and Catholic social teaching with a focus on how the social teachings are based in Scripture, both Hebrew Scripture and the Christian Scriptures as well as the First Scripture of Creation. The social teachings of the Church should have a central role in the education of anyone offering homilies and spiritual reflections, including seminarians and priests as they prepare for day-to-day parish life. Apostolic exhortations, such as *The Joy of the Gospel*, and papal encyclicals, such as *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, should be studied and celebrated, giving us constant reminders that Christ has no hands on earth now but ours.

The themes of nonviolence and ecological conversion should be woven into all educational programs. Everything is interrelated, interconnected, interdependent. Ecological conversion would provide a window into how our choices and policies impact a broader circle of reality and beings.

Seminarians should be required to work with the poor as part of their formation process so that relationships and understanding are built. In the U.S. most new priests come from white middle class backgrounds with no experience of diversity. The discipline of celibacy has tipped the talent of the pool of good candidates. Seminaries that are like 'gated communities' need to be torn down and candidates for priestly ordination be assigned to good parishes where they would find mentoring by laity and priests.

New pastoral agents should have knowledge about and exercise nonviolence, including the virtue of nonviolence, as well as practices such as nonviolent communication,

trauma-healing, restorative justice, nonviolent resistance and nonviolent civilian-based defence. Priests should be able to speak about nonviolence and just peace.

Catholic school curricula and seminary/convent formation should include the principles of nonviolence and just peace. Peace education should be reinforced in the Church so that all generations exercise active nonviolence. These programs should focus on theological discernment

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***The curriculum of seminaries should include education about a synodal church, Vatican II and Catholic social teaching ...***

and transformation and remind people that God loves them so they become channels of this love and therefore, of nonviolence and just peace. Too many are set up to make practicing Catholics rather than disciples and more recently they are making neither.

Programs could integrate the teachings in songs, theatre, art, in drawings and in educational games integrating active nonviolence and peace. TV shows and competitions could promote nonviolence. One parish gives out a peace award to a high school senior who works on social justice projects.

Educators should consciously integrate values and virtues in learning modules; focus on the positive and not the negative; provide students with small and concrete ways to prevent violence; balance teacher talk and student talk in class. Workshops on human rights need to be held in parishes. 'Elite' Catholic schools that are white and wealthy maintain and perpetuate an unhealthy power dynamic; they undermine inclusivity and nonviolence.

A formal document or encyclical on nonviolence would help with the education of priests and pastoral formation.

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## Youth

*Participants emphasized that youth need to have a voice in the Church. More involvement of youth would come from a new way of being the Church, the Body of Christ in which everyone makes a contribution and has responsibility.*

The Church should be able to adapt to the 'signs of the times' – listening to and getting the perspective of the youth and different sectors. The Church should develop the attitude that all our contributions are needed, especially

of women and youth. Do we involve young people in the parish? Do we have youth ministry, young people on the parish council?

The Church should take inspiration from the energy,

passion, and ideals of youth when it comes to inclusivity and other good values. An intergenerational approach to healing is needed, as young people know we are passing on to them a broken planet. They have a good sense of their relationship with nature and of reconciliation with the natural world and with their neighbours. Young adults too often don't see the Church addressing topics that matter to them. For example, the Church in the U.S. was not addressing climate change or social justice. It would be good to connect with nature during Mass.

The Church should promote nonviolence and just peace, utilizing relevant communication strategies and trends, particularly visual vernacular that also reach youth who are in formative stages of faith. Promote the use of social media to create positive change.

Youth participation in parishes has changed over time. In one country, those youths who do remain, focus most often on retreats. Their broader social or social justice activities are limited, leading to fear that they are being indoctrinated with fundamentalist thinking.

In Africa, young family members between ages of 22-30 have left the Church. They said the Church does not respond to the needs of youth. For example, they do not have a role in worship, songs, liturgy.

With active nonviolence training, such as that by Pax Christi International in the DR Congo, young Christians can remain connected to the value of peace and active nonviolence. In some places, peace is being integrated into formation programs in local churches. For example, in the Diocese of Balanga in the Philippines, a ministry on nonviolence and just peace is being created.

In Ireland the experience with youth is very positive, with book clubs, *Laudato Si'* groups and young people involved in 'care of the earth' groups.

Language should be simple; words like 'synodality' and 'consubstantiation' can be an obstacle for children. Use music to draw in the youth.

One group said that everything is spiritualized, creating a disconnect with culture and the Church is disconnected from the youth. The youth look up to laypeople, why not the clergy?

(See Appendix 2 for verbatim reflections of youth in one listening session.)

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## Experiences of the Synod

*As we expected, experiences of the Synod on Synodality process in general varied widely, as did their relationships with and opinions of the Catholic Church, even within the same country. Finally, a few words about their experiences of the Synod process itself:*

One participant noted that the Church, by its very nature, evolved over centuries and emphasizes the magisterial more than the consultative. He asked if such a structure would be willing and amenable to listening and genuinely changing by incorporating the rich, diverse and grounded experience of the *populus Dei*? A few others

mentioned that priests seem to be afraid of the Synod.

In the U.S. some participants said that there were many opportunities to participate in the Synod process and that communities excluded by the Church now feel included. Others said that the Synod process was not being valued. In some places it was being organized by deanery

Wise words: Synod and Synodality  
Submitted by Gearóid R. ÓDubhthaigh

God Walks  
amid the unfurling  
situations of life;  
Joy His Fragrance  
Goodness His foot-print.

Beauty Reflects  
His Countenance  
All that exists  
has its Source  
in Him.

We, wedded  
to enslavement  
systems  
(Stockholm Syndrome-like)  
find Release  
Only in Him.

His Incarnation  
Enables us  
to sensitively  
be inserted into, and  
participate in  
His Divine Dynamic;  
that LOVE  
we have always  
(even unknowingly)  
hankered after,  
hungered for.

Let's  
Reflect  
Reappraise  
Rejoice.

not by parish, so the input was lessened; elsewhere there was a three-minute limit on what was said, so people left.

In Scotland, the Synod process was slow but there were some positive reports of inspiring meetings. Scottish bishops, clergy and the Synod facilitators made an effort to reach out to marginalized people. In Belgium, young people were included in the dialogue. In Germany, the Church was already in discussion at another level, for example, about electing bishops.

A participant in Japan said that the Church is not taking the Synod seriously: ‘When I asked how the parishes were working on the Synod, the response was that they were praying for the Synod, so I couldn’t get anywhere, and when I emailed the diocese, they replied that they were trying to get the “parishes” to summarize the Synod ... The slogan “synodality” may be a noble one, but the current

situation is that we have stumbled over how to actually absorb the voices of the people. The Church community has not been willing to have a frank discussion with each other. Let’s talk! but they don’t know how to do it, do they?’

Others called for the Church to go out to people where they are. Their experience of the Synod process in parishes was that it was too clergy-led and excluded those who are not regular Church attendees. They said that we need to ask those who no longer come to Church, why? If Synodality is to mean anything, dialogue with everyone, especially youth, women, religious and lay, and ‘listening’ should be at the heart of Church life shaping it in the service of the broader community. It could be like the disciples listening to the Lord on the road to Emmaus - we should be alert to His voice.

Pax Christi International is a Catholic peace movement that promotes peace, respect for human rights, justice and reconciliation throughout the world. Grounded in the belief that just peace is possible and that vicious cycles of violence and injustice can be broken, Pax Christi International promotes active Gospel nonviolence and just peace, addressing the root causes and destructive consequences of violent conflict, social injustice, environmental destruction and war. Pax Christi’s network includes over 100 member organizations working in their own contexts on every continent to create a more just and peaceful world.

The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative is a project of Pax Christi International that is working with the Vatican, bishops from many countries, religious congregations, Catholic universities and local Catholic communities to deepen Catholic understanding of and commitment to Gospel nonviolence, moving nonviolence to the center of Catholic teaching on direct violence and war, as well as on systemic and structural violence, cultural violence and ecological violence.

Pax Christi understands nonviolence to be a spirituality, a way of life, a global ethic and a spectrum of proven-effective approaches to preventing or interrupting violence, protecting vulnerable and threatened communities and promoting a *Laudato Si’* future based on social justice, human dignity and the integrity of creation.

## Appendices

1. The Church is already promoting nonviolence and just peace
2. Verbatim reflections of youth from six countries
3. What does Pax Christi Toronto want the Church to know?
4. Journeying Together Towards Justice and Peace Synod: Response from Pax Christi USA

## Appendix 1: The Church is already promoting nonviolence and just peace

*Many examples of the Church promoting nonviolence and just peace were shared by participants:*

- Catholic Sisters act on Jesus’ message more consistently than do most Catholic priests. For example, they dedicate their land for climate/creation sanctuaries. Communities of Catholic Sisters could be models for the Church.
- In some places the Church is open to calls such as the World Week to Pray for Peace, the Kairos Document and the Human Fraternity Document.
- Churches have worked with the local municipalities to build housing, including senior housing, on Church-owned land.
- The 16 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide opportunities at all levels to promote just peace. Many of the values undergirding most SDGs reflect Church teaching and also generally mirror values that have moulded indigenous communities.
- Kenya: *Jumuiya* is a Swahili word for small Christian communities. Here they meet to pray, share their spiritual journey and everyday life in general. The *jumuiya* are instrumental in supporting dialogue in parishes and encouraging new and existing Christians in the Gospel.
- DR Congo: In Kinshasa, the residence of Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo was attacked in 2021, and some Catholic parishes in the Grand Kasai area were looted, vandalized, but the Episcopal Conference of the DR Congo (CENCO) and the Episcopal Justice and Peace Commission (CEJP) launched an appeal for peace, not to react, no revenge, keep calm and Christians have followed this path of nonviolence.
- DR Congo: Archbishop Christophe Muzihirwa of Bukavu is called the Romero of the DRC. He was killed on 29 October 1996 because he preached active nonviolence and peace, instead of war. The Association of African Bishops Conferences (ACEAC) set up an Institute of Peace and Reconciliation in Bukavu to promote nonviolence and peace.
- During the arrival of Rwandan Hutu, the Church of Bukavu urged the population to avoid violence toward the Hutu refugee population. The bishops of Kivu called on the armed groups to cease the violence against the civilian populations in the east of the DR Congo, especially in Butembo, in Fizi, Mwenga, Shabunda, the plain of the Ruzizi.
- Burundi: The Church sends messages to denounce and to avoid violence. At the Centre Jeunes Kamenge in Bujumbura, the priest brought young people together to protect them during the crisis in 1993 and was awarded the alternative Nobel Prize in 2002. In 1995, at the minor seminary of Buda, the rebels attacked the school and tried to separate the young people by ethnicity; they refused and 40 young people were killed
- Also in Burundi, in 1993 people who had participated in a massacre came to hide at the archdiocese. Soldiers came to look for them and the archbishop of Gitega said no; he told the soldiers to kill him before killing these people. The people were arrested by the rebels to kill them and the archbishop started shouting loudly so the rebels let them go. This archbishop saved human lives; it is a testimony of the actions of the Church in favour of active nonviolence and peace. We nicknamed this archbishop Joachim (the faithful pastor).
- Philippines: The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has made various pronouncements on nonviolence and peace over the years, and has shared prayers related to issues (e.g. Prayer for the Elections 2022). Dioceses and parishes have social action ministries where the Church is able to reach out to and serve not just the Catholics, but others as well. The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) issued an important statement prior to the election on the qualities of a leader and promoted nonviolent/peaceful, honest elections, including through the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCCRV). (There is less of a unified voice when it comes to issues such as extrajudicial killings [SPG].)
- In the Philippines, a local parish organized a Meet the Candidates ‘Voice your Values’ forum and invited all the different faith communities in our area to come .... Christians of all varieties, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and people of all faiths and none. The parish is also organizing a new parish council seeking cooperation between clergy and laity listening to one another.
- Philippines: Miriam College offers a general education elective, ‘Justice and Peace in the Church and Society’.
- Brazil: The Pastoral de Campo of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) defends communities when their land

rights are violated. CPT helped to differentiate invasion and occupation - many times it was the landowners who attacked the peasants who owned the land. In recent years CPT and its partners have applied nonviolent resistance principles, defending the land without weapons, although the situation continues to be very violent.

- The nonviolent approach marks a roadmap for priests and the entire pastoral in Latin America, to be able to link more and more sectors. It is the exercise that Pax Christi International has been developing since 2013, bringing together various actors in Latin America, in order to resolve socio-environmental conflicts nonviolently.
- In Colombia, the Church has provided intermediation in critical moments of the conflict and journey toward peace. The bishops of the Colombian Pacific -- especially the bishop of Quibdó, Chocó, Juan Carlos Barreto -- have denounced the presence of paramilitarism in the region, the links between the army and the paramilitaries and the planting of mines by the ELN.
- Peru: The Church promotes human rights, nonviolence, peace and trains pastoral agents to defend the land and water.
- El Salvador: St. Oscar Romero's legacy of work for human rights, ecological struggles and accompaniment of local communities continues.
- Venezuela: The Church has been active through its social action network, meetings of peace builders, diplomas to train community leaders, a chair of peace agents for high school boys and accompanying families of migrants and political prisoners.
- Mexico: In Chiapas, nonviolence has been practiced for several years and is promoted by the Catholic Church. The Church works with organizations that promote human rights and trains pastoral agents in peacebuilding.
- New Zealand: On Holy Thursday night the service was led by women with two women carrying the cross. The priest was very open to women's role in these services.
- Australia: Australian bishops in the Plenary Council process listened to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council. The Social Justice Sunday Statement 2021-2022, 'Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor' is excellent. At least two bishops mentioned that climate change action and support for asylum seekers is part of being Easter people.
- In Ukraine, people who are committed to a nonviolent way of life are raising their voices.
- In Japan, when we organize actions in front of embassies and other places, the police and authorities intervene, however, they do not intervene if we gather to pray.
- In Korea, Mass is often celebrated or prayer services held for those who have been victimized by state violence.
- The Church in Ireland was an advocate for peace and nonviolence. The archbishop of Dublin spoke out strongly about synodality and the care of the earth.
- Scotland: The bishops have for 40 years been outspoken on the issue of nuclear weapons. Bishops regularly attended protests and vigils at the nuclear submarine base in Scotland. Pax Christi Scotland has regular online events addressing a range of nonviolence/peace issues (from gender violence to nuclear weapons) at which clergy and bishops speak and give generously of their time. The Church in Ireland and Scotland has welcomed many Ukrainian refugees.
- United States: In Chicago, Cardinal Cupich organized a march with the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday to address gun violence. The Church in South Dakota protested the Doctrine of Discovery that led to the colonization of indigenous peoples and for which we have never asked forgiveness. The Church in Evanston, IL has participated in a concrete plan for reparations for African Americans. A local Pennsylvania parish managed a food bank for the area and weekly soup kitchens. Parishes in Detroit, MI have explored 'Voice of the Earth'. The dioceses of El Paso and San Antonio, TX reached out to refugees.
- Canada: The Catholic Women's League has included social justice work as one of three pillars.
- One person described participating for nearly 20 years in a pastoral space focused on professionals, where the institutional Church offers a space for participation, recognizing that the Church has failed to generate a greater openness so that Catholic professionals can make proposals and carry them forward.
- For more than six years, Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative has carried out an internal review exercise to engage the magisterium of the church to move nonviolence to the centre of Church teaching on war and violence.

## Appendix 2: Shared reflection of youth from six countries

*Youth UK, Ireland, Philippines, Taiwan, Fiji, Myanmar shared the following responses to Pax Christi's questions. These responses are very close to verbatim:*

**If the Church were to adopt nonviolence as a way of life, how would relationships in the Church change?**

- Nonviolence challenges the hierarchy, promotes gender equality, welcomes diversity of cultures and sexual orientation. Acceptances of our differences and appreciation or celebration of our uniqueness.
- The relationships within the Church would not change; but it would change how people relate with the Church and with one another.
- Nonviolence has been lived within the Church for so long. Jesus's sacrifice taught us to love one another – if there's no love, there would not be peace.
- In this time, people are challenged to change and prefer nonviolence. It must begin within ourselves and then we will be able to share it with others.
- The Church is a good place to be as there is not much violence in the Church. It is the people in the Church who need to change.
- The Church has long been practicing nonviolent ways. Individuals need to live out nonviolence.
- If the Church continued to live out nonviolence as a way of life, it would significantly change the relationship between the Church and the community. It would also help build a nation of peace-loving people.
- Nonviolence would be a great way to unite people. It would bring about harmony and peace.
- Violence in my country (Philippines) has been a big issue. The Catholic Church has been allegedly involved with the communist party. They are people who have principles and who fight for their rights, but that should be done in a peaceful way. This divides people and affects young people.
- Relationships among people will flourish if nonviolence is a way of life in the Church.
- It would be nice to acknowledge that everybody is a child of God no matter what side of the fence you are on.
- It would change relationships for the better. It will prevent all kinds of violence e.g. physical, emotional, spiritual.
- We could freely go to church without fear of being judged.
- Greater mutual understanding. Greater respect. It would heal nations, beginning at home.

**How can the Church best promote nonviolence and just peace?**

- Internally – through renewal of the Church, sharing of power and authority. Injustices in the church must be addressed. Rejection, such as of LGBTQ communities, is a form of violence inside the Church.
- Externally – by reaching out to others, welcoming others, dialogue, becoming the voice of the unheard and unseen, giving opportunities for parishioners to meet each other after Mass.
- Through the Gospel, the hymns selected for the liturgies, studying the lives of the saints, knowing and living out the fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- By looking up to Jesus as a role model; he desired peace; being able to talk about our differences rather than bursting into arguments.
- By encouraging the Church to live out Catholic values so that people in our community will know that we are of God just as we are taught.
- People from different backgrounds could be made to feel welcomed and able to belong; the Church is not just the building but the people in it.
- Intensify the promotion of inclusivity because sadly there are still cases where people are driven away from the Church because of a few factors.
- We need to promote peace ourselves as well.
- The best way to promote nonviolence is for the Church to create an interfaith dialogue.

- The Church has sessions like this to eliminate violence and promote peace.
- The Church has to be neutral. It must promote nonviolence and not side with any groups. The Church has been involved in many partisan groups during the past election. The Church must remember the 1987 constitution - the separation of the state and the Church.
- To have interfaith/religious programs.
- The Church must stop discrimination.
- The Church can be the voice to communicate freedom, for people to be able to speak freely.
- Peaceful living can be promoted by the Church.
- To have the ears to listen.
- Homilies of the priests could speak about nonviolence.
- Practice the way of love. Small gestures of peace and friendship make a difference.
- Unconditional love and action should be the way of life.
- Fully embrace the Gospel message of nonviolence that affects patterns of behavior and, most importantly, emotions.
- Encourage nonviolence and respect.
- Gospel commitment to peace.

Can you share an example of how the Church promotes or undermines nonviolence and just peace in your community?

- We have many different denominations in the community and not just Catholics. We have Islam and Iglesia in Cristo and others. We have this inter-religious ministry where every month we have a day to visit the mosque and have a dialogue with the Islamic leaders.
- We participated in the Mindanao week of peace, including a caravan for peace with the parish priest. It was a nice welcoming event.
- The problem in our parish community is that the different ministries have misunderstandings and quarrels among each other, e.g Knights of the Columbus, Legion of Mary, etc. The parish priest must take action to unite these groups.
- The Church should be neutral.
- Another interfaith/religious dialogue including our Muslim brothers and sisters will be happening soon in our community.
- Our Church creates social activities that promote unity among all. In our Catholic school we have Muslim students, born again etc. but we respect them and we welcome them to the school community.
- People join the pilgrimage of a Sister towards power plants and celebrate Mass together when they reach a church.
- In Pakistan, there are many child laborers. The Church provides them with food and access to education. We are the best examples of nonviolence.
- Put our effort towards resolving violent issues in the Church, appointing a priest to look after sexual-harassment problems. Each parish or community has a hotline to report abuses.
- Reduce the gap between communities, especially between the minorities and the majority religion or culture. Do not be afraid to take the lead in promoting peace.
- Participate in protests and provide a safe place for workers - migrants who are abused by employers and human trafficking.
- Aborigine ministry to promote their rights (Taiwan)
- Drug-rehabilitation centre (Myanmar)
- Prayer ministry, praying for each other.
- Presence of the Church in social media (provide good and true information, Christian values) is an example of addressing violence in social media, sharing about our faith not forcing it on people. Our voice is small but we need to keep speaking.

- I usually start my day with prayer. I noticed that within the prayer, we are invited to pray for peace and mercy.
- In small Christian Communities Sunday readings are shared; In the 'faith in action' part of the sharing, we are encouraged to identify an action where we can engage with other members in the community.
- Attending interreligious dialogues is a good avenue to promote and show our understanding and acceptance of other denominations.
- Interfaith dialogue (I am part of the minority, in terms of religion, here in my community), getting into a good relationship with others, inviting them to join our activities. This enables us to show how we follow Christ. We also encourage them to tell us what we need to know about their religion.
- This year's national elections (Philippines) brought about different feelings. I really admired the outgoing vice president because even though she lost the race, her message of inclusivity and love still rang throughout the hearts of the people. Moreover, she emphasized that peaceful and right ways will make the message of the campaign louder and more concrete. Her mission-spirited campaign kind of shows the Christian values taught by the Church.
- Practice interfaith living.
- Invite other people into activities organized within the community.



## **Appendix 3: What does Pax Christi Toronto want the Church to know?**

### ***Synodality and Pax Christi Toronto***

1. Despite the observation that the term was never used at its origins in 1945, Pax Christi and its local expression, Pax Christi Toronto asserts that those who aspire to gather under the name of the Peace of Christ have always striven, collectively, to be a manifestation of what the world has come to understand during the papacy of Pope Francis as synodality. Pax Christi Toronto sees the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in Pope Francis' call to revitalization through synodality. Together we have the power to shape our world for good. Pax Christi Toronto is grateful that the preparations for the 2021-2023 Synod of Bishops have taken the form of an inclusive consultation process through which individuals and groups are encouraged to discern the charisms that we have been given to act responsibly. For the duration of the preparation for the synod, at our monthly meetings, Pax Christi Toronto has decided to include the Adsumus prayer of Saint Isidore of Seville. Because of our weak and sinful nature, we are aware that the partiality of individuals and indeed groups can influence our actions often in negative ways. We are aware that our individual and collective ignorance can lead us down a wrong path and that despite our best intentions to promote the opposite, human activity can lead to disorder. Our group, mostly over 60 years of age, is made up of lay people and religious. We from diverse backgrounds. In our own lives, we have experienced or have witnessed various forms of injustice.

2. To us, Pax Christi Toronto, using the word synodality describes our desire to walk together in faith and humility, to listen to each other in order to discern the truth and to act in such a way that, despite missteps and setbacks, and despite apparently insuperable blockages, together as a movement, much like Moses leading his people, that pathways to peace, a Via Christi may be discerned and once discerned, to be followed in good faith. Pax Christi Toronto has pledged, in the words of Saint Isidore of Seville to do "what is right" and not "stray from the way of truth".

3. During the month of March 2022, Pax Christi Toronto undertook a Lenten activity of discernment into our individual and collective understanding of synodality. During five sessions during Lent, 13 members (four men, nine women) of Pax Christi Toronto met online in order to create this response. All participants were seniors over the age of 60. Because of numerous restrictions brought upon us by COVID-19 and indeed by lack of time, Pax Christi Toronto observes that our Lenten process of discernment, though sincere and heartfelt, was not all encompassing. Between sessions, we communicated through email. Three of the 13 participants met for all five sessions, six met for two to four sessions and four met only once. As befits a multicultural community, participants included Canadians who had lived in Central America, South America and Europe and those born in Asia.

4. What can Pax Christi Toronto be trusted for? What can Pax Christi Toronto be counted on to say and do? These questions emerged during our discussions. Synodality helps to answer these questions. We are called to learn what we can count on each other for. We have come together to share our own understanding of the peace of Christ and we strive to listen to each other in such a way that partiality will not influence our actions. Many of our members conduct extensive research about a variety of peace building initiatives in the hope that ignorance will not lead us down a wrong path. We cannot solve planetary problems by ourselves. In the history of the world and the Church, Pope Francis' call for synodality is coming on cue. Gandhi's observation that "poverty is the worst form of violence" continues to motivate us. Lack of trust is widespread in our world as we see poverty being manifested in multiple ways. As Pax Christi Toronto keeps reflecting on the unifying power of the Holy Spirit, we are committed to broadly sharing our experience of the liberating power of the synodal process.

***Pax Christi Toronto wants the church to model INCLUSION in a multitude of ways.***

a. INCLUSION: PARISH STRUCTURE.

Although the principle of subsidiarity suggests that the local parish is the basic building block in order to gather the scattered, too many people, whom we have come to know have become uncomfortable with how their own parish works in practice. For the examples listed below, there appear to be no easy pathways within the diocese to navigate how to have their concerns listened to and responded to effectively.

Turning one's back on the local parish, (as some have done), can be attributed to various forms of verbal abuse and even cruelty practiced by the person appointed by the bishop: the pastor. Pastors are appointed to one parish and then appointed to another responsibility without evidence of an attempt to be open about the process. Individuals in Pax Christi Toronto have observed that current practices have, at times, led to a considerable falling away of parishioners.

Whenever the demeanour or personality of the pastor is perceived as unwelcoming, there is a noticeable problem. There are subtle forms of not being welcoming, including being insensitive to issues of diversity. Whenever a pastor demonstrates a bias or "partiality" for his own ethnic group and (whether aware of the issue or not) betrays an insensitivity for the faith development of people of other ethnicities, the bishop has a role to play in mitigating the damage. Similarly, whenever the pastor demonstrates, through his words or actions that he is being insensitive to the need to extend welcome to all those who have been excluded or marginalized, including LGBTQ2S+ communities, the bishop has a role to play. There needs to be greater transparency about the oversight provided by the diocesan bishop and his auxiliaries. Is there a model for consistent, fruitful interaction between the bishop and members of individual parishes?

The regional auxiliary bishop should have a role in helping to discern courses of action that would transcend the jurisdiction and boundaries of parishes, especially when issues of outreach to marginalized people become pressing concern. In our diocese, there are many seasonal agricultural workers whose spiritual needs are either not being addressed or are being prevented from being addressed.

Pax Christi Toronto is pleased that there are now clearer procedures to deal with clergy sexual abuse. What procedures are in place to mitigate other forms of disturbing clergy behaviour, sometimes defended as "humour" such as splashing altar servers with water during the liturgy and stepping on the toes of children who come forward for a blessing? Parishioners who have been refused Communion because they have knelt to receive walk away weeping and never return to their community.

At times, some pastors and indeed some deacons, in their liturgical roles, model behaviours that span the gamut from a quasi-militant insistence on devotional practices to expressions of demeaning forms of humour to fixations on "things from the waist down." Again, parishioners should have confidence that such issues could be brought to the attention of the bishop, coupled with an expectation that such issues would be investigated and that the raising of such issues would not be greeted by a form of reprisal. The results of any such investigation must be reported back to the people who raised the issues in the first place. It is unconscionable that issues would be "swept under the carpet" and that the pastor would not be held accountable both to the bishop and to the parishioners in a public manner that is transparent to everyone.

We urge bishops to take steps to deal compassionately with expressions of frustration and experiences of betrayal. Pax Christi Toronto identifies a particularly egregious example of dissonance: well-organized

fundraising for improvements to the cathedral contrasts with the initial lack of leadership with regard to fundraising in aid of First Nations, Inuit and Metis victims of residential schools.

There needs to be transparency regarding the functioning of parish councils and parish financial councils: Can a review procedure be established to ensure a consistent approach across the diocese?

There needs to be greater openness regarding clergy placements. For positions of responsibility, what procedures are in place to ensure transparency relating a) to appointments, b) to term lengths of appointments, c) termination of appointments?

A parish needs a team of people to tend to its needs. Diocesan resources should give priority to support a person to coordinate parish ministries. Wherever possible, consideration should be given to providing opportunities for retired priests to be part of a parish. Greater use should be made of spokespersons of organizations which provide support for a variety of Church teachings: Development and Peace - Caritas Canada, Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council, Community Peacemaker teams, for example.

Whenever a pastor is open to offering a space for parishioners to pay further attention to, and discussion of, societal and global issues such as the environmental crisis, integral ecology, and Reconciliation and Justice for Indigenous peoples, the principle of subsidiarity is being reinforced and the life of the parish would, to some extent, be reinvigorated.

In his meetings with Canadian leaders in March 2022, Pope Francis expressed the hope that “our meetings...will point out new paths to be pursued together and instill courage and strength and lead to greater commitment on the local level.” Sadly, more often than not, parishioners do not feel listened to and such discussions do not take place.

#### b. INCLUSION: HOUSE CHURCHES.

There is a need to listen to prophetic voices that inspire us. Although before COVID, Pax Christi Toronto would meet in a parish setting, Pax Christi Toronto exists as a group that extends beyond the parish level. In that context, we have experienced significant moments of inspiration and companionship, with each other, with our ambassador of peace, with our teachers of peace, with our invited guests and through our outreach to the peace builders, the war resisters and the refugees in our midst.

Within or beyond the parish structure, there is a need to build smaller, more intimate faith communities, based on the Gospel and dedicated to living the Gospel. There is a need to develop friendships with others through housing, homelessness and various other issues of poverty that constrict the flourishing of the soul. There is a need to encourage the development of support networks and spiritual friendships through applying the recommendations of the Catholic Eco-investment accelerator, participation in Bible Studies, study of the Church’s social teachings, such as the Catholic Climate Action Program.

#### c. INCLUSION: ROLE OF WOMEN.

To provide meaningful opportunities for women, Pax Christi Toronto is fearlessly willing and open to growing in the life and spirit of the Body of Christ. Pax Christi Toronto aspires to create spaces for women to experience being “on fire and flame” to do “something that only women could do for suffering women”. The phrases in italics refer to creative responses to various nurturing (i.e. breastfeeding) and medical issues and complications that only women experience. Beyond the observation that women should be encouraged to empower other women, Pax Christi Toronto hopes that women’s gifts not only be made available to benefit other women, but that women’s gifts be made

available to benefit men and to benefit all aspects of life in the Church. The account in John 11 points to a path for us. Circumstances brought the direct involvement of Jesus into the lives of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. According to the story, without the fortitude of both Mary and Martha, Jesus would not have followed the path to Bethany and to his raising of Lazarus. While Mary stayed at home, Martha got out of the house, went on the path to stress the urgency of the moment. We observe that some aspects of Church life have “already been in the tomb four days”. The healing teachings of Christ always articulate a new path for Wisdom. Manifestations of counter-witness to the urgings of the Spirit for a more equal partnership between men and women beg for fortitude and prayer. On this issue, we beg that partiality not influence our actions, nor that our actions promote disorder.

d. INCLUSION: SHARE the SOCIAL TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH. One of our members is very thankful to a late deacon in her parish who recommended Pax Christi to her in 2004. What is remarkable about her assertion is that the words and actions of the deacon were so unusual at the time and remain so today. She believes that God put the deacon in her path as the sermons he gave were the most meaningful she had ever heard. Pax Christi Toronto questions the curriculum of the seminary. What provisions are included for education about a synodal church, Vatican II, and Catholic social teaching since Leo XIII? The social teachings of the Church should have a central role in the education of anyone offering homilies and spiritual reflections, for seminarians and for priests as they prepare for day-to-day parish life. In their formation, there needs to be focus on how the Social Teachings are based in Scripture, both Hebrew Scripture and the Christian Scriptures as well as the First Scripture of Creation. The messages of apostolic exhortations such as *The Joy of the Gospel* and papal encyclicals, such as *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* should be studied and celebrated, giving us constant reminders that Christ has no hands on earth now but ours.

e. INCLUSION: ADULT EDUCATION: Use adult faith principles to prioritize adult faith development. We are aware that Canadian resources are available through the Centre for Religious Education and Catechetics at Saint Paul University, Ottawa.

f. INCLUSION: YOUTH. Be creative. Seek the advice of educators. Facilitate more involvement by young people. Listen to what is important to them. The gift of an inquiring mind should not be marginalized. Show young people that good things are happening and that they can have fun with each other. Share ideas and courses of action together.

g. INCLUSION: Enliven parish life through the PRACTICE of the CIRCULAR ECONOMY.

h. INCLUSION: CHILDREN. Be creative. Share music with children, especially musical versions of Gospel stories. Rabindranath Tagore reminds us that “every child that is born comes as a sign that God has not lost hope in humanity.” Engage children as peacemakers and as critical thinkers, particularly during preparations for first Eucharist and Confirmation.

i. INCLUSION: COMPANIONS. Express encouragement for various forms of friendship and companionship. Companions come our way in many ways; some companions come to us through our reading; some we have known all our lives; others we have not known for long. In every case, each companion comes as a gift.

Express the value of positive health regimens and interfaith understanding. Decry the destructive aspects of clericalism, patriarchy, hierarchy, sexual abuse scandals. Affirm people who have had things to say and who have been ignored.

j. INCLUSION: SPIRITUALITY. Ecological spirituality, women’s spirituality, spirituality of sexuality and the diversity of gender orientation are neglected areas for spiritual development. Explore the Universe

story, different forms of prayer and scripture sharing. Listen to modern prophets. Explore interconnections between ecology, climate, disarmament, non-violence, integral human development. Create opportunities for the experience of a deeper appreciation of and compassion for God's creation. Pax Christi Toronto is passionate about non-violence, and how it touches everything. Pax Christi Toronto aspires to be trusted, to be open to listen, to empower others, to help our church to "be more in tune with what it can be." There is so much potential in the church when it actually follows the Jesus, who would sit, listen and talk with anyone who invited Him.

**Pax Christi Toronto concludes by asking questions that require a variety of responses and that also need some sort of mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of those responses.**

- On a variety of issues, what provisions are made to ensure that laity are consulted and included?
- Are innovative responses to the issues of the day and imaginative ways to promote interconnection between clergy and laity actively encouraged or effectively discouraged?
- Through its actions, does the diocese foster or discourage a spirit of inclusion?

*Dear bishops: the whole church is in crisis, many wrong paths, followed over long periods of time have led to many experiencing a profound lack of trust in the saving power of the Good News. Please, do not pay lip service to the notion that the voice of God is revealed in the voice of the people. "Vox populi est vox Dei" is a living injunction. O that today you would listen to his voice!*

## Appendix 4: Journeying Together Towards Justice and Peace

### Synod Response from Pax Christi USA

Pax Christi USA is a peace and justice organization grounded in the Gospel and Catholic social teaching. Guided by the spirituality of nonviolence, our members advocate and provide leadership for disarmament, economic and interracial justice, inclusivity, and care for Creation. We are part of the international Catholic peace and justice movement that seeks to model the peace of Christ in our witness to the mandate of the nonviolence of the Cross. We strive through prayer, study, and action to be attentive to the intersectionality of these issues, and their impact on the world community. We're committed to establishing strong, honest, caring relationships—both personal and institutional—across all lines of prejudice, in order that together, with the whole Body of Christ, we can transform structures and cultures of violence and domination.

This response was initiated by a regional Pax Christi group. The lead coordinator from that group studied the Vademecum and Preparatory Document, attended trainings on facilitation and having difficult conversations, and co-led a parish-level synod response. Facilitation guides were written containing historic and present-day context for the synod, information on discernment, and holding a safe, brave space for everyone's voices. We offered the Prayer for the Synod, and asked four questions:

1. *Imagine the future Church as a healthy thriving body that upholds the peace, justice and love of Christ in our world and supports us in our own deepest spiritual need and work. What are the similarities and differences of the Church at the present moment?*
2. *What makes you feel seen, heard, and connected to other people of faith? Where do you find this feeling most and why?*
3. *In your own experience, what pushes you away from the Church, and what draws you in? For example, have you encountered comfort, support, or needed guidance? Have you encountered harm, indifference, or lack of understanding?*
4. *What does Christ's peace mean to you and are you able to carry out your own calling towards Christ's peace in the world around you? What holds you back and what supports you?*

Regional facilitators held listening sessions, and were encouraged to take detailed notes of participants' voices and experiences. Some people also shared personal written responses, and notes from groups that met prior to our guides. The lead coordinator read the notes, rested with them in prayer, and made an initial written framework. Then each point in each response was compared to the framework and checked off if it was reflected. If it wasn't, it was considered in the light of whether others had raised a similar point in the responses, or in Pax Christi interactions, or if it was echoed in conversations outside of Pax Christi, or if it had a compelling need to be expressed. In this way, nearly everything shared was woven into the writing. Spiritual guidance through prayer was sought throughout this process. The writing was sent to participants for review and editing, and adjustments were made, before final submission to Pax Christi International.

As we began this work, we were aware that people in many parts of the U.S. felt excluded from having a meaningful voice in the synod process. In some cases, there was an opportunity to participate within someone's parish, but disappointment in the brief summary offered to their bishop. People frequently expressed distrust in a given bishop's willingness to hear or include a person's voice in his own synthesis. Some didn't have a synod process in their parish, and some were no longer part of a parish.

This writing represents listening sessions of approximately 280 participants from various points in the U.S., and also reflects on the writing, workshops, actions and positions that constitute our members' work towards living the Peace of Christ in our world. Participants include Catholics since birth as well as converts, laypeople, nuns, priests, and some who were formerly nuns or priests. Some are youth in high school or college. Others have completed degrees in Divinity, Ministry, or the school of life. We have voices of people who have left Catholicism. Some voices are Christian but not Catholic, who are committed to nonviolence, justice, and prayer.

## **Our Vision for a Healthy, Thriving Church**

Our vision for a healthy thriving Church is inclusive, accountable, and trustworthy. It speaks truth in a way that draws in, and does not condemn. It disrupts ways that people engage in violence, and redirects them to creative, healthy paths. It hears, sees, and accepts individuals in both their fullness and their failings, and accompanies them on their life journey. It reconciles injustices, including its own, by repairing violence, harm, and separation. It guides healthy, whole, right relationships, in which all participants are regarded in mutual dignity and agency. The healthy thriving Church fully embraces God's diversity. Its followers live the Gospel and strive to live freely into the wholeness of their being, in community with God and each other. Commandments and tenets of our faith are seen as gifts, rather than rules. The young, the middle aged, and the old are all present and nurturing to each other. It is an interdependent community of people offering themselves to each other and God. In this there is joy.

## **Rehanging the Bell**

Today the bell that calls people to the Church has crashed to the ground, its rope frayed and broken. To rehang the bell, a new cord must be fashioned. The spirituality of St. Francis and St. Clare, who formed the previous cord, can offer guidance. Francis and Clare looked to the Gospel for how to live. They embraced poverty, and chose nonviolence both with respect to warring nations and factions, and in relationships across class and gender divides.

## **Gospel Nonviolence**

Jesus's teachings offer us a path of nonviolence. While many in our listening sessions expressed feeling inspired, hopeful, and encouraged by Pope Francis's words and actions, many experiences closer to home have been concerning. A number of people shared stories of trying to live the Gospel, and finding themselves branded as a problem in their parishes. We strongly feel that the Church is called through the Gospel message of Jesus to commit to the practice and teaching of Gospel nonviolence.

We believe the Church is called to teach "Just Peace." War does not ever bring justice, and there is no such thing as a "Just War." In addition, participants suggested that Christians should read and meditate daily on the Gospels, and that meditation is a laboratory for learning nonviolence. Others shared being moved by homilies that tied Jesus's teachings to current concerns and suffering in our communities and world. Conversely, some struggled with generally hearing homilies that do not give insight into living the Gospel in our world today or being in relationship with God, but instead, give the message to be good now so when you die you can have eternal life. The spirituality of participating in mission and communal relationship together with God, each other, and all of Creation, is lost. "How can you be at peace NOW, if someone you know is suffering?" one participant asked.

The USCCB Peace Pastoral in 1983 was energizing. It gave vision. But now this energy seems absent. A number of US Catholics seem unaware of Pope Francis's teachings in *Laudato Si*, *Fratelli Tutti*, and other sources. Participants note that raising concerns at their churches about violence, such as gun violence, endless war, militarism, poverty, systemic racism, discrimination against women, LGBTQ hate crimes, the death penalty, immigration, and environmental destruction are deemed "too political." We see addressing them as a primary duty of the Church, without which, we do not live the nonviolent teachings of Jesus.

## **A Rhetoric of Peace**

To live the Peace of Christ in our world, one participant asks us to use 'a rhetoric of peace.' Our Catholic culture often uses a rhetoric of war. Many speak of spiritual warfare, and fighting sin. Even among people practicing nonviolence, terms such as 'prayer warrior' and 'peace army' are used. Words that glorify violence run through the stories of the Old Testament, Psalms, and our liturgies and prayers. In one person's words, "*Jesus is called the 'Prince of Peace' but that title...reveals the conflict in the very culture that coined it. For princes, the sons of kings, depend for their existence upon conflict.*" Words chosen carefully to promote peace and expose violence as the destructive force it is, change us internally. Externally, we will harvest what we have sown.

Violent language is often invoked from the pulpit in statements relating to abortion. One person in our discussions stopped going to church after the pastor proclaimed that “liberals just want to murder their own children.” Such language contributes to the polarization threatening both the United States and the Catholic Church. This polarization has rent tears in personal lives as well, between husband and wife, parent and child, siblings, and close friends. While the teaching that life begins at conception may be correct, the tactics being used build fear and anger, and demand **enforcement**. They do not address the roots of the problem. A rhetoric of holy war is used, and those deemed opponents are cast as demons. Few minds and hearts have changed, and we pay a toll that is breaking society. We will continue to pay until we learn to protect **all** life with integrity and care. That cannot be done using a rhetoric of violence.

### **Choosing Poverty is a Practice of Nonviolence**

The Church is not the buildings or real estate, it is the people in relationship with God and each other. The need for large sums of money makes leaders beholden to people whose actions may be governed by power, jealousy, pride, greed, fear, and hate. Religious leaders lose their cherished intention of being servants of Christ and become servants to the wealthy. For example, we can look at the weapons industry: the \$138 billion in weapons sales from the US to the rest of the world, the 49.5% of our national budget allocated to military spending, the stockpiles of nuclear weapons, and endless research and development of technology that kills. Under the present structure, dioceses and parishes need the money generated by jobs, investors, and manufacturers in this wealthy industry. Money spent on violence robs people of food, shelter, healthcare, opportunity, safety, voice, and life. Death is glorified and mercy is trampled. Yet church leaders rarely speak against weapons and military spending and our perpetual participation in wars. Those who do, as in the case of Archbishop Wester’s pastoral letter about nuclear disarmament, receive scant support from contemporaries.

Recently, a gold tabernacle was stolen, and the Eucharist desecrated. The tabernacle’s value was \$2 million. It is a service of the Church to preserve spiritual art for nurturing the faith of the people, but when it clings to possessions wrought in gold, *whom does it serve?* To walk away from violence, the Church will need to let go of the markers of power in a world of fear and domination.

Many US dioceses are closing parish churches, ostensibly due to lack of resources, although many people are crying that racism and authoritarianism are involved. Dioceses appear to be following a capitalist model in which affluent parishes remain open and those in poor neighborhoods, and frequented by marginalized people, are closed. People also perceive that Vatican II centered parishes are being closed intentionally where they are felt to be a threat to conservative bishops. Small parishes are being consolidated into large ones, yet in large parishes, or among large numbers at Sunday Mass, many people reported feeling overwhelmed, alienated, anonymous, alone, disconnected, judged, or dismissed. While it is important to choose to live and work simply, and real estate and buildings are expensive, divestments and resources need to be distributed equitably, decisions made synodally, and creative approaches used to keep small communities together and strong.

As is well known, St. Clare believed that choosing poverty was especially critical in following the Way of Jesus. It is another example by which the early spirituality associated with rebuilding the church is not being followed today.

### **Denying Our Sisters and Brothers**

Many see the institutional church as not following the message of Jesus. It is judgmental and not inclusive. This is seen in a portion of its teachings, the words of some vocal leaders, and attitudes of many followers. There is consensus from our participants that many parishes feel unwelcoming, even hostile. People speak of feeling convicted by the church, of feeling invisible, or that they must choose between the church and their child. People describe feeling that their own perspective is irrelevant and that formation programs try to force them to conform to values and thinking from hundreds or thousands of years ago, to which they are quite morally opposed.

One participant shared, *“The Church is one Body. When your foot aches the rest of your body tries to compensate. That only happens when you’re in contact with others.”* When members of the Church, both leadership and



followers, shun LGBTQ individuals, divorcées, or politicians who don't make certain decisions, or when they diminish and dehumanize women, Blacks, Indigenous, and people of color, then those parts of the Body of the Church are cut off. Jesus did say that if part of the body offends you to cut it off. He did not, however, cut off any of the above categories of people in his ministry. When decisions and teachings are proclaimed by members of the hierarchy, while excluding the lived experiences of the full diverse Body, they are not the law of the Church but rather the surmises of a limited, fallible subset of humanity.

There has been a focus on purity and perfection in powerful sectors of the Catholic Church, rather than open doors, mercy and charity. This serves no one: not the faithful, not the institution, not people living in the world, and not even those who believe in it. It instills fear. Followers become cautious rather than courageous. When we buy into the ideal that saints are perfect, and to be faithful is to live in purity, we dare not risk something that might be seen by others as 'wrong', even if it's written in the Gospel, and even if it shows love. We certainly dare not look in depth at our own failings. The shame would break us. Walls go up. Chasms that divide us yawn ever wider, deeper and darker as we project these failings onto others. In the end, when we believe in purity codes, we commit grave injustices against those we deem lacking, whom we've dehumanized: our own brothers and sisters.

### **Women Are Whole Beings**

Denial that the Holy Spirit can call a woman to priesthood is a denial of her full personhood. How can we trust leaders who insist women are beings of lesser spiritual depth and value? If women, too, are made in the image and likeness of God, if Christ is alive in women as well as men, if women's bodies are also temples of the Holy Spirit, how can women be intrinsically incapable of administering Sacraments? Is the presence of the Holy Trinity within women not enough? Or is manhood more significant than the Holy Trinity's presence? Or do those in leadership not actually believe that God is within each of us?

It hardly seems realistic for a church that insists on diminished, restrictive, imprisoning roles for women to be capable of addressing abortion by any means other than force. Treating women as full beings in body, mind, and spirit would forge healthier relationships within the Catholic Church and greatly increase its capacity to minister to others. It would remove a conflict of deeply held moral values that cause many to leave, and many on the outside to refuse to ever consider Christian faith. The continuation of harm against women carried out by the Catholic hierarchy reveals the limited extent of their actual willingness to uphold the value of life.

St. Francis did not diminish, restrict, or imprison St. Clare. While she followed him, he also consulted with her. When the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council required religious women to be cloistered and to follow only the Rule of St. Benedict, Clare was strong enough in her convictions to insist on, and receive, papal approval for the rule she wrote, based on the spirituality she shared with Francis. Recently, when Pope Francis signed the *Fratelli Tutti* encyclical in Assisi, most of the public focus was on St. Francis, with little mention of St. Clare, or another important woman in St. Francis's story, Bl. Jacoba dei Settisoli, whom he called "Brother Jacoba." The *Fratelli Tutti* encyclical itself referenced no women in over 200 footnotes, and the title appears to exclude women. Although the Vatican denies this, we cannot help but to see it in the context of what the words mean in our own language and culture. Also, when other writings of the institutional church use such language, they decisively do exclude women. Evidence points to St. Francis, St. Clare, and other early followers, both male and female, as working together as equals in mission. To this day, church leadership refuses to treat them as such. Why not live by their example? Why not trust them?

### **White Supremacy Is Alive and Well**

The Roman Catholic Church has been operating as a white supremacist institution for several hundreds of years. The wounds of this practice remain fresh and active among many peoples, and white supremacist actions by portions of our leadership continue unabated. Fr. Bryan Massingale, a Pax Christi Teacher of Peace, names white supremacy as the primary impediment to peace in our world.

The faithful of European descent must actively parse ways they contribute to both direct and systemic race-based harm. In the Church, leaders and followers alike must do this work, while supporting new systems that are centered on the voices of those with lived experience of racism. Reconciliation will take generations.

The first step is to tell the truth about the Church's own actions. While portions of our leadership take this seriously, others will not consider it. Some of our bishops and priests attack racial justice advocates, and express contempt for those who ask for acknowledgement of the truth. This is not acceptable. It forces the faithful into a perilous moral decision: participate in a church that is in no way interested in supporting all human life, but predominantly supports white, male, heterosexual life, or else leave.

Historically, the Catholic Church in our country bought and sold slaves, engaged in the erasure of culture and forced labor at missions, and ran residential boarding schools where families were separated, children stripped of their cultural inheritance, abused, and many children died. *"I cried as a child from the pain and that cry has never stopped!"* writes a Skokomish elder in his 70s who was taken from his family at the age of five. The Doctrine of Discovery sanctioned the subjugation of all non-European people, resulting in widespread human rights violations and genocide. This must be acknowledged.

In recent times, church leaders and followers have perpetuated white supremacy in sermons and support for government systems that have allowed slavery, redlining, and discriminatory practices. Leadership remains mostly white, and parish closures fall disproportionately on those with fewer white followers. Black priests and nuns continue to contend with discrimination in their own diocese and orders.

The historic and present participation in white supremacy is a desecration of human dignity. Yet it has been challenging to convince conservative priests, bishops, and parishioners to see the Church's role in racism from a theological perspective. It is instead seen as only a political perspective, and a 'progressive' idea that is labeled 'evil.' It appears to us that many seminaries don't form priests to consider or understand racism. The evidence suggests, rather, that they are formed in ways that foster it.

### **The Exile of LGBTQ Brethren**

In the Gospel, Jesus gives us guidance on discernment: to look at the fruits of a tree to determine whether or not it is good. The fruits of the present teaching about homosexuality, same sex marriage, and gender dysphoria include high suicide rates, families torn apart, homeless youth, hate crimes including murders, families leaving the church in support of relatives and neighbors, and young people refusing to engage with the Church to support peers or protect themselves.

Among the LGBTQ community are people of strong faith, devoted to God, offering themselves in service. There are same-sex parents caring for stable loving families, and sensitive, gentle people of love. Sin causes harm and separation. However, these are not people who are indifferent to causing harm, but who typically show far greater care in preventing and healing it than the rest of society. Despite this, personal stories from LGBTQ people tell of experiencing excruciating harm, of feeling attacked, convicted, and outcast by the Church, and by people in the general public who act in hate and feel they are justified by their religious beliefs. The separation (sin) is not created by the homosexuality or gender orientation itself, but by the condemnation of community members, which many understand as sanctioned by the Church.

The argument that scripture supports this teaching is weak, to speak mildly. The one line in the Gospel that is frequently cited is an interpretation at best, and were it a true interpretation we should witness that truth lived out in our lives, but that is not what we see. In Leviticus, the language in the earliest available transcripts that is ostensibly about homosexuality is so unclear as to be meaningless. And there are many laws from Leviticus that we are not asked to follow today. Nothing actually says that the sins of Sodom and Gomorra had to do with sex. What can be the justification for causing such pain?

Sometimes we use the term *Mother Church*. Many, many mothers say that we cannot treat children the way the leaders of the Catholic Church treat its LGBTQ children. Love does not permit it. Witnessing our neighbor's pain, which stems from the hate encouraged by our leadership is upsetting. Fearing for our children's lives by suicide is sickening. Witnessing and supporting homeless teens who were kicked out for being gay or trans is soul rending. How can we see and hear and yet be complicit without destroying ourselves? The answer is we cannot.

### **Marital Status**

Despite Jesus's conversation with the woman at the well, and refusal to condemn the woman caught in adultery, and his many examples of meeting all people where they are in their life journey, so very many people have become estranged from the church due to divorce or remarriage or being single parents. Even people who tried to have children but miscarried feel unwelcome in churches where most participating women of a certain age are in the 'mother's group'. People do not feel welcome to even make soup with other parishioners when their marriage or childbearing experiences are different from the narrow version of what is deemed 'acceptable' or 'normal.' The feelings of judgment and exclusion are too pronounced. People who have remarried outside the church are not permitted to receive the Eucharist, and feel shunned entirely.

### **Ordination Open to All the Baptized**

Many participants expressed that ordination should be available to all the baptized, regardless of marital status or gender. When ordination is limited to traits that some are born without, and others can only meet if they are called at a certain stage in life, it implies that the vast majority of the population is less capable of holiness, less sacred, and cannot be bearers of Christ. If we were to ordain people based on their experience in loving God and each other, rather than on unrelated factors, the Church would be led by people informed with the full range of life experiences. Marriage, pregnancy and miscarriage, raising children, broken relationships, healing from them, losing a child or spouse, and working and living in the complexities of the present world, offer wisdom – a needed wisdom that is learned through experience, which is not present in our current leadership.

### **Hierarchy is Intrinsicly Dehumanizing**

It is well known that power corrupts, and in this knowledge, we come to another area of consensus among many who shared in our synod sessions: The harm created by the hierarchy, and the need for a healthier structure of organization. Hierarchy puts some people on pedestals while it diminishes others, and both actions are dehumanizing. In order to maintain its illusion of appointed people being more highly valued than others, the hierarchical structure must enforce barriers between them. Such barriers range from authoritative titles and special clothes, to isolating lifestyles, and maintaining a system of power and privilege for some while limiting, ignoring, and even punishing the voices of others. In this, we lose our ability to see, hear, and know each other, our ability to learn from and trust each other. Hierarchy is a structure that we built to help us. It protects us from a certain amount of chaos, unpredictability. But as with a house or a church building, this structure helps us to an extent, but also separates us from experiencing the fullness of God's Creation. We need a new architecture of peace: a structure that enables organization, collaboration, and sharing information, and doesn't separate us from each other and the fullness of God.

Presently, many parishes offer events, groups, and formations that are aligned with a given pastor's specific viewpoints, with some parishes being traditional, others progressive, and some specializing on specific cultural groups. People who don't fit into the pastor's agenda find themselves left out. Several lay people in our sessions gave examples where they offered ideas, talent, energy and time, only to be dismissed by the pastor. People who have been highly formed and qualified, with energy and fire, were devalued repeatedly until they didn't bother to come anymore at all. People in such situations may be able to find a different parish where they can be spiritually nourished and share their gifts, or they may not have that option. A number of people said it was through participation in Pax Christi that they found some relief from the pain this has caused, but it's clear from their responses that the rejection of their offerings by parish priests and pastors remains an open wound.

People also shared examples of themselves or someone else disappearing from their parish ministry or community and no one asked why, or tried to reach out to them. There is a feeling that someone who goes missing isn't missed, that we experience the ups and downs of our lives in isolation.

In nearly all listening sessions, people said they found most spiritual support in small faith groups. This points strongly away from hierarchy for the nourishment of faith. While it's hardly surprising that those participating in Pax Christi listening sessions frequently cited their involvement with Pax Christi as a way of finding connection and meaning that they couldn't find in their parishes, it may be worthwhile to note that Pax Christi's organizational structure diminishes hierarchy, though it hasn't abolished it entirely. National leaders are accessible by email to any member, and they do respond. National leadership offers trainings and written material, and shares actions and projects, spiritual practices and insights. Meanwhile, regional groups decide on their own what they will work on, and sometimes the trainings, writings, actions, projects, practices etc. offered nationwide are hosted through regional groups or written by individuals who are not part of national leadership. There is room for anyone to take initiative. Laypeople, nuns, and priests work side by side. There is not even a formal membership procedure to join. If you participate with us, then we welcome you! It is empowering, energizing, and nurturing.

If lay leaders can be formed and entrusted with more, and if the pastor's role can be to coordinate a team of diverse leaders in their parish, then people with varied experiences and perspectives can be nourished within the same parish. More leaders are needed to reach out to people who are struggling, or who feel rejected, to try not to lose them. It would help us all to live more fully and would better model communities of justice and peace.

Returning again to the examples of St. Francis and St. Clare, both endured significant personal trials to leave their own hierarchical positions in society and live among the poor and outcast. Francis almost had to force Clare to accept the title of Abbess of the sisters at San Damiano. It was only done for the purpose of organization and she took care in her rule to spell out the ways an abbess is to serve and lead, not judge and rule.

### **Reconciliation and the Shadow**

We strongly support those embracing the practices of restorative justice. It is critical that the Church take responsibility for past actions that have caused harm. There are many. Some leaders are hiding behind the supposed infallibility of the Church, creating a shadow in the collective psychology of the Church Body. It is sheer pride to insist that human hierarchical leadership at any point in history have perfectly understood the stirrings of the Spirit or been fully committed to following them. All people, even saints, are limited to understanding through their own life experiences. It is critical that the Church model humility and accountability through a willingness to tell the truth about its own sins. It must thoroughly examine the causes of those sins with openness and vulnerability, and seek the grace of atonement. Without that, how can others be led towards reconciliation? But *with that*, there becomes a truthful model of strength, courage, tenderness, humility, vulnerability and love. A person cannot learn to truly love one's neighbor without learning to love oneself, and this is true of the Church as a whole as well. The Church will learn the fullness of its offering through the integration of its own shadow.

## **Obstacles in Our Path**

### **Loss of trust or relevance**

There seems to be a presumption of trust between laity and clergy that isn't always present. Trust must be earned through listening, presence, patience, and acceptance. While some clergy put utmost care into this, others appear to assume their status does this work for them. Consequently, people don't self-reflect with honesty, don't participate in spiritual direction or confession, or don't share meaningfully enough for their spiritual growth.

The faithful have been hammered for years about impropriety in their personal sexual relationships, as if the most serious sins of the world were centered, not on violence, but on the ways people have consensual sex. In a distressing illustration of projecting its shadow onto others, this took place while the Catholic Church had a standard practice worldwide of protecting and enabling sexual predators in its ranks.

In reflecting on the implications of this situation, it is frightening to realize that the sexual abuse cases are only the visible tip of the iceberg. The spiritual abuse that remains underwater is that it could never have happened if the leadership saw the presence of Christ in the laity –if these leaders saw God alive in us, if our lives were considered sacred. The laity have been systematically dehumanized by the institution. What, then, does this leadership really think our baptism means? How can such clergy be entrusted with any Sacrament, any teaching, at all?

Many among the laity are angry with bishops and priests, despite that some clergy do hear and understand the root problems. While these work to rebuild trust, others in leadership continue to destroy it. This can leave those working on repair feeling overextended, exhausted, and disheartened. Sometimes they are outright punished. People’s polarized beliefs place tremendous stress on the Church. What is trustworthy to one is evil to another.

Young participants who have been through Catholic school note that none of their classmates have continued to go to church once they’re out of school. They share that unrelatable and outdated material is forced on them, and cite hatred, intolerance, exclusion and lack of humility among leadership and parishioners as reasons their church became irrelevant to them. They shared times when they were expected to choose theology over science, but said they want to be able to choose both. They felt the church acted out of fear rather than love. They hoped instead for inclusivity, a willingness to discuss complex thoughts and ideas, and to be seen, accepted and accompanied.

There seems to be an avoidance of contemporary theology in seminaries and the training of priests. Participants shared examples of newly ordained priests in their parishes who are against Vatican II. Why is it permitted for them to be formed this way? There is a felt need to improve knowledge of current theology and social justice teaching among all members of the church, from the faithful in the pews, to seminaries, to priests and nuns, and even to bishops and cardinals.

The focus on individual salvation has cost us community. The Creed in the original Greek said, “We believe,” not “I believe,” as the Latin translation suggests. Our language affects how we see ourselves and others, and ultimately, how we act. When we understand ourselves as independent, not interdependent, it’s easier to participate in harm or be indifferent to it. Similarly, there is a great deal of focus on the small parish life, at the expense of recognition for the role we play in the global community. While people need to connect locally in small groups and parishes to feel belonging, it’s also important to connect people to all of humanity, and all of Creation. Salvation is a cosmic and communal experience, not an individual one. The work for Peace, Justice, and Love is for all of us.

## **Violence We Witness**

We witness that we are not nonviolent as a society, nor as a church. Our country is the biggest arms dealer in the world. White supremacy, prejudice, and hate abound. Black and brown lives are lost at the hands of our militarized police or fed to our industrialized prison system. Our citizens damage the environment with near impunity and deny responsibility to those harmed or killed by our actions. We are complicit in or benefit from actions and programs that rob the poor and powerless. Our participants shared experiences of church leaders preaching positions that aid, abet, and even celebrate and promote, this status quo.

We witness adherence to the letter of the law, as interpreted by a privileged few, often causing harm to many, in place of discernment in the spirit of the law, which is Love, by the broad community of the faithful. Injustice has been codified into canon law.

We witness that some church members are abusive to people already experiencing violence, such as refugees, LGBTQ individuals, people in need of racial justice, and sexual abuse survivors, particularly ones who have had abortions. Conservative leadership in particular has fostered abuse through political maneuvers to prohibit abortion, through judgement and contempt, and through dehumanizing the laity while prizing the clergy. We witness institutionalized harm to women, people of LGBTQ communities, and people of indigenous descent through church teachings which fail to affirm the dignity of every human being.

We witness leadership who call themselves ‘pro-life’ while raising the issue of abortion up to the exclusion of all other life issues. In the United States, in the process of pursuing their desired ends, many of these faith leaders vigorously promoted means that opened the doors ever wider to the destruction of our planet, hatred for our brothers and sisters, indifference to inflicting suffering and sickness that have led to millions of deaths, and idolatry of money, power, status, and weapons, including weaponry easily capable of destroying most or all life on our planet. As one of our members points out: “Since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we have managed to get through 75 years without someone using a nuclear weapon against another country. What are the chances we will make it through 75 more years?” If we continue on the present course, that chance indeed seems slim.

We witness a church that asks the faithful to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but often does not lead by example. While some pastors and religious orders are working on how to understand and reconcile their historical and present role in racism, we also see some bishops condemning people who call for racial justice and truth telling. We’ve seen pastors promote voting restrictions while decrying their objecting parishioners as the real ‘racists,’ and bishops performing exorcisms on indigenous people who are asking for meaningful acknowledgement of the church’s role in their generational trauma. At a time when we desperately need to persuade individuals to have the courage to look at their own shadows, we cannot count on our faith leaders for guidance.

We witness most bishops and priests in our country offer little to no leadership in caring for our common home, or addressing the many refugee crises. We see immigrants and refugees who attend church for years feeling it is their family, and yet feel alone because they do not fit in the dominant culture.

## **Living the Peace of Christ**

### **What Holds Us Back**

We wish for help in overcoming the things that hold us back from living and leading the Peace of Christ. These include personal shortcomings, anger, shyness, fear of risks to safety, comfort, or status, feelings of helplessness, and of not being understood or supported by people we love. There can be a sense of desolation about the situation of the world. There is a need to find peace within oneself in order to expand it to others, and a struggle to be open and vulnerable enough to truly examine the self, let go of anger, heal from harm, and empty into God. Some express the difficulty of learning to accept and love oneself in order to truly love others and God.

### **What Helps Us Overcome**

We are thankful for spiritual guidance and growth received through relationships, when we’ve felt connection to each other, and help from people in religious communities. We’ve gained strength by working together, and walking together, through fear or difficult situations. Mutual respect has helped us to trust. Confession and spiritual direction have helped us face the vulnerabilities, harm, and separation that holds us back. The perseverance of those around us gives us hope beyond hope.

## **Ways We Connect**

We are inspired by the selflessness and sacrifice of people who have strived to live the nonviolent teachings of Jesus. We see nuns who work steadily with bravery and skill despite being governed by a patriarchal system that devalues their capacity. We see priests whose focus is to be present with the people they were called to serve, moving side by side with them, in the garden, the kitchen, the camps, villages, and streets. We’re inspired by those who face exclusion, admonishment, arrest, imprisonment, bodily harm or death as witness to the Peace of Christ.

We are formed through organizations such as Pax Christi, Maryknoll, Just Faith Ministries, Center for Action and Contemplation, and others. We find growth in small faith communities of diversity and inclusion which develop our lives in Christ. In them we’ve found our values welcomed, that we could risk being vulnerable, and allow our needs to be known. We believe we have an obligation to speak or do what we’re called towards in Christ. That is

something we don't do alone but with each other and God. We hear the call from Pope Francis to care for Creation and each other. We participate in shelters, schools, prisons, soup kitchens, and hospitals, service of all kinds. We recognize that whether caring for someone on the margins or for our Mother Earth, it's a two-way street. They are also supporting us.

We connect to God through the Sacraments, Mass, the Eucharist, Adoration, retreats, and devotion to the Blessed Mother. We strongly encourage that these be done with the active participation of the faithful, and including children. We center through praying the rosary, communal prayer and lectio divina. We find spaciousness and healing in the silence of contemplative meditation. We're guided by the saints and mystics. We share joy and prayer in music and joining our voices for God, justice, and peace. We enjoy Gospel reflections that are danced, acted, and presented in art. We enjoy when women, and racial and sexual minorities are equal contributors. We call for every Mass to affirm the dignity of all people.

We have found wisdom and a deeper understanding of our own faith through studying the tenets, practices, and mysticism of other religions. We have found ourselves in God's Presence among people of other faiths. We have found people working through language and cultural barriers in some of our parishes, presenting both challenges and strengths. We also see God at work in secular life, among people who do not follow a religion but still create and thrive and live and forgive and care for each other with tender love. God is truly with all of us.

There are times when through our faith we find a peaceful place in the midst of a torrential waterfall, or when we've faced death with peace, and been brought back to our families nonetheless.

## Conclusion

*One participant said, "When I think of a future Church that upholds peace, justice and love of Christ in our world, I see a Church that is hard work. It means that the Church is with the suffering. It means that the Church is in the midst of division. It means the Church is with those who are alone or not connected...The only similarity that I can think of [with our present experience of the Church] is that we have the Eucharist and the Scripture as central. But I cannot say we are living it."*

We, as members of the Church, are called into communal relationship with God and each other, here and now. If we can respond, we will find we are people of mutual sacred relationship, interdependent with each other, with Creation, and with God. Thus, we are called to live nonviolence in every sense of the word: where each being is heard, seen, accepted, nurtured and loved, without judgement or exclusion, just as they are. It is a Beloved Community of God.

We ask for leadership committed to accompanying people as they learn how to live this sacred relationship in ever greater fullness. We ask for leaders who know the value of trust, and are willing to do the work to earn it. We call on all members of the Church to be truthful about its history and failings. Among us today are people who have participated in or benefited from this harm, people who continue to suffer from it, and people who experience both. It is the responsibility of all in the community to listen to each other in the depths of our hearts, where change can occur. With each one of us who becomes free to speak in the community from their most vulnerable experience, willing to offer their broken self, more of the fullness of Christ is revealed. No one should be in leadership unless willing to tend a safe space where this can happen, for this is how we as the Body of the Church grow and heal through the grace and mercy of God, and in that healing become Light beyond our present capacity.

It's a turbulent time in our world and Church. Sometimes it seems the ship will be smashed. May God grant us the faith to remain tender and open amidst the roaring of these storms. As we face those who act with violence, may we have the courage to hold one hand out to them, while touching our heart with the other, finding the stillness within. In that stillness, may we hear the small voice, guiding us to actions that right the relationships among us, that level the imbalances of power, that quell fear and pain, that calm the raging whirlwind.