Toward a Christlike Church: Synodal Report of the People of God of DignityUSA

We are pleased to present you with this synthesis of the synodal listening process undertaken by the members of DignityUSA. This report was submitted to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in August 2022.
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Introduction: These pages represent the faith, love, sufferings, joys, and hopes of the LGBTQI and Ally People of God in the United States of America in the year 2022.

As members of Christ’s Faithful people, we desire to increase the fraternal knowledge and affection between the Church’s pastors and their LGBTQI/Ally siblings in Christ. We wish also to share our visions, concerns, and hopes for the Church in our present day. We believe that the Synod of Bishops will encounter in this report a community of faith-filled disciples who love Jesus Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ. You will find also in this report the painful conflict we often feel with members of our Church’s hierarchy. You will witness the ways in which the Body of Christ is broken by sin, by the pursuit of power, and by the rejection of some parts of the body by others of the parts. But ultimately, we hope and pray that you will find in this report the hope we have for our Church, the gifts we longingly desire to offer in service of that Church, and the witness of our faith to the world.

Since 1969, DignityUSA has existed as an association of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) Catholics in the United States. Our organization also includes many family members and friends. We witness to our Church and society our wholeness and holiness as disciples of Jesus Christ in the Catholic tradition. With the whole Church, we proclaim that “we have an inherent dignity because God created us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit sanctified us in Baptism, making us temples of the Spirit, and channels through which God’s love becomes visible.” Further, we affirm that “gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex Catholics in our diversity are members of Christ’s mystical body, numbered among the People of God.”

The report that follows represents a synthesis of our synodal listening process undertaken in the early months of 2022.

(See Appendix A)
Inspired by the Holy Spirit

From the early minutes of our synodal listening sessions, it was clear to everyone that the Spirit of God was present in the hearts of our members and in the midst of our community spread across the miles. No one can deny the genuine faith, deep spirituality, and firm commitment to the Gospel expressed by our participants. A common theme to emerge in our synodal process was the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We heard countless stories of the ways our members have lived in intimate, personal relationship with God and have discerned in their daily lives the voice of the Holy Spirit. Many participants shared stories of intense personal prayer and careful discernment as they made decisions about vocations, relationships, identity, and sexuality. Others shared the ways that their love for God has been shaped by the sacraments and the Church’s tradition. One participant shared this conviction shaped in his life of prayer:

God’s love and the love of Christ has always transcended [the pain experienced in Church]. I have never once felt judged by Jesus; I have always felt loved.

In some ways, our members have found that our often-difficult relationship with the institutional Church has brought greater urgency to the task to form ourselves in the faith and to deepen our relationship with God—a God whose voice our members quite evidently hear in their own lives of prayer.

The Church We Love

Within our local and national Dignity communities, our members have discovered communion and, in reality, the presence of church. Our members seek faith communities that are enriching, spiritually challenging, and hospitable to LGBTQI people of faith. Although the local parish is often left wanting in this regard, our members say
they have found in Dignity a community that fulfills these needs. Since 1969, local Dignity communities have gathered to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist.

Many of our members expressed joy in this celebration. One member commented on her first visit to a Dignity community in the 1980s:

*It really was a revelation to see that there were other lesbian and gay Catholics worshiping God.*

For many, Dignity has provided them with a place to positively reconcile and integrate their Catholic faith with their sexuality and gender identity. Participants in our synodal process also expressed gratitude that Dignity has offered them a place to exercise ministry to others in the community and to share the spiritual gifts and charisms they have received. We also received a number of contributions from parents of LGBTQI children who have found belonging in our Dignity communities and who value our ministry. Participants’ affinity for the Dignity community can be summarized in the words of two longtime members:

I have never experienced such joyful people who have experienced such pain.

Dignity has been such a blessing to me!

It is apparent to all that the relationship between LGBTQI Catholics and Church institutions has, at many times, been negotiated with great difficulty. But it would be a mistake to assume that our experiences have been entirely negative or that we are lacking in our affections for the Catholic Church.

From our youngest days, the Catholic tradition has deeply and profoundly formed our character and our lives. From this synodal listening process emerged dozens of stories in which our members recounted joyous and cherished memories of growing up Catholic. Many shared fond memories of learning and celebrating their faith in the family home with their parents, grandparents, and siblings. Many recalled with gratitude their education in Catholic schools, universities, and seminaries. In particular, they felt they were well-formed in the Catholic vision of social justice—a vision they have carried long into their adult lives with practical effect.

Some commented on their positive relationships with lay ministers, priests, religious sisters, and even a few bishops. These ministers of the Church have offered us guidance, friendship, and acceptance. In times of difficulty, they have brought us compassion and healing. Many of our members count priests and religious sisters among their dearest friends.
Some members gratefully acknowledged parishes and religious communities that affirm LGBTQI Catholics and welcome us into their spaces. When asked about the joys of being Catholic, the father of a transgender child commented:

*The joys have come from seeing the face of God in our transgender child and the love and support we have received from the Jesuit community.*

Our members also expressed particular gratitude for religious sisters in the United States who have shown support for LGBTQI Catholics and our families, often expressing this support with great courage and personal sacrifice.

**Formed in the Catholic Faith**

Our members’ commitment to our Catholic faith is evidenced in their education and theological literacy. Many Catholics may be surprised to discover the deep knowledge and insights our members have in the areas of theology, spirituality, ecclesiology, and liturgy. Many of our members have been educated in Catholic schools and universities, with a significant number who went on to seminary studies or graduate theological institutions. Some have served in official capacities in the Church as priests, sisters, lay ministers, and theologians. Many more members have attended theological institutes or dedicated themselves to expansive theological and spiritual reading. In a saying that would resonate with many Dignity members, one synod participant said:

*I am an aware, adult Catholic.*

Some of those participating in the synodal discussions shared the ways in which the Second Vatican Council informed their spirituality and participation in the life of the Church. Our organization itself is a fruit of the Council, having been founded in the years immediately after its conclusion. The Council has deeply influenced our organization throughout its history and has inspired our model for lay leadership. Some synodal participants who lived in the years of the Council expressed that the spirit of the current synodal process feels similar to the spirit of that era:

*I wish we could resurrect what happened during the Second Vatican Council: Open the doors, open the windows, let some fresh air in.*

The Catholic Church, whatever its shortcomings and failures, has inspired great faith, love, and commitment in our people. We are grateful and proud to be members of this faith tradition. We find common purpose with our Church when
it seeks to confront war, poverty, starvation, and the injustices found in the world, and we are proud of the good work that our Church accomplishes in the world.

The Love of Family

As the LGBTQI/Ally People of God, we wish to express with great enthusiasm the joy and blessing we find in our relationships with our spouses and children—who indeed form family for us. We have witnessed the countless ways that our relationships serve to bless our communities, our Church, and our children. Some members experience this blessing by serving as adoptive parents, forming families with children from the overburdened foster care system we experience in our country. Extended family is also important, with many serving as caregivers for aging, disabled, or chronically ill family, and many deeply involved with nieces, nephews, grandchildren, grandnieces, grandnephews, and other family members. We experience our relationships as being sacramental: visible signs of God’s grace and action in the world with which we lovingly cooperate. One member summarized this experience:

The primary purpose of marriage is the expression of companionable love for the well-

being of the next and future generations. There are many other ways beyond procreation to take care of following generations.

A Faithful People

The LGBTQI People of God in the United States in the year 2022 are a people of prayer who seek God’s will in our lives. We are a people who actively work to form communities of faith. We are a people dedicated to our spouses and families—to sacramental love and the domestic church. We are people who have been deeply formed by the Catholic Church and who deeply love the Catholic Church in return. We cherish our relationships with priests and religious sisters. Although our lives are certainly imperfect, our Christian discipleship is lived with enthusiasm and intentionality. We are your siblings in Christ and among the faithful People of God.
A Sense of Alienation

The most common themes to emerge in our synodal listening sessions were related to the hierarchy’s articulation of Church teachings on homosexuality and gender in recent decades. At issue specifically is the language employed by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986), and the document *Male and Female He Created Them* (2019). These teaching documents employ the words “intrinsically evil,” “intrinsically disordered,” and “acts of grave depravity” to describe our intimate relationships. They use the words “objectively disordered” to describe our sexual orientation. Those whose gender identity does not conform strictly to their biological sex are accused of merely following “emotional impulses” and promoting a “confused concept of freedom.”

As even members of the Church’s hierarchy have acknowledged in recent years, these assessments are deeply unhelpful. They dismiss our experience, disrespect our identities, and fail to convey the truth of our dignity as children of God and as Christians who have been clothed in Christ. A bishop at a previous meeting of the Synod of Bishops remarked that these words produce “a sense of alienation.”² One participant in our own synodal conversation commented:

> God created me not as objectively disordered. God created me as someone God loves.

Another participant exhorted:

> That phrase is not mentioned in the Bible. God created all of creation good. God does not create people objectively disordered.

We find in the official teaching documents of the Holy See information that is outdated and even inaccurate. The documents disregard the many advances made by the sciences, social sciences, psychology, philosophy,
scriptural scholarship, and theology in the past years and decades. These documents also reveal, rather conspicuously, the personal prejudices of their authors. It is a sad reality that mistaken ideas and prejudices are presented by the Holy See as authentic Catholic teaching.

As the LGBTQI People of God, we must also respectfully ask: Can the pronouncements of the Holy See on LGBTQI persons truly represent the sensus fidelium of the Church when these pronouncements are met with such broad, sustained, and carefully discerned objection among the very segment of the Faithful to whom they are addressed and among those who know and love them best?

The painful and cruel consequences of these documents are deep and wide. In fact, contrary to the promise we find in the Catechism, these documents inspire every sign of unjust discrimination imaginable in the life of the Church and in civil society. What is less apparent, but no less significant, is the many ways these documents point to serious underlying problems in the Church’s function and governance today. Here we will share the specific examples our participants articulated during the synodal listening experience.

Unjust Discrimination

Numerous and frequent statements issued by Catholic bishops convey disdain for LGBTQI people, marginalize us within the Church, and fail to offer any positive assessment of our lives and our faith. The suffering generated by each and every one of these statements is real and widespread. In today’s interconnected world, even the statements of a single bishop have repercussions that stretch far beyond his own territory.

We received testimony from former seminarians and priests barred from active ministry solely on the basis that they are gay or that they chose to acknowledge their sexual orientation publicly. The loss of their vocations has been a source of great pain, is experienced as an injustice, and has left the Church poorer without their ministry.

Since 1987, nearly all of our Dignity chapters have been forbidden from gathering and worshiping God in Catholic churches. As Catholics, our exclusion from our own churches has been deeply hurtful. Recalling the eviction from church property, one member reflected:

*It was crushing to say the least.*

The repeated firings of LGBTQI employees from Catholic parishes and schools convey the message that we are not wanted in our Church and that we are
viewed as a unique and insidious threat. These Catholics are friends whom we know to be people of faith and integrity who loved their work and served the Church well.

In some instances, LGBTQI Catholics are denied the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, Catholic funerals, and even Christian burial—a source of tremendous pain. Requests for the intervention of the Holy See in these cases have been ignored. Certainly, the lack of recognition of our marriages and intimate relationships is a source of pain. At times, it has even been difficult to find a place to have our children baptized.

An increasing number of dioceses today have implemented policies that discriminate against LGBTQI students in Catholic schools. Catholic parents of LGBTQI children expressed disappointment and anger at these policies. By now it is well-known that LGBTQI young people who do not have access to affirming spaces are at increased risk for mental illness, addiction, homelessness, child abuse, poor education outcomes, impoverishment, and suicide. In response to the policies of her archdiocese, one mother of a transgender child commented:

I felt betrayed by my Church. The Church, as represented by the archbishop, was content to throw my child away.

We also received contributions from parents who express reservations about raising their children in Catholic parishes and schools on the basis that they desire to protect their children from homophobia and transphobia. A mother expressed:

Our child is not intrinsically disordered. She is designed as our Lord intended her to be and ordered her to be in my womb.

Another mother offered this reflection on her lesbian daughter and her daughter’s partner:

They are beautiful caring women in whom I see the love of Christ. The stark reality is that there is not a place for them in the Catholic Church. This seems so unjust on so many levels.

The long-suffering and death of dear friends and partners was a common experience in the Dignity community during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s. Our members who lived through that era found this suffering to be compounded by Church officials with the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons and the expulsion of Dignity chapters from parishes in those same years. One participant vividly recalled this timing, calling it “cruel and un-Christlike.”
We know that large numbers of gay men serve our Church as priests and bishops. Many of them are friends. They are committed to their vocation, and they serve the Church very well. However, there are some in the clergy and the episcopate who deny, repress, and despise their own sexual orientation. This kind of self-hatred and immaturity is often manifested in the expression of virulently anti-gay viewpoints and actions inflicted on the People of God. The lack of support and acceptance for gay priests perpetrates deep harm on their lives and too often on the lives of those to whom they minister.

We express our very grave concern about the positions adopted by our local bishops and by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops with regard to the rights and protections of LGBTQI persons in civil society. Our bishops have publicly and forcefully opposed all civil protections in the areas of marriage, employment, housing, adoption, health care, and access to public accommodations. In this way, the bishops of the United States abuse their tremendous power and influence, giving license, even encouragement, to acts of discrimination in public life.

Around the world, violence against LGBTQI persons, the deprivation of liberty, and even the deprivation of life remains exceedingly common. The Holy See, which also has a tremendously powerful voice, has failed to explicitly oppose this violence and endorse the human rights of LGBTQI persons. There is a disparity between the Church’s teachings on human dignity and the Church’s actions in the public square. One participant summarized this problem:

_This contradiction is seen by many as at least duplicitous, and at worst hypocritical and spiritually abusive._

Beyond LGBTQI persons, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church has served to marginalize and exclude many groups of people. These groups include women, divorced persons, racial minorities, indigenous persons, people with disabilities, and young people. The history of racism in the American church parallels the history of racism in the United States. This history extends with devastating effect to the present day. From its earliest days, the hierarchy in the United States has been exclusively male and almost exclusively white. With our fellow citizens, American Catholics must grapple honestly with past and present racism in our Church and nation.

Some participants commented on the absence of younger family members and friends in the life of the Church. Often, these young people intentionally resolve to leave the Catholic Church because they morally object to anti-LGBTQI ideology, acceptance of racism, and discrimination against women. In many
cases, these young people do not identify as members of the affected communities but leave the Church out of a sense of solidarity and social justice. Over our fifty years of ministry, we have come to recognize and value the gifts of people of all genders. There are women among us with the vocation to serve the Church as priests and deacons. One of our members asks:

Since I was a young girl, I have been called to priesthood. How do I respond to that call?

Throughout our synodal process, we received a high volume of contributions on this topic. We wish to point out that these contributions were offered by an approximately equal number of women and men. Across our organization, people of all genders recognize the ways that the lack of women in ordained ministry impoverishes the whole Church, which stands to benefit from the spiritual gifts of these women. Some contributors asked us also to consider whether the exclusively male, celibate model of priesthood has been exalted to the point of idolatry in the Church today.

A Culture Imbued with Clericalism

As a number of members commented, the exclusion, abandonment, and pain perpetrated on LGBTQI Catholics and other marginalized groups cannot be understood apart from the spiritual sicknesses afflicting our Church in this age: clericalism and the unhealthy desire to preserve institutional structures and power at the cost of justice and charity. It is perhaps an act of providence that the preparatory document for this Synod makes this same diagnosis, observing, “The whole Church is called to deal with the weight of a culture imbued with clericalism…”

Although LGBTQI Catholics are members of our Church, we are more often treated as an outside pressure group or as people who have fallen away from the Church. In this way, esteem for the institutional structures of the Church is exalted over the Church’s first and primary image as the one, universal Body of Christ.

There is a pervasive feeling among our members that bishops and other Church officials do not listen to LGBTQI Catholics—and that they feel they have nothing new to learn from us. Some participants expressed skepticism about this very synodal process, noting our sustained attempts at dialogue with bishops over many decades that have
been almost entirely ignored or rebuffed. In these instances, bishops and clergy assume that their knowledge and spirituality is superior to ours. Too often, they fail to view themselves, firstly as fellow pilgrims with the LGBTQI People of God and as our brothers. In this way, clericalism disregards the Church’s own teaching that all the baptized, of every rank and office, carry within us the Holy Spirit and are channels of God’s grace. One participant said flatly:

*The hierarchy has become a god.*

**An Examination of Conscience**

During our synodal conversations, the word *Christlike* was used again and again. The exclusion, abandonment, and pain that LGBTQI Catholics experience in the life of the Church does not resemble the attitudes and actions of the Christ we have come to know in the Gospels and in our lifetime of faith. As one member commented:

*Intrinsically disordered is nothing Christ would speak.*

Another reflected:

*If Jesus were here right now, he would not be inside a church. He would be out in the streets looking*
LGBTQI Catholics are, firstly, Catholics. We are members of the People of God. Our synodal listening sessions made apparent that we view ourselves in this role and take our baptismal call very seriously. The history of the Church and the lives of the saints reveal our Church’s deep ability to form Christlike persons and to be of great service to a world in need. We are grateful and proud to be counted among the people of this faith tradition.

Because we have been created by God and baptized in the Holy Spirit, LGBTQI Catholics possess indispensable spiritual gifts that we recognize are to be employed for the common good. We desire earnestly to share these gifts with the universal Church so that all our siblings in Christ will be blessed. Our heterosexual and cisgender siblings, including those among our bishops and clergy, stand to benefit from these gifts as well.

The gifts offered by LGBTQI Catholics are varied—too numerous to list here. But we wish to point out that Dignity’s model for ministry has a great deal to teach the wider Church in its current program of reform and renewal. Over our fifty years, we have undertaken a number of efforts to encounter, welcome, and include those who were once on the margins. We have learned on our journey how to intentionally foster gender equality in all areas of our ministry. In our history, we expanded our organization’s mission to include transgender Catholics and, later, Catholics who identify as queer or are intersex. We have learned to foster intergenerational relationships and have successfully integrated members of varying age groups. Through all these times, we critically examined our governance structures, our liturgical life, and our organizational culture. The story of Dignity will serve as an inspiration for the wider Church and its institutions as they walk the road to reform and renewal.

It should be clear by now that the Church’s pastors cannot think solely in terms of ministry to LGBTQI persons or...
the pastoral care of LGBTQI persons. Rather, there must be thought given to ministry with LGBTQI Catholics, who bring our own God-given gifts that will greatly enrich the Catholic Church. One member expressed this hope for the Church:

I hope that the Church becomes open to the gifts of all, especially of women, and sees that its union with all the peoples of the world is what will expand and grow what the Church is in our world.

One heterosexual member and friend of Dignity reflected on the gifts of LGBTQI Catholics:

My joy is to hear an LGBTQI experience of God that I will never have.

I celebrate that.

A Repentant, Reconciled Church

We strongly urge our bishops and other members of the Church’s hierarchy to embrace the attitude of the humble Christ, who knelted as servant to wash the apostles’ feet. Bishops and clergy must be humbler in exercising their power, in drawing conclusions, and in pronouncing judgments. They must be reminded that they are firstly, fellow pilgrims with the whole People of God and brothers of the People of God. One synod participant made this point, stating:

Pope Francis is my brother!

In our humanity, all of us are subject to sinfulness, error, prejudice, and limitations in our knowledge. No one person can experience the full range of what it means to be human. These confessions of our limitations and frailty inspire humility. They apply equally to our bishops. This realization ought to lead the bishops to pronounce judgments that are humbler, more tentative, more open to revision, and more informed by dialogue with the People of God. With the whole People of God, the bishops are called to sacrifice any desire for power, privilege, and comfort. In this very sacrifice, the Holy Spirit is permitted to enter and to work.

Throughout this document, we have outlined the ways in which LGBTQI and Ally Catholics have experienced sin and suffering at the hands of Church officials. Our members ask that the hierarchy acknowledge its failings toward LGBTQI persons and families and publicly repent of those failings. Such a process would be in keeping with the best teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church. From our childhood, we were taught to examine our conscience, to repent of our
failings, to confess our sinfulness, to do penance in a spirit of reconciliation, and to go forth with the resolve to change our ways. We earnestly hope and desire that our Church’s leaders will follow this exact path.

LGBTQI Catholics yearn for true reconciliation with our bishops and clergy. But such reconciliation cannot come without the humble and honest recognition that Church leaders have marginalized LGBTQI Catholics and, at times, failed to uphold our dignity as human persons and as baptized Christians. We stand ready to support and affirm our bishops in this process of reconciliation.

A Welcoming, Listening Church

Our Church must actively work to welcome all people, recognizing that hospitality is a biblical and Christian virtue. We gratefully acknowledge the Synod’s orientation toward dialogue and listening. Truly, we are called to be a Church that listens. There is a need for increased, sustained, and public dialogue between Church leaders and the LGBTQI/Ally People of God. The dialogue we seek cannot be filtered through the present doctrine, but rather, must happen in a spirit of openness and listening first.

Recognizing the great diversity that characterizes the LGBTQI community, this dialogue must intentionally include women, transgender people, intersex people, and those who do not identify with any gender. Church leaders must overcome the discomfort they feel when interacting with these various groups.

Dialogue with the LGBTQI community will be invariably increased with the intentional placement of LGBTQI Catholics in positions of influence and authority within the Church. We do not seek these positions for their own sake, but that the voices of our people might be represented in decision-making and in the ecclesiastical culture of our Church.
Our relationships in the LGBTQI community in the United States have afforded us the opportunity to interact with many of our Protestant neighbors, whose churches have undertaken their own processes of dialogue with LGBTQI members. Many of these models are praiseworthy and have lessons to teach our own church.

Beyond LGBTQI Catholics, the hierarchy must increase its dialogue with other marginalized groups among the People of God, including women, young people, the poor, indigenous people, and persons who belong to racial groups that have been historically marginalized. The words of one participant offer good advice:

My message to the Synod: Listen to the people. Trust in the Holy Spirit.

Promoting Human Dignity

A renewed Church will work to transform its language and develop its doctrine with regard to its LGBTQI members. The first and most absolute moral teaching of the Church is the love of God and neighbor. The Second Vatican council reflected with new vigor on the dignity and value of each and every human person. A renewed Church in this twenty-first century will embrace, promote, defend, and celebrate the profound dignity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons. A full embrace of our dignity as persons created in God’s image will inevitably lead to new developments in the Church’s teaching on LGBTQI Catholics. Practically speaking, two immediate steps are possible and advisable. Firstly, we advise that the terms *intrinsically disordered, objectively disordered,* and *acts of grave depravity* be removed from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in its paragraphs on homosexual persons. Secondly, we advise that the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986) be explicitly abrogated.

Two participants in our synodal process shared poignant insights on promoting the dignity of LGBTQI people:

*If the Catholic Church were more loving and inclusive, the people of the LGBTQI community would live much healthier, happier, productive, and thriving lives—the lives Jesus Christ intended for us.*

*As a Catholic Church, we must continue to embrace the beauty and uniqueness of God’s creation in each of us—immutable and innate characteristics that God created within us, including sexual orientation and gender identity.*
A Christlike Church

Throughout our synodal reflections together, some of our members reflected on the Church’s mission in the modern world. Again and again, their reflections pointed us to the Gospels and the person of Jesus. One member reflected:

*During this Synod, we envision a renewed and kinder Church that welcomes every child of God, without judgment. This new territory is uncharted and sometimes dangerous. But just as Jesus asked hardworking fishermen to leave their regular routines and put out into deep water, the deep listening of this Synod will encourage us to venture beyond our comfortable church environments and “get our hands dirty,” becoming triage personnel in the field hospitals of our broken world.*

Reflecting on Christ’s relationship with LGBTQI people, one member reflected:

I cannot believe that Jesus would condemn all of us. If he were here today, he would embrace us. He would kiss us. He would tell us that he loves us.

The tenderness of the Christ we have come to know must be reflected more readily in the Church’s ministry and exercise of authority. In this current program of renewal, we urge that all of our institutional structures, practices, doctrines, decisions, and public statements be continually examined in the light of the person of Jesus Christ. This light will “convert prejudices and distorted practices that are not rooted in the Gospel.”

The message of the Gospel is a magnificent one. This message is advanced by a People who strive to reflect the person of Christ in all we do. May our Church become ever more Christlike in every way.
Conclusion: Our Prayer

We express our gratitude to the Synod of Bishops and to Pope Francis for the consultation process currently underway. Throughout our synodal listening process, we found that the LGBTQI People of God were enthusiastic about this synodal journey. They are concerned for the best interests of our Church and its people. And they were hopeful about the possibility of renewal in the life of the Church. We pray that this process will bear great fruit and will continue beyond the 2023 meeting of the Synod of Bishops. One particularly enthusiastic member shared with us:

This is almost like a Vatican II moment for me. Many people are very skeptical that anything will change as a result of the Synod. I have hope.

The LGBTQI People of God are among Christ’s Faithful people. We walk with you as fellow pilgrims on the journey of salvation and as your siblings in Christ. We offer ourselves to the Church’s service. And we join with you in the mission of being ever more conformed to the image of Christ. May the Holy Spirit accomplish this work in all of us who form the one People of God.

(Appendices follow)
Appendix A
Our Synodal Process

In the fall of 2021, inspired by Pope Francis and the preparatory document of the Synod of Bishops, DignityUSA resolved to undertake a process of listening to our members and friends across the United States of America and to report on this listening process to the General Secretariat in preparation for the upcoming meeting of the Synod of Bishops in 2023.

After reflecting on the preparatory document and the particular circumstances of our community, DignityUSA leaders provided our members and friends with our own document detailing our vision for listening and for participating in the Synod’s consultative process. This document was shared with our membership in January 2022.

In February and March 2022, Dignity hosted two online listening sessions. We also provided our members with the opportunity to provide feedback on our website through April 2022.

Our listening sessions proved popular among our members and friends. Nearly all regions of the United States were represented among the participants. Multiple races and ethnic groups were also represented. Some participants were decades-long members of DignityUSA; others were newer members or friends who support our mission and work. Our youngest participants were in their 20s, and our oldest were in their 80s. Participants included LGBTQI Catholics along with friends and family members who do not identify as LGBTQI. A sizable number of participants were Catholic parents of children who identify as LGBTQI. Men and women were represented in nearly equal numbers. A few participants did not identify with any gender or identified as queer.

Each session began by praying the Synod Prayer. We then held a short liturgy of the word, proclaiming Acts 10:1-35. This text is referenced in the synod’s preparatory document, and we believed it would resonate with our members who often find themselves on the margins of our Church. After proclaiming the word, we read paragraphs 15 and 24 from the preparatory document to foster a greater understanding of the synodal process.

All were then invited to a period of silent prayer and discernment prior to offering their input. We offered these five reflection questions to aid participants in this process:

- As an LGBTQI Catholic or ally, what have been your joys in your journey of faith? Where have you heard God’s voice and felt God’s love? When have you felt supported, seen, and valued in the Church, in Dignity, or in the LGBTQI community?
- What experiences in the Church have brought you pain, disappointment, or exclusion?

- In what ways has being on the margins impacted your relationship with God and your relationship with the Church—for good or for ill?

- What hopes do you have for the Catholic Church?

- What message do you have for Pope Francis and the Synod of Bishops?

   Following the period of silent prayer, participants were given the opportunity to speak for three minutes each. It is fair to say that all of us were moved by this process. More than mere opinions or ideas, participants shared deep stories about their faith, their relationship with God, and their joys and sorrows as members of Christ’s Church. Many shared personal testimony about pivotal moments in their journey of faith. Naturally, we cannot share all of these stories in this text. But we do know that the collective testimony of this document has been shaped by the faith and experience of the many LGBTQI Catholics and Allies who contributed to our synodal process.

   After our final report was drafted in June 2022, it was shared with our entire membership for comment before being finalized by our national board. Our members suggested some important changes, particularly on the topic of language used in magisterial documents. The choice of language employed in the Catechism and other documents of the Holy See has been the source of much suffering and offense to our members over many decades. Our final report was also revised in places to strengthen the voice and witness of Ally Catholics who participated in our synodal listening sessions. We know that large numbers of Catholics in our country could be described as firm Allies of the LGBTQI community. Those changes are reflected in this final text.

   Members across our organization were deeply moved by our synodal process and expressed pride in this final report, which represents our participation in the life of the Catholic Church and the working of the Holy Spirit among us.
Appendix B
Miscellaneous Comments and Concerns

Some of our members wanted us to note that their local parishes and/or dioceses made only limited efforts to undertake the synodal process in the spirit of open dialogue. In some places, it seems, discussions have been oriented toward predetermined outcomes reflecting the priorities of bishops or pastors. In order to be truly synodal, the Synod of Bishops will have to take further steps to solicit the feedback of the Faithful in the United States.

Members expressed gratitude for the current synodal process and for the ministry of Pope Francis. Over the past decade, there have been bishops and priests who have expressed limited support for LGBTQI Catholics and our families. We hope for expansion and broadening of this trend. We also receive as positive news the ways that the Synodal Way in Germany has advocated greater inclusion for LGBTQI Catholics and others who have been marginalized within the Church.

Notes

6. Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2357-2358.