The Call of Christ Does Not Wait
Synodal Report of the People of God of DignityUSA
April 2024

The People of God of DignityUSA enthusiastically take up the call of Christ. We accept the call
to be a synodal Church. And we celebrate our identities as LGBTQIA+ and Ally children of
God.

This report reflects the synodal dialogue among our members in the winter of 2024.
“Listening in the Spirit,” our community hosted two online listening sessions in which we
gathered testimony from LGBTQIA+ Catholics, allies, and family members from across the
United States. We also offered the opportunity for people to submit written testimony. This
report reflects the sacred stories, hopes, and sorrows of these members of the People of God. The
conversations were held in light of the developments of the Synod of Bishops and are therefore a
response by the People of God to the Synod’s work.

In 2022, following a similar process, DignityUSA submitted the report Toward a
Christlike Church: Synodal Report of the People of God of DignityUSA. The current report is not
intended to replace our testimony from 2022 but should be considered alongside this first
contribution. This report should also be read alongside the document DignityUSA and the
Practice of Synodality in a Catholic Community, which reflects on the many ways in which the
DignityUSA community has lived synodality since our founding in 1969.

Chapter 1: Answering the Call to Synodality

Over the course of the 2024 listening sessions, we witnessed the same “genuine faith,
deep spirituality, and firm commitment to the Gospel” among our people that we observed in our
2022 listening sessions. We remain “people who have been deeply formed by the Catholic
Church and who deeply love the Catholic Church in return.” Although many have experienced
exclusion or pastoral failures within the Church’s institutions, our members and friends
recognize that the call of Christ does not wait and that we are called to follow Christ’s call in the
context of our particular circumstances.

It was clear that our people recognize themselves as essential members of Christ’s Body
and full members of the Catholic Church. One member commented: “I’m just as much part of
the Church as the pope is.” Another issued a call to Church leaders: “We’re here already. The
next step is to recognize us.”

We believe that LGBTQIA+ Catholics, our friends, and family members have a role in
the Christian community which is indispensable. One participant reminded us: “As long as the
Church excludes LGBTQIA+ and Ally Catholics from full membership, its mission will never be
complete.” Another participant reflected: “LGBTQIA+ people, our lives, and our relationships
are part of the beautiful mosaic of God’s incomprehensibly vast diversity.”

A number of our members reminded us that LGBTQIA+ and Ally Catholics have been
given spiritual gifts and charisms to share with the whole Church. And many commented on their
earnest desire to share the gifts they have been given. Among these gifts are the call to ordained
diaconal and priestly ministry among women. There was a sense among many participants that
the whole Church is poorer when the spiritual gifts of women and LGBTQIA+ people are
rejected by the Church’s pastors. One participant commented, “There is so much the Church has
lost.” An ally participant said more directly, “They’re missing out on the best people.” In many
places, LGBTQIA+ persons do serve in Catholic parishes, schools, and other institutions.
However, they most often are required to hide their identities and familial relationships, and they
often feel vulnerable to their ministry being rejected.
In light of the Synod’s focus on co-responsibility among the People of God, a significant number of contributions were received on this theme. Our members broadly agree that the history of DignityUSA has been one of true synodality and co-responsibility. For over fifty years, DignityUSA has engaged in extensive, broad processes of consultation and community discernment, striving to keep the Holy Spirit at the center of our efforts. In the absence of ministry from bishops and clergy, Dignity members have discovered creative ways to live the Gospel call to be light and salt in our communities. One member reminded us: “We have ministered to ourselves and those who are in our communities, and we have brought the Gospel to them.” Speaking about the pastoral care of our people, one member commented, “We seek to take care of one another.”

Several members commented that DignityUSA provides many lessons to the wider Church on the theme of co-responsibility. “We are a model for what synodality can look like.” As the Synod of Bishops discerns ways in which the whole Church can become more synodal, DignityUSA offers ourselves as an example and a resource. These listening sessions reminded us again that LGBTQIA+ Catholics and allies are committed to the Catholic Church, committed to practicing our faith, and very often an example of faith lived in the modern world. Christ has spoken into our lives, and the Holy Spirit has given us gifts we desire to share with our Church. Speaking about her commitment to our Church, one member stated emphatically, “I will never give up the Catholic Church because I am part of the Body of Christ.”

Chapter 2: “A Huge Milestone”

There was a shared consensus that last October’s assembly was a remarkable and praiseworthy moment in the history of the Church. The months and years leading up to the meeting offered the most robust consultative process the Church has ever undertaken. We will not soon forget the images of delegates sitting at round tables, listening attentively to one another. The inclusion of women and lay people as voting members of the Synod marked what one participant called “a huge milestone to recognize and be proud of.” The global diversity of the Synod’s membership is certainly to be praised. It revealed to us the diversity and vastness of our Church, which is comprised of many cultures and innumerable experiences.

In the stories they have shared, Synod delegates have consistently commented on the power of “listening in the Spirit.” As members of DignityUSA, we recognize this process which closely mirrors a process we have followed in the history of our organization. We are heartened to see that the Synod of Bishops is following this model. Our members do believe that the Holy Spirit was present and at work during last October’s assembly. And while the results of the Synod next October will be important, so too is the process itself. The image of a listening Church is a powerful one. We would like to see this process continue in the life of the Church. One participant said: “The process should endure.”

In the months preceding the Synod of bishops, the presence of LGBTQIA+ Catholics in the Church was mentioned in synodal listening sessions around the world and this topic raised in five of the continental reports. The instrumentum laboris last summer recognized the need to welcome LGBTQIA+ Catholics. These acknowledgements from every corner of the world are significant.

During last October’s assembly, members of the board and staff of DignityUSA interacted positively with Synod delegates in Rome, who received us graciously and in a spirit of listening. Our executive director was likewise received by the Holy Father in an audience that same month. These interactions reaffirmed for at least some of our members that we have a home
in the Catholic Church. The release of the declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Fiducia Supplicans*, has also been received positively by members of our organization. We recognize in all these steps the beginning of a renewed relationship between LGBTQIA+ Catholics and the hierarchy. They are positive signposts on the Church’s pilgrimage for which we are grateful and give thanks to God. But they are foundational steps which require continued development and growth.

**Chapter 3: Desolations on the Synodal Journey**

Even as we rejoice in the many good fruits of the synodal process, we must also note several concerns that our members have expressed as the synodal process continues to unfold.

The absence of openly-LGBTQIA+ Catholics in the synod hall is a conspicuous and serious shortcoming. One participant simply called it “troubling.” Honest and fruitful conversations about LGBTQIA+ persons cannot occur without our contribution. We also note with very heavy hearts the erasure of LGBTQIA+ Catholics from the 2023 assembly’s final synthesis report. This was, in a word, painful. We feel that our voices were ignored and that we were made invisible in the life of the Church. Likewise, the voices of Catholics on five continents were ignored. Several of our members also expressed disappointment that the Synod did not address the ordination of women in greater depth. The urgency of the Gospel call remains for those women who experience God’s call to ordination. In light of these developments, some of our members expressed skepticism about the synodal process. They believe that the Synod of Bishops failed. Other members expressed a sense of hope that the October 2024 assembly might take up these topics anew and make further progress.

Because our faith is lived in a particular geographical context, our members commented frequently on the state of the Church in the United States of America with implications for the Synod of Bishops. We received a high volume of contributions in regard to the leadership of bishops and the collective work of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. There is an overriding sense that most bishops in the United States behave in a manner that is judgmental and detached from their people. This is summarized in the statement of one participant: “They like to judge what they consider to be other people’s sins.” Some of our members sense that bishops are fearful of changes present in society and do not know how to respond. There is also a sense the U.S. bishops as a body are overly invested in political issues and too connected with particular political leaders. We heard, “They are reflective of the secular political problems in our country.” There is also a perception that individual bishops and the bishops conference are too heavily influenced by wealthy persons who contribute money in hope of driving the bishops’ priorities.

We detect among many of our bishops and pastors indifference and, at times, opposition to the synodal process. Synodal listening sessions have been implemented unevenly across the United States. Some of our members reported positive engagement in sessions within their local churches. But others’ testimony was met with dismissal or even chastisement. One couple who spoke about their LGBTQIA+ children reported being scolded for doing so by their parish priest, who also expressed his own opposition to the synodal process.

Although there are exceptions, the Catholic Church in the United States remains largely hostile to LGBTQIA+ persons. One speaker urged that the bishops need to “stop the demonization of queerness.” A number of contributors urged that we regard homophobia, transphobia, and sexism as sinful attitudes. As we noted in our 2022 report, these attitudes and the actions associated with them perpetuate real and lasting harm in the lives of real persons created in God’s image. Some members noted a link between homophobia and sexism, which they urge be addressed together. One member commented: “The leadership needs to seriously
examine the sin of homophobia and transphobia—and the sins of hatred that are present when bishops take certain actions or make certain pronouncements within their dioceses.” Although DignityUSA has successfully engaged with a few Synod delegates from the United States, most of our requests for meetings have been ignored. Our requests to participate in the listening sessions hosted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have likewise been ignored.

Several submissions we received noted the continued problem we experience in our country, whereby LGBTQIA+ Catholics are denied employment within Catholic schools and parishes. As we wrote in 2022, “The repeated firings of LGBTQI Catholics 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.”

Our members expressed some divergences of opinion in regard to how we might engage with the bishops of the United States. One participant emphasized that we ought to find ways to listen to them with compassion and care as we do to one another, recognizing that our bishops too are in need of pastoral care. One member asked, “How can we reach them? I don’t want to give up on them.” Other members expressed shear exasperation at bishops’ continued refusal to engage in conversation with us. Our 2022 statement remains largely unchanged: “There is a pervasive feeling among our members that bishops and other Church officials do not listen to LGBTQI Catholics...noting that our sustained attempts at dialogue with bishops over many decades...have been almost entirely ignored or rebuffed.”

There was broad agreement that those bishops who have offered us their friendship and who have supported the synodal process ought to be afforded our continued friendship and support. And we continue to affirm, as we have for fifty-five years, that we recognize all our bishops as our brothers in Christ.

Reflecting on the Church’s institutions and structures generated a considerable amount of conversation in our synodal listening sessions. There was a consensus among participants that the Church’s leaders too frequently prioritize preserving various institutional structures over living the Gospel. One participant commented: “The institution has become the single most anti-Gospel witness of the Church in the U.S.” Our people generally felt that structures within the Church remain too hierarchical with control exerted from the top. In many cases, commitment to these structures prohibits the Church’s pastors from responding to people and situations with compassion and love, even when they wish to do so. We repeat our words from 2022 when we emphasize that “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.”

In the period since our first synodal report, violence against LGBTQIA+ persons along with campaigns of legalized repression have both seen marked increases around the world. In our own country, state legislatures have enacted laws opposed to the welfare of transgender persons and their families—often with the explicit support of bishops. In other regions of the world, legislative bodies seek to punish LGBTQIA+ people for their relationships, identities, and even advocacy for their own welfare. These campaigns of repression are too frequently supported by Catholics and by their bishops. We gratefully acknowledge Pope Francis’ opposition to these laws. But there remains an urgent need for the Holy See to actively resist these efforts and for the pope’s teaching to be reflected more prominently in the Church’s magisterium. Violence and oppression committed in the name of the Church against any group of persons is not acceptable.

A theme that has continued to grow in prominence since our 2022 document is that of gender theory. While this document cannot address this topic comprehensively, our members feel it is of great importance to express our concern and competence on this matter. We note a mystifying incongruence between the welcoming attitude expressed by the Holy Father and the Holy See’s forceful dismissal of “gender theory” and “gender ideology.” A transgender member,
sharing her testimony said of transgender persons, “We are children of God. We are not theological issues. We are not sociological issues.” Parents of a transgender child stressed that their child is a part of God’s plan for their lives and their family. They would appreciate greater support from the Church. Another transgender member urged, “Talking about ‘gender theory’ is not the level on which to engage. We are not theories. This dehumanizes us.” The Holy See risks making pronouncements that are reckless and irresponsible when those pronouncements are not informed by science and by transgender and gender non-binary persons themselves.

In response to the Synod’s desire to identify groups of persons whose voices remain marginalized within the Church, our members wished to note several other groups who live this experience today. In addition to women and LGBTQIA+ people, the voices of persons who are neurodivergent and persons with various disabilities are underrepresented within the Church. The elderly, sick, and homeless are also groups that are not always represented. Native Americans impacted by abuses at residential schools in our country are not ordinarily heard within the Church. There is also a perception that those with wealth exercise a greater influence within the Church than others. Divorced Catholics continue to be marginalized within their communities. And most egregiously, persons who have been harmed by the sexual abuse of clergy continue in many cases to be dismissed and ignored. After so many decades, the Church must find a way to make them heard, welcomed, and able to participate in decision-making.

**Chapter 4: Toward a More Synodal Church**

In service of the work the Synod of Bishops will undertake this fall, we wish to offer a few important steps that will build a more synodal Church and that will uplift the voices of LGBTQIA+ Catholics in the Church today.

There was clear consensus among our members that conversations regarding the identities and relationships of LGBTQIA+ Catholics must include LGBTQIA+ Catholics, family members, and visible allies as participants. We strongly urge that LGBTQIA+ Catholics be included among delegates at the October 2024 assembly of the Synod of Bishops. We also strongly urge that working groups addressing topics of importance to LGBTQIA+ Catholics include members of our community.

In 2022, we wrote, “Our Church must actively work to welcome all people.” This view was reaffirmed in this winter’s synodal listening sessions. However, participants reminded us that LGBTQIA+ Catholics are passionate about serving our Church. We desire to be more than registered parishioners or participants at Sunday Mass. Steps ought to be taken that permit openly-LGBTQIA+ Catholics to serve the Church with the gifts we have been given.

We also received many contributions on the topic of the language the Church uses to address LGBTQIA+ Catholics in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In 2022, we wrote that these statements “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.” We also reminded you: “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.” We gratefully acknowledge the Synod’s resolution to consult these areas of knowledge more closely in the Church’s teaching and pastoral practice. We believe this scrutiny, undertaken honestly and sincerely, will open new avenues to understanding the sexuality, identity, and relationships of LGBTQIA+ people. We remind you that the Catechism of the Catholic Church was revised on the topic of homosexuality once in 1997 and has also been revised on other topics in light of further reflection and new information.
In our synodal conversations, we continued to hear from women who experience God’s call to ordained ministry as deacons and priests. We also heard testimony from an equal number of women and men about the overdue need to include women in the Church’s leadership. We urge you to remember that the call of Christ does not wait.

The Synod’s emphasis on decentralization and communion among local churches is laudable. The history of our organization itself recognizes the importance of a healthy decentralization. However, the current moment in the life of the Church presents serious challenges. For such a path to emerge at this time, substantial intervention from Rome will be required. The history of our own nation has made clear that marginalized persons and groups must, at times, enjoy promotion and protection from the highest levels if they are to be heard and respected. We appeal to the Synod of Bishops, to the Roman Curia, and to the Holy Father to provide such pathways to marginalized groups of the Catholics within the United States. The work completed by the Synod of Bishops thus far gives us much to celebrate. We recognize that the Holy Spirit continues to call the whole Church. And we recognize that much of the work is left unfinished. The People of God of DignityUSA continue to support the synod with our contributions and our prayers.

Chapter 5: Faithful to Our Call

Several of our members reflected on the reality that reforms in the life of the Church often take shape over years, even centuries. Alongside this reality is also the recognition that the call of Christ does not wait. For over fifty years, the People of God of DignityUSA have sought to discern God’s will in our lives and in our community. We have sought to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit and to actively build up the Church. Without sacrificing our respect for the Church’s institutions, we seek to live our faith—at times within the Church’s institutions and at times outside the visible structures of the Church. We continue to minister to one another and to bring the presence of Christ to our communities. Even where we lack support from the Church’s institutions and pastors, we will continue these efforts, which reflect those of countless saints through the centuries who likewise encountered reluctant pastors.

We heard from several of our members that the struggle we undertake to achieve dignity and justice within the Catholic Church is, for us, a form of enduring faithfulness to the Gospel. We are reminded of Christ’s call to take up our crosses daily. As one member wisely admonished us: “We continue to witness to Christ and model how to carry the cross of being oppressed and excluded from the main body of the Church.” It is clear that our members will proceed confidently and serenely in these efforts whatever the Synod’s outcomes. We invite the delegates of the Synod of Bishops and the Church’s pastors to walk with us on this way of the Cross—for the call of Christ does not wait.