

## SYNOD 2023 RESPONSES

In response to the call of Pope Francis for a Synod on Synodality in 2023, We, Members of Mary Mother of Jesus Inclusive Catholic Community in Sarasota, Florida, (USA) offer the following response:

### **Who We Are:**

Mary, Mother of Jesus, Inclusive Catholic Community, founded in 2006, are women and men some of whom are year-round Floridians and some seasonal; some who are people of color; some who are physically or mentally disabled; some are LGBTIA; some are divorced; some are divorced and remarried; some of our priests are women and some are men; some are married and some are not with celibacy being a personal decision regardless of marital status.

Although most of us have roots in the Roman Catholic tradition, we value individuals of different backgrounds, affiliations, orientations and persuasions. All are welcome. We are Roman Catholics who embrace our **diversity**, work for **equality** and the **empowerment** of the people of God. We are a community supported in love and service to each other, the world and care of the earth.

### **How We Listen:**

We listen to God speaking to us through community sharing in the weekly homily voicing personal inspiration and interpretation of the scriptural message. We listen to our

members who are so often ignored in general society because of a physical or mental limitation and affirm the value of their input. We listen to the needs of the poor and marginalized in our local and international communities and donate quarterly financial support as well as volunteer service.

### **How We Speak Out:**

We support the ordination of women and gender equality in the Church. We have seven validly ordained women priests and one Bishop who speak out regularly on the local, national and international levels through the media.

### **How We Share Responsibility and Authority:**

We have instituted an inclusive, circular model of leadership and decision-making where all members are asked for input on an issue and approval of an action. We employ surveys to hear what our members want. As a nonprofit religious group, we have an elected Board of Directors and volunteer teams who follow up on meeting the members' needs. We have an annual meeting of all members where the annual budget is presented and approved and issues are discussed.

### **How We Discern and Decide:**

We listen to our members' opinions, discuss them as a group and make decisions in keeping with our commitment to live the way of Jesus in love. Input is requested from the membership either at a meeting where all can participate or through electronic mail

feedback to our Board. As mentioned above, we use electronic surveys that analyze the responses and give percentages of agreement. The final decision is brought before the entire membership for further discussion and/or approval.

### **CELEBRATION:**

Our liturgical celebration each Saturday afternoon is the center of our community and is open to all both in-person and on Zoom. We believe that God is pure spirit, neither male nor female so we use both feminine and male terms to enrich our liturgy and make all feel worthy. Our liturgies have both ordained and non-ordained leaders and participants. Members share homily interpretations, together bless the bread and wine including the words of consecration and offer communion to each other just as the early Christians did. Following our liturgical celebration, we continue celebrating with each other by going to dinner at a local restaurant in a spirit of true community.

In addition to liturgy, we offer a weekly prayer group where interested members gather to pray for the needs of our own community as well as the needs of the world. Other opportunities for spiritual growth are offered through book discussions, spirituality courses offered online at the Peoples Catholic Seminary, ecumenical services in the local community or retreat days.

The community continually adjusts what is done to the needs and desires of its members.

### **Challenges and Questions:**

We need to raise the following questions: Will the institutional Church continue to be a top-down hierarchical organization that punishes faithful dissent and clings to medieval doctrine, practices, and structures that discriminate against women? Will the Church embrace the full equality and moral agency of women in all aspects of their lives and in all ministries – including priestly ordination?

The synodal dialogue can chart a new path forward by affirming the primacy of conscience for all Catholics, including women priests who are called to serve their sisters and brothers in public ministry in the Church.

**Conclusion:**

Mary, Mother of Jesus, Inclusive Catholic Community has shown over 16 years that a new model of church based on synodality is possible!