

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

NORTH AMERICA REGION

STAN CHU ILO (REGIONAL COORDINATOR)

& MEGHAN CLARK (ASSISTANT REGIONAL COORDINATOR/ORGANIZING
SECRETARY)

“What we have Seen and Heard”

“Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centers of power where weighty decisions are made” *Fratelli Tutti*, 215.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION
2. LIST AND BIOS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN WORKING GROUP MEMBERS
3. LIST OF INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS
4. METHODOLOGY OF THE NORTH AMERICAN REGIONAL WORKING GROUP
5. RESULTS OF THE LISTENING SESSIONS ON THE TEN THEMES
6. RESULTS OF ADDITIONAL THEME SPECIFIC TO NORTH AMERICA
7. DON SERGIO MASSIRONI’S VISIT: “SURPRISED BY WHAT I SAW”
8. FINAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS
9. APPENDIX

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The project, Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries, was received with great enthusiasm by the members of the North American Working Group. Every member of the team was specifically chosen because of their strong faith in God and commitment to the Church. In addition, they are influential theologians whose research, writings, service to the poor and the Catholic academy and the wider publics and advocacy for social justice demonstrate a clear and consistent engagement with some of the questions and concerns of those at the existential peripheries.

The North American Working Group also share a common admiration and support for the reform agenda of Pope Francis and a dream for a Church that can be better structured institutionally, pastorally, and missionally to respond to the signs of the times as a worthy and credible instrument for the realization in our times of the fruits of the eschatological reign of God. It is this common interest for a Church with an open arms and that speaks from the existential peripheries that inspired our prayers, conversations, planning, and

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

development of the method and practice of accompaniment that characterized our listening sessions.

The reverential and humble ways in which we have attempted to lift up the *sensus fidei fidelium* of the people we encountered were also informed by this desire for a Church that speaks from the wisdom and experiences of those at the peripheries. Our listening sessions were carried out in these North American cities: Chicago, Ciudad Juárez, El Paso, Los Angeles, Quebec, New York, Peterborough, San Diego, and Toronto. These cities were chosen as representative cities of the North American demographics and special effort was made to reach the peoples whose voices are often muted in our churches in North America, especially the Indigenous populations, migrants and refugees, prisoners, and LGBTQ+ among others.

In this report, we take readers into the world of so many people whose voices are not often heard in our churches and society. In these pages, you will hear the stories of many brothers and sisters whose faces are not often seen in our churches and society. Members of our working group visited them in diverse sites—prisons, refugee and immigration camps, national borders, convents, holding centers, seniors' residences, rehabilitation centers, churches, and social and pastoral centers. We spent a time of prayer with our brothers and sisters and together we listened to the Word of God from the bible, the teaching of the papal magisterium of Pope Francis, and also to the Word of God being proclaimed to us through these brothers and sisters, who generously shared their stories with us and even broke bread with us at some sites.

This report aims to tell the stories of our journeys into the journeys of our brothers and sisters and how we stepped onto the sacred grounds inhabited by the poor and the marginalized. However, as Fr Bill Nordenbrock, C.P.P. S reminded us at a dinner and listening session in Chicago at the convent of the Precious Blood Sisters, the poor and the marginalized are truly the center, why? Because the people we refer to as those at the peripheries of life are the center of divine love and light. It is those who cannot see God resplendent in the least of the brethren who inhabit the existential peripheries because they have shut themselves off from the illumination of God and thus lose the rhythm and rhyme of living life in the presence of God's revelatory light.

This report is our attempt to document and center the narratives of those at the existential peripheries which transformed our gaze as theologians and initiated an inner movement of conversion in us. This movement is a shift from seeing them as simply the inhabitants of the peripheries to encountering them as the new voices and ministers of God's Word to us and the church of our day. This report is, therefore, presented as a different way of seeing, interpreting, evaluating and responding to the *other* through a culture of encounter animated by a humble and vulnerable disposition. This new way of encounter helped us to see in the stories from the existential peripheries, the new irruption of God's Word that can speak in powerful and compelling ways to the Church today. These new and inexhaustible sites for the revelation of God, should become main sources of theology today. Grasping the centrality of these voices and theological witnesses from the peripheries for doing theology today, offers an immense possibility for rethinking not only our theologies, but for reimagining and redesigning our pastoral accompaniment. This way, the pastoral accompaniment of being present to people and serving them will reflect the realities and intimations of the divine that come so clearly and directly from these sites of light, hope, pain, suffering, resilience, solidarity, resistance, and praise.

We have divided this report into four broad sections. The first part gives the background context: a short biographical information of the members of the North American Working group, and the list of sites, places, and persons we encountered in the course of this project.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

The second part discusses the method for our work and how we applied it at the sites.

The third part, and by far the longest, gives a thematic account of what we have seen and heard from the existential peripheries. We also included here some of the important conversations that took place and the wisdom gained from the peripheries when the project director, Don Sergio Massironi visited the region (Chicago) from 16-20 May, 2022.

The final part provides a theological reflection on what we as theologians have gained from undertaking this project, and the lessons we have learned from this approach to doing theology and pastoral accompaniment, and some recommendations for the Church. We have an additional appendix of our interview schedule, some pictures from the sites we visited, and acknowledgement/credits—**Stan Chu Ilo**.

2. LIST AND BIOS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

William T. Cavanaugh, Professor of Catholic Studies and Director of the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology, DePaul University, Chicago, USA

Meghan J. Clark, Associate Professor of Moral Theology, St. John's University, NY, USA

Fr Darren Dias, OP, is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology in the Faculty of Theology, University of St Michael's College in the Toronto School of Theology. He currently serves as prior of the Priory of St Thomas Aquinas.

Bradford E. Hinze, Karl Rahner, S.J., Professor of Theology, Fordham University, Bronx New York, USA

Fr Stan Chu Ilo is a Catholic priest of Awgu Diocese, Nigeria; a Research Professor of World Christianity, Ecclesiology and African Studies at the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology, DePaul University, Chicago, USA. He is one of the editors of *Concilium* International Journal, and the Coordinating servant of the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network.

Thomas M. Landy is a sociologist and director of the Rev. Michael C. McFarland, S.J. Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture at the College of the Holy Cross

Fr. Thomas Lynch, Lecturer in Moral Theology, St. Augustine's Seminary in the Toronto School of Theology. He currently serves as Rector of St. Peter-In-Chains Cathedral in Peterborough, Ontario and Principal of Sacred Heart College in Peterborough, Ontario.

Jennifer Owens-Jofré is a Manresa Postdoctoral Fellow in the Center for Ignatian Service at St. Louis University and a Research Associate at the University of San Diego.

Jaime L. Waters is Associate Professor of Old Testament at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

3. LIST OF INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS: GROUPED BY CITY AND THEOLOGIAN.

Chicago

William Cavanaugh, interviewer

Individual:

**DOING THEOLOGY
FROM THE EXISTENTIAL
PERIPHERIES
REPORT**

Efrain Martin, parishioner at St. Giles Church, Oak Park

Sharon Morgan, teacher at Catalyst Circle Rock School, Chicago

Group Listening Session:

Fred Weatherspoon, Joe Montgomery, Harold “Mack” Hagerman, and Joseph Mapp, Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, Chicago

Jaime L. Waters, interviewer

Individuals:

Kimberly Lymore, MDiv, DMin., Associate Minister at St. Sabina Church Fr. Joseph Mulcrone, Director of Chicago Office of the Deaf

Christopher Pett, member of Dignity/Chicago

James Smith, parishioner at St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center

Jing Zhang, parishioner at St. Therese Chinese Catholic Church

Groups:

Seniors at Mercy Circle. Most in the group were Sisters of Mercy.

Community organizers at the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership.

Stan Chu Ilo, interviewer

Individuals:

Gordon Hanlon, CEO, the Catalyst School, Chicago

Andrew Dias, Kolbe House, Chicago

Justin Lombardo, Director, COVID-19 Task force, Chicago Archdiocese Groups

Kolbe House Ministry, Chicago

The Family of Michael Rubio

Sisters of the Daughters of Divine Love, Regional House, Chicago

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, La Grange, Chicago

St Agatha Church, Chicago

Campus Ministry, DePaul University, Chicago

St Celestine Parish, Elmwood Park, Chicago

New York

Meghan J. Clark, interviewer/present

Individuals:

Kenneth T., is a public school teacher, former Catholic high school teacher, and gay Catholic male in a committed relationship, (Queens).

Christine Z., is a transgender Catholic active in her parish and wider Catholic community. (New Jersey)

Josefa M., is a Mexican immigrant and canner in Brooklyn and canner's elected

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

representative on board of directors at Sure We Can <http://www.surewecan.org/> (Brooklyn)

Angelina C., is a Mexican immigrant and home health aide in Brooklyn and member of Golden Steps cooperative. (Brooklyn)

Ana T., is a single mother, high school teacher, religious education director, and member of Comunidad Siervos de Cristo Vivo (Queens)

Group Listening Sessions:

Mariam/Maki (from Kenya), Sayan (from Guinea), Carol (from Dominican Republic), and Tita (from Philippines) survivors of labor trafficking currently part of a Lifeway Network program

Laraib (from Pakistan), Melissa (from the USA), and Ariana (from Mexico), survivors of labor trafficking in a Lifeway Network program

Erma, Norma, Fausto, Maria, Emmanuel, and Miguel (immigrants from Mexico and Uruguay) day workers, of Don Bosco Workers at the Don Bosco Community Center, Portchester, NY

John (Jewish board member), Pedro (from Mexico), Juan (From Mexico), Jorge (from Mexico), Fausto (from Santo Domingo), Perla (from Mexico), day workers, of Don Bosco Workers at the Don Bosco Community Center, Portchester, NY

Bradford Hinze, Interviewer

Individuals

- Mychal P, Formerly Incarcerated
- John B, Black Doctoral Student, Fordham University
- Dariella R, Director of Community Development and Youth Development, The Point, the Bronx
- Ignacia R, Latina Migrant, Catholic, and Healer in the Bronx
- Meilyn C, Latina from Dominican Republic, Lady of Angels Parish

Group Listening Sessions:

- Black Catholic Members of Charles Borromeo Parish in Harlem
Tiffany B, Michael H, Nina K-L, Tanya Sue L, Vincente L, Timothy T
- LGBTQ Catholics from Francis Xavier Parish in Manhattan
Natasha A, Joel D, Brandon D, Lynn S D, John K, Ted M, Ed P,
Teresa J T, Philip G W
- Latina Immigrants/Migrants, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Bronx
Monica R. D, Alexandra V. Raquel F, Estella, Cristal, Maria C

El Paso

Meghan Clark and Stan Chu Ilo, present

Individual:

Carlos, a Catholic organizer at Sin Fronteras Border Agricultural Workers Project Jose, a Catholic farmworker at Sin Fronteras Border Agricultural Workers Project Kiki and Gloria,

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Catholic regular volunteers at Diocese of El Paso Martyrs Shelter

Group Listening Session:

Lorena, Selina, Josefina, Sandra, Olivia, Rosa, Selene, Antya, Hilda, Mailisa, Kathy, and two women who preferred to remain anonymous at *Mujer Obrera* at Café Mayapan

Ciudad Juárez*

Meghan Clark and Stan Chu Ilo, present

Individual

Victor and Griselda at *Casa Migrante* Shelter in Juarez

Ana at *Casa Migrante* Shelter in Juarez

Group Listening Sessions:

Families impacted by Title 42 at Mexican Federal Complex, Juarez Men impacted by Remain in Mexico at Mexican Federal Complex, Juarez Migrant mothers at Casa Eudes

Sylvia, Eliza, Ophelia, Maria, Rose, and Alejandro at Borderland Victims of Disappearance (Feminicidio) and Violations of Human Rights @ Centro de Derechos Humanos

Members of Raramuri, Purépecha, Wahaka, Mixtec, Chinantec, Mazatec, Chichimeca, and other Indigenous communities at *Parroquia San Vincente de Paul Catholic parish*

*in addition to the formal sessions, we also met with staff of Jesuit Migration Service Mexico

San Diego/Los Angeles

Jennifer Owens-Jofré, interviewer

Individual Interviewees

Evan., Left the Catholic Church, Sacramento, CA

Mary, Sister of Mercy and founding member of Casa de Misericordia, San Diego, CA Brett., university student, San Diego, CA

Erik, music minister, Los Angeles, CA

Diego, university student, San Diego, CA

Group Listening Sessions:

Beginning Experience, a ministry for divorced and widowed Catholics, Orange, CA: Carol., Kim, Sandy, Sylvia.

San Diego Organizing Project, San Diego, CA: Teresa., Eulalio, Ana, Wendy, who are connected to the reality of immigration in different ways and do faith-based community organizing in Catholic parishes

Tom Landy:

Homeboy Industries, Los Angeles, CA: Veronica, Vincent, and in Listening sessions: David V., Deborah, Marlo, Marco R, David W., Stevie, Mark, David M, Stevie, Fabian, Rene, Louis, and another who wished not to be named.

Toronto, Ontario

Darren Dias, interviewer

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Individuals:

Janet Rodriguez, someone who experiences disability and is a disability educator and activist.

Maria Lucas, a biracial, Metis (Indigenous and white) lawyer specializing in Aboriginal law and Indigenous legal traditions.

Mary Baier, a former pastoral minister and Catholic educator.

Group Listening Sessions:

Members of Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE): Marie Cerny, Mary Ellen Chown, Christine Gebel, Mary-Ellen Morgentern, Catherine Walther.

Members of Members of All Inclusive Ministries (AIM): Rick Hayward, John Jacob, Michel Madden, Cathay Maloney, Carl O'Byrne, David Pereyra.

Peterborough, Ontario

Tom Lynch, interviewer

Individual:

BW, Peterborough, self-employed individual with long-standing mental health issues J, a Catholic well-educated divorced woman with 3 adult sons

XX, formerly incarcerated, now street counselor

Group Listening Session:

Mary, Maria & Rosemary, retired, professional active lay women

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE NORTH AMERICAN REGIONAL WORKING GROUP

We have titled this report an account of "what we have heard and seen" drawing from two biblical passages, Acts 4: 20 "We cannot stop telling of what we have seen and heard" and, 1 John 1: 3, "We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

The image that was prominent for us is the encounter between Jesus and the two disciples on the way to Emmaus in Luke 24: 13-35. We saw our role as that of traveling companions, who wanted to walk in the shoes of our brothers and sisters through a culture of encounter, carried out in a humble and respectful spirit of listening and learning in their presence so as to hear the voice of God revealing deep spiritual wisdom at these existential peripheries.

We also saw an analogical relationship between what we were doing and what the writer of the Acts of the Apostles accomplished in the sacred text. In a proper sense, the inhabitants of the peripheries offer the church a continuing act of the apostles because their daily lives and realities, their joys and sorrows are indeed like Gospel narratives of the credible and authentic witness of lives of today's followers of Christ. Their daily lives point to the presence of God, and the credibility and rationality of faith. What we saw and heard at these sites are the faces of Jesus and the Word of God. The account in the preface of the Gospel of Luke offered us some hermeneutical structure for developing our methodology as a group in many ways:

First Moment: Encountering the Lord at the Peripheries

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

The preface to the Gospel of Luke (1:1-4) begins this way, 'seeing that others have undertaken to draw up *account* of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered *account* for you.' First, the writer speaks of the account or narrative (*diegesis*), in the preface, of 'events that have taken place among us'—*pragmata peplerophoremena*. Luke concentrates his narrative on the efficacy of Christ's actions and presence as witnessed to in the community. This first moment written about in Luke is also our own experience. Our journeys to the peripheries began with a purification of our inner vision so that we could see without any pre-judgement other than with an open heart that searches for the footprints of God. Like the first disciples of Christ, this openness led by the Holy Spirit, moved our hearts to see and experience the action of grace and faith in the Lord as witnessed to by those we encountered at the peripheries of life and the church.

Furthermore, Luke's use of 'account' or 'narrative' refers to all that has taken place—the great and small, the good and the bad, life and death, sin and righteousness—nothing is left out. In order to tell the story of 'all that has taken place', the narrator must be present in the story and pay attention to every detail; not only to the spoken words but also the unspoken words, symbols, signs, artistic works, cultural and spiritual artefacts among others. Everything belongs within the space of encounter as markers of the presence of God. As the writer of Luke's preface notes, he 'examined everything carefully' in order to make sure that no aspect of 'what happens' or 'what happened' in the community is excluded in his story and nothing is minimized or distorted by lack of due attention. For our group, embracing this moment of exchange was shaped in us as a team during the three sessions of meetings and prayers that culminated in a workshop, we conducted for ourselves on methodology before going to the sites. So, for us we were not going out to collect opinions on what people like or don't like about the church. Our goal was to harvest the beliefs, faith and life experiences that nourish the soul, strengthen agency, and inform the daily choices, while encountering the lament and hope of those at the peripheries.

Second Moment: Listening—Learning—Being Present

Tom Landy (consultant to the NAW) who led our workshop on methodology made this important point at the beginning of our workshop, "We want to hear stories, not necessarily opinions. Our job is to communicate the stories that opinions, beliefs and practices grow out of." He invited our team members to, "Ask yourself, after you go through a number of the questions, we had developed in our interview schedule for both focus groups and individual interviews, if you are in an echo

chamber. Are you hearing anything that is new or surprising compared to what you want to hear? Be wary if you only hear what you want to hear, and nothing surprising." One of the ways to stay with the story and in following the narratives is to be fully present to those we encounter and being open not only to hear a story but to allow the Spirit to lead our hearts to follow the story. As Stan Chu Ilo (regional coordinator) put it during the workshop on methodology, "Are you open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit? Are you entering deeper into the mysteries of divine revelation in the wisdom of the peripheries as you accompany your conversation partners by allowing God to lead you through the stories into a deeper and transformative new moment of revelation?" In order to allow ourselves to be guided on this road of discovery and revelation, one of the working rules of thumb that we formulated to help us in the listening sessions is the importance of silence, "Don't be afraid of silences. The best answers often rise out of it."

Third Moment: Telling the Story of the Gospel that was proclaimed

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Finally, in Luke-Acts, the author noted that he wanted to put forward an ordered account. This is not because of the Gospel's logical or chronological coherence, but rather in terms of the whole story coming together because the Lord is present in the story. The shattered lives of people and the complex challenges facing the early Christian community, are presented as moving in a certain direction that is beyond death and destruction because Christ is present to bring all things together so that the story will be a complete one with a beginning, a complex middle and an ordered and happy salvific ending. It is a continuum which is integrated by the participation of all in the life of all and by the presence of Christ through the presence of the church in bringing order in the disorder and chaos which sin, poverty, suffering, and pain inflict on wounded hearts and on a wounded world. The summons to Theophilus from the writer indicating that the account is being put together for him to believe is an assurance that God is present in history particularly in the broken history of those who are outside the gate, the voiceless, persecuted, forgotten, wounded, lost and alienated of this world.

In this light, our account of the stories was also to elicit belief and action on the part of all those who will read the stories in this report. Our methodology extended not only to how we collected the stories, but also how we wrote the account of the stories. Just like Luke-Acts, those at the peripheries are our brothers and sisters; in going to encounter them we are connecting with those we have made to feel disposable and as outsiders in the drama of history and in our ecclesial life. Like Luke-Act, we wanted to tell the stories of what we have seen and heard centering the existential peripheries as the sites of the most painful but hopeful drama playing out in today's world. This meant for us that the best account that we could give of the peripheries must be a first person account not something that we received as a secondary information.

So, we were *eyewitness* (*autoptes*, Acts 1: 2) to what we have written in this report because we were present with our brothers and sisters. This presence with the people—albeit briefly—enabled us to do what in some ways is similar to what the writer of the Letter of Peter (1Peter 3: 15-16) calls an *apologia* (confession or an answer) of the hope and light that we experienced at the peripheries. In order that the eye witness must follow closely (*parakoloutheo* Acts 1: 3) and participate fully in the life of individuals and the community of faith, he or she must be present and hear and see what the people who live that experience live and see every day. The account is not something that is to be told from a distance. One has to tell the story as an insider; it is a grounded account because the writer is in touch with the very flesh of the phenomenon being described. It is an emic account which one tells from a first-person perspective as a witness to what one is describing.

As Pope Francis teaches in *Veritatis Gaudium* (no.5) theology should not provide pre-packaged answers and ready-made solutions, rather theologians should go to unfamiliar sites with risks and fidelity to the borderline. Theologians, Pope Francis observes, by going out to the peripheries are like “spiritual ethnographers” with the smell of the sheep, whose encounter with people in their cultures, histories, and sites of pain and hope will bring about an inward transformation as they seek for a ‘hermeneutic of integration’ in accounting for the logic of grace and of the signs of God's reign from these sites. This hermeneutic of integration guided our final reflective exercise as each of us listened again to the recording of our interviews and conversations and searched for words that spoke to us of God's action in the communities we encountered.

This report is the result of the application of the hermeneutic of integration—of bringing together an ordered account as the preface of the Gospel of Luke says—of all that we have seen and heard in the hope that in reading this report, we all can hear the voice of God in new ways today and respond appropriately to the demands of this new Gospel—**Stan Chu Ilo.**

Perspectives on Methodology by members of the North American Working Group:

As a moral theologian, I am committed to local listening as ethical practice which requires a willingness to observe the world around me so as to ask the question: who is missing? To listen to the perspectives of those otherwise ignored or overlooked, and to encounter requires an openness to reconsider one's own moral or theological perspectives in light of the wisdom or challenge from those who are marginalized. "Teaching and studying theology," urged Pope Francis, "means living on a frontier, the frontier where the Gospel meets the real needs of people." (Pope Francis to members of La Scuola Cattolica). This commitment centered my desire to follow Pope Francis's lead in outreach for interviews: LGBTQ+ Catholics, immigrant workers in informal and less protected jobs, women, and survivors of human trafficking. This reflection led us to partner with HOPE Border Institute in order to observe, listen, and encounter migrants in *La Frontera, the Borderlands* in El Paso/Ciudad Juárez. Similarly, our methodology began with a commitment to protect and respect those whom we seek to engage in conversation - through attention to a flexible consent form and making sure our work was evaluated by St. John's IRB (institutional ethics review board). Personally, my methodology in practicing local listening began with prayer. In particular, I sought the intercession of St. Oscar Romero and carried with me in the project, a key chain given to me from his beatification in San Salvador"—**Meghan Clark**

5. RESULTS OF THE LISTENING SESSIONS ON THE TEN THEMES

Thematic Report and Analysis: Theological results on each of the 10 themes arranged according to theme and city using the most impactful direct quotes from the interviewees or focus group participants, and followed by "Lifting up the Sensus Fidei" a succinct attempt to bring out the wisdom from the peripheries.

1. Wisdom from the Margins

a. New York:

i. "I see God every time I find a way to help someone" (Don Bosco Workers).

Background: On May 11TH, 2022, Meghan Clark with the assistance of Gonzalo Carreon Cruz (organizer listening session in Spanish), conducted a listening session with five (Pedro, Fausto, Perla, Jorge, Juan) workers from Don Bosco Workers and John, a Jewish supporter and friend of DBW. Don Bosco Workers is a grassroots community-organizing group led by Latino immigrant day laborers and other low-income workers in Port Chester, New York. (Quotations via translation).

Keywords: worker, exclusion, friendship, Jesus

Wisdom from the Margins: Where do you see God?

- "But I see God working every day with people who do good deeds with myself, who change the way I think, who change the way I look at life and who change my actions. Sometimes, when my actions want to be right or not right, God works there in my life and tells me in some way with some sign and. And so I see that every day he works well with me and with other people when they have gestures of kindness with people, gestures of benevolence, gestures of goodness. That is where I see God every day."
- Well, I don't think I've ever seen God, I've felt his presence in his works. It's felt and I know he exists, but I've never seen him. I feel his power by. By many works that you can see around the world. But in reality I have never seen him. I have felt it. And I think sometimes I think that God is like air, that he has infinite power, but we can't see him

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- and we need him and we feel him but we can't see him. (Jorge)
- “when I was diagnosed with cancer I began to see God in many ways with many people, because for me that is to see God in the people you see, in the gestures of the people, in the actions and in one's own life. When one sees oneself in the mirror and when, as others say, one asks from the heart, one is seeing, my interior is different and when I can say God gave me a second chance of life, I had colon, liver and lung cancer. It was a total change for me to believe in God and to know that He is real, that He exists and that all of us have the power to change.” (Peter)
 - I see God every time I find a way to help someone. There's so many times I stress out because the help someone needs isn't available but I don't give up and I search until we can find some sort of help.. we don't always win but when we do I know God helped us. (Perla)
 - Wisdom from the Margins: REFLECTING ON JESUS THE WORKER: (Reflecting on *Laudato Si'* 98 with group)
 - “I think about how humble he is, that with all his power and holiness Jesus came and worked with us. I think about all the day laborers and workers that come here to create a better life for themselves and community.” (Perla)
 - “How would I interpret that? By saying well, well Jesus works by your hands. Jesus works to mold us as children of God. And for me the greatest example that God set for me was to make himself or send his son to earth to set an example for all of us of whether he was making himself. Becoming man, becoming flesh and having the same capacity for weaknesses that we have. He was able to give that great example that to this day.”
 - Theme: Dialogue and Encounter:
 - “To try to dialogue, to understand and to form. This is not a Catholic value; this is a human value.” (John, Jewish participant)
 - I think the church, understanding that the church is the members of the church, can see that they could have done more. Not only with me, but with many members of our immigrant community. That has to be my answer. (Pedro)
 - “I'd tell Pope Francis about my childhood and how I managed to create for myself a life I always dreamed about because I'd ask him to raise more awareness about child Sexual Abuse. and how wrong it is for adults to abuse kids. I'd talk about the unfair economy that made me work 2/3 jobs while going to college and being a single mom. I'd talk about the opportunities and doors that God has offered me and how thankful I am, such as being able to advocate for my immigrant brothers and sisters & volunteer at community centers. Lastly, but not least, I'd tell him that my biggest blessing is my son Angel who has given me the motivation to keep going even when I don't see the light at the end of the tunnel.” (Perla)

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

“I see God every time I find a way to help someone.” “I see God working every day with people who do good deeds with myself, who change the way I think, who change the way I look at life and who change my actions”

These two insights stand out as capturing the way in which faith in God permeates the lives of the workers whom I met at Don Bosco Workers. God's presence is everywhere – in those who help us along the way but also when we help others. These workers, who come together to make sure that the basic rights of day laborers are respected, feel God's presence in their own resilience and accomplishments. **“Jesus works by your hands. Jesus works to mold us as children of God,”** in response to a reflection on Jesus as a worker, similarly shows the way the presence of God permeates in a way that is mutual and reciprocal. **-Meghan Clark**

**DOING THEOLOGY
FROM THE EXISTENTIAL
PERIPHERIES
REPORT**

ii. “He taught him to work like we teach our children, in the same way.” (Don Bosco Workers)

Background: On May 9TH, 2022, Meghan Clark with the assistance of Gonzalo Carreon Cruz (organizer listening session in Spanish), conducted a listening session with seven workers from Don Bosco Workers. Located at Don Bosco Community Center and evolving out of collaboration with Don Bosco parish, Don Bosco Workers is a grassroots community-organizing group led by Latino immigrant day laborers and other low-income workers in Port Chester, New York. (Quotations via translation).

Keywords: worker, exclusion, friendship, Jesus

Theme 1: Wisdom from the Margins:

REFLECTING ON JESUS THE WORKER:

Group Reflection on: “Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to this task in a simple life which awakened no admiration at all: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (Mk 6:3). In this way he sanctified human labor and endowed it with a special significance for our development.” (LS 98)

- “It’s that Jesus works with his hands, creating in him a craftsman of a thing. Who had no form, piece of wood and wonderful grace? He could create and transform something that in a sense, a single plank. Make something beautiful. And when you say no. Is this the carpenter, the son of Mary? **I find it very ironic because he alone with the wood can return his son to Mary’s time and he can sacrifice him and he dies on a cross. And because it gives a peculiar value for our training. It’s a craft like a tree. It’s realizing that.**
- “Jesus was humble and he came to die with something that was what gave him at one point in time all his life and all this movement and all his maturation. That’s what I think, what eternal life is, what Jesus worked so hard for. Suppose your dad, **he taught him to work like we teach our children, in the same way**”
- “**Well, that’s the sacrifice that a father makes, a worker makes for his children.** To give them a better future, a better friend that sometimes you don’t know how things are going to end.” Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness
- Discussing their joys and sorrows:
- “We have the help of God and the help of hope. It’s the faith of the victim that he didn’t expect to receive.”
- “my children, that I see the joy in them and the innocence like in every child, that even if they don’t know it, it has to be forever
- Reflecting on the Bible: “**The Passage when Jesus tells the disciples to cast out their nets: “I think they didn’t know if it was Jesus. Then he told them they have a net, grab it, he’s not going to give up. True friendship.”**

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

Despite transcription/translation challenges, the workers present were all men and women committed to collaborating for workers rights. They had a strong sense of the dignity of work and while most of them did not have significant catechetical education they had a strong sense of God and faith. They were given the paragraph from *Laudato Si’* and given a moment to read/think/reflect on the significance of Jesus as a worker, like them. The connections made – that Jesus was a craftsman working with wood and then is crucified on a wooden cross – is a profound insight. Reflecting on the relationship between Joseph and Jesus, “**he taught him to work like we teach our children, in the same way.**” The men in particular clearly identified with this bond between father and son, workers and with pride in craftsmanship—**Meghan Clark.**

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

b. Chicago

i. *"I know God now better than before I went to jail."* (Kolbe House)

Background: Before this interview which was conducted at the Kolbe House with Don Sergio Massironi, Stan Chu Ilo visited some of the inmates at Cook County Jail where Andrew was incarcerated for one year. This jail is notorious for many reasons, one of which being that it is overcrowded with over 9000 inmates 75% of whom are African Americans and the majority of the other 25% is Latino. Kolbe House through whose ministry we encountered the current and former inmates accompanying the often-forgotten prisoners and former convicts. As an archdiocese-wide ministry, Kolbe House serves as the locus of ministry to anyone affected by crime and incarceration in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The legacy of ministry to the incarcerated, their families, the local community, and persons returning from incarceration continues and grows. In addition, Kolbe House seeks to engage people across the archdiocese in this work by offering educational and ministry opportunities to the parishes and soliciting their participation and support for this work.

Key Words: God, Cross, Never gave up, knowing God.

- *Hope and Trust in God:* "God knows the right way that we need to go in our lives" (1:22). *Solidarity:* "Deacon Pablo and Gloria never gave up on me. They always reached out to me; never gave up on me and because of their love and support, I made a commitment not do drugs and again because these people never gave up on me and told me that they will provide anything for me" (5: 22).
- *The Cross:* (Andrew helped to carry the Cross for the Holy Week walk and even though the Cross was heavy, he determined to complete the journey carrying the Cross and said these words): "And I'm thinking to myself, our Lord Jesus carried a heavier Cross so if Jesus could hold this big, heavy cross that they made him carry and how they hit him. I said, If Jesus could do this, why can't I carry the Cross? I will not drop the Cross and Pablo was there for me by my side as we made the 3 miles walk with the Cross. And I said to myself I'd better not drop this cross" (9:07).
- *Wisdom from the Margins:* "I know God now better than before I went to jail. In jail our lives are stuck in jail and we feel empty, but with Kolbe House we met the Church." (12:42)

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei

One image that stayed with me from listening to Andrew was when he told the story of being asked to carry the Cross during the Holy Week's Stations of the Cross along a stretch of three miles. Andrew recounts three moments that could help one to see how the *sensus fidei* emerges from the peripheries and in this context from one who in the eyes of others was a condemned criminal. First, is his experience that has deep roots in his encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ in the jail where as he related, "he found God." Second, this experience finds its deepest foundation for Andrew in the Cross of Jesus. Andrew tells of his connection with the self-sacrificing love of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. This gives him the strength and grace to carry this physical Cross which he reminds himself is lighter when compared to the heavier Cross carried by Jesus. Because Andrew never saw the Cross that Jesus carried or lifted it, one would imagine why he thinks that Jesus's physical Cross was heavier than his. It is here that one can find a transition in meaning in the faith of Andrew and the Cross he was carrying during the Holy Week. This physical Cross can be interpreted as a representation of Andrew's cross of incarceration, rejection, and abandonment, but it is also a representation of his freedom in Christ as he freely embraces the physical Cross with an inner spiritual disposition determined not to let the Cross Fall or let God down. Finally, as Andrew relates this story, I also see a striking resonance between what Simon of Cyrene did on the Way to Golgotha. Andrew sees himself as helping to carry

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

the Cross of Jesus, but unlike Simon he was not compelled to carry the Cross, but willingly offered to do so. As he journeyed, Andrew, spoke of gazing at those who supported him in jail and who didn't give up on him especially Deacon Pablo. Dropping the Cross would be to give up on this community of friends through whom he encountered Christ. It was also for him a moment of revelation because just as he never gave up in jail and outside of the jail because of people who didn't give up on him, his carrying the Cross was also for him an invitation not to give up on others. This is how he made that decision to be with his family with whom he now feels invited to enter deeper into a sacred walk with Jesus in the Church that is represented to him through Kolbe House—**Stan Chu Ilo**

c. Toronto, Ontario

i. Surviving the Incarceration System and Living Outside: “The Church just needs to get more involved in what is happening around them.”

Background: The long hard work of rehabilitation is a lifelong effort. In late June, 2022, our interviewer sat down with XX in Peterborough, Ontario where he was released into the community for the second time after serving 2 long federal sentences for violent crimes while also battling various addictions. He is one of the adlimina who like Simone Weil is teetering on the edge of the Catholic Church.

Key Words: visibility, community, fellowship, accompaniment, empathy

Revelation:

- “I have encountered Christ in all people.”
- “It’s where you start. And the churches have the organization to do it, and the people to do it. They have a captive audience, do something, manipulate them! Instead of them using you, you use them!” (Interviewee laughs)
- “I meet people where they are and deal with them, bring them around to the faith, but I don’t it make my mission because there are lots of other ways you can help them.”
- Clericalism:
- “As far as I am concerned, you’re helping people. You know? Regardless of the context. If you’re helping people, you’re going to help people. It’s, like you know, meet them where they are and that’s where you’re going to work with them. If you can bring them into the faith at some point, that’s even better. But that’s not why I go out there and work. No...it’s not my main mission.”
- “I have experienced a lot of hypocrisy; it is to be expected. I have experienced a lot of it inside. Involvement with the chapel and the faith groups inside...it is definitely a way better your chances of getting out. So, I have seen a lot of what I call ‘Jail House Christians’.”
- “I don’t have a lot of conversations like that with church leaders. It’s generally with more of the congregation. The street-level people. But their faith is no less. But I have had discussions with people at the Cathedral...it has gone well. They are open to listening and I’m open to listening to them. Sometimes it’s hard to peg somebody down.”
- Hope & Building Trust:
- “Any closing thoughts you can think of?” “I am glad the Church is doing stuff like this and taking an interest in what is going on around them. I don’t know where it’s going or what the master plan is, but I guess whatever they are doing, they will be working on it for years.”
- “Well, seeing as I don’t know what their end game is, but I trust in you. I don’t know. I just wish churches would open their doors to the people who really need their help rather than make...the sense I get from all saints, and no names, it seemed to be a privileged group of parishioners. And that’s how they acted, as a privileged group.
- “I have been married three times, but never ended well. I blame me. Well, somebody

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

said to me, she said, 'You've had three marriages, so what do you think the common denominator is?' I said, 'Thank you, but my life is totally different from what it was before.'"

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

XX is a man of the streets, on the streets, for the people of the streets. He is a believer but can't find a home that he is comfortable with – or that is comfortable with him. He is a battle-hardened veteran of the prison system, and he recognizes that God is the force that has allowed him to both survive and to live again in a new life outside the system. Perhaps XX is the prototype for pastoral accompaniment because he has been the recipient of individual time and attention from believers. Now he sees his role as being a channel to continue that same accompaniment for the people under the bridge, the streetwalkers and the other guys "with big and bushy beards." **-Thomas Lynch**

d. San Diego

"The image of God is love has been so huge for me, and I also wish I would've heard...[that] God is not hate."

Background: Erik is a gay Catholic man who works as a music minister at Dolores Mission in Boyle Heights, CA. He is second-generation Mexican-American and grew up in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, having attended Catholic schools as a young person. The parish serves an economically poor neighborhood of first- and second-generation Salvadoran-American and Mexican-American immigrants, and it enjoys significant support from those of more economically and racially privileged backgrounds.

Themes: Wisdom from the Margins

So, the God that I am talking about first of all, is a loving God, a God who only knows love, who is love, and I think that is first and foremost who and what God is to me. And I think that's come to a very long time ago, I think as I was going through confirmation...I was very moved by two things I can recall. I think it's in the one of the letters of John, where it says, God is love, it straight up just says it, and I'm like...Yeah, God is love! I remember being in English class, and you learn about linking verbs, and it was like "is" is an equals sign, so to hear, "God is love," it's like, God=love...and it just resonated, it stuck with me, and for me, that is the God that I believe in, the God that I pray to, that when I talk about God, that is who I'm talking about.

To me, God is just...and Mary is the one who stands up for her kid, even though her kid might've done the worst thing in the world and is like, Please, God, give him a second chance. That's very much the Mary I relate to, as well, the Mary who stands up for anybody and everybody.

I'm a huge believer in being the hands and feet of Jesus here on earth, so I'm all for being down with the people and walking with the people...I think where I struggle with it is, where, if you and I are part of the same church—well, not you you, but...a random person—and you're gonna come in here and be like, Yeah, let's do it...sometimes, I feel like there's a lot of show in it...sometimes it's like, Are you really in it? Or are you only here for the photo op?

Vulnerability and Tenderness

Sometimes I can't name my own struggles, and that can make it hard for me to pray.

I'm kind of fatigued right now by [other people's reactions to my coming out], I'm like, I've tried. At this point, I've put in my work. It's not to say that I can't keep trying, but I gotta move on other areas of my life...there are other areas of my life that need some attention

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

right now. That's a little bit painful for me right now, I'll be honest with you.

The image of God is love has been so huge for me, and I also wish I would've heard...the inverse of that, which is God is not hate... And I don't think I heard that enough, I think if I had heard that from more people, even if not in an official capacity, but maybe just in a one-on-one, informal...if I would've heard or seen or experienced more of "God is not hate," that would've been huge because we could say "God is love" all day long and that can mean whatever we want it to mean...and a hateful person can get away with saying, "God is love," but that won't cover...[we need] to go beyond words and see more deeds.

Dialogue and Encounter

We don't have to like each other, but we do have to love each other. And I think as human beings, we're capable of that. We can get wrapped up in our own, kind of, institutional or political thing, or maybe it's our own self-interest or something, but we create these barriers...and it's ugly, so that's discouraging to me. So it's moments like that, where I do feel like...in my own lived experience, I'll be at church, whether I'm playing or attending, it's just like, I'm not here for that, I'm here for church, I'm here for community, and I'm here for communion...I'm here to commune...but sometimes it gets a little hard to block out the noise and the ugliness of it sometimes.

I'll even say to the priests at our church, Y'all will get up there and preach at the English Mass and have a very pro-LGBTQ English homily...and then you'll go and give the same homily at the Spanish Masses, and you won't speak directly to that, you won't say what that is. And you know, some of them have been very honest with me and have said, I don't think they'd be ready for it, and I'm like, Well, #1, you don't know that. And #2, but I need that. I need that. I needed that [when I was coming out]. And thankfully, because of the work I do at the parish, at least I heard it in this Mass, but you know what? You know who didn't hear it at the other one? My mom. My dad. Other people in my family. And I feel like, You could've helped me out there. They love and respect you [priests]. (clapping). It would've really helped me out if they would've heard...just three words, something...because now they'd know, it's not just Erik being rebellious...this is real.

Lifting up the *sensus fidei*: In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis writes, "The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society" (no. 180). Throughout my conversation with Erik, I felt from him a deep longing to experience abundantly not only that kind of love from God, but also from his community, from those with whom he has shared his life for so long. He spoke initially of the positive reaction he experienced from those to whom he came out, but one can hear the pain in his voice when he describes more negative reactions from loved ones when they realized that it wasn't "a phase." I also heard from Erik a desire to be seen as more than this aspect of his identity, to be permitted to be a fully human person, in all his complexities and beauty. Listening closely to Erik—both his words and the powerful feelings and experiences behind them—calls us to consider how the church—both in teaching and in practice—might more closely reflect the will of that loving God who reigns not only in our world, but also within us. **-Jennifer Owens-Jofre**

2. Welcome the Stranger

a. El Paso/Ciudad Juárez

i. **"what migration represents today is an act of resistance of people who refuse to disappear." (Carlos)**

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Background: On May 16th, 2022, Meghan Clark, Fr. Stan Chu Ilo, Dylan Corbett (HOPE/MRS) and Vanessa Salazar (HOPE) went to *Sin Fronteras Border Agricultural Workers Project*, a worker center that provides training, organizing, and respite space for farm workers, to conduct individual interviews. Carlos is an active Catholic and organizer at the worker center who has been active in collaborating on behalf of farm workers since the early 1980s, noting he is now serving and organizing the children of those first farmworkers.

Keywords: agriculture, workers, human rights, faith, resistance, migration,

Theme: Welcoming the Stranger

- **“what our faith is telling us we need to accompany the migrants” and “it is nothing more than following in the steps of Jesus, this is being Catholic for me.”**
“take away the label of victim to protagonist, the migrants are the ones who are defying this system.”
- **“If you really want to accompany the oppressed, to make changes, you have to have a strong faith. That will give you the courage, the clarity, and more than anything it will make you remember that the protagonists are the poor.”**
- **every day, the work we do, we are trying to do to take care of their needs...to use the space [the center] to fulfill their individual needs, that’s the only way we can think to bring some humanity and dignity into their lives, having space, having space where they are together and they can reflect....that they are a part of a group of people being oppressed and exploited and excluded by a system, the system of a god of money.”**
- Theme: Wisdom from the Margins
- **“what migration represents today is an act of resistance of people who refuse to disappear, refuse to be what Pope Francis calls the disposable created by this system.”** Told story of Central American migrant caravan coming and how it reminded him of the movie 10Commandment, but the difference is “the Israelites in the movie had things whereas these people had nothing” and noted that it was the people coming out from their homes to give assistance – not the government, not even NGOs but the compassion of people coming out of their homes to aid those passing.
- Told story of a Honduran woman, who he asked if she feared the soldiers / US authorities upon reaching the border, “it will take many weeks til we reach the border, by then maybe God will have changed Mr. Trump’s heart or the soldier’s heart. Now that’s conviction”
- Theme: Leaving Clericalism behind
- “I am a Catholic, not because I choose to be, nobody asked me. I was born a Catholic. For many years, I had doubts in my faith. I understood from my faith the most important component was social justice but at the same time the church I was part of was in the opposite side....you hardly see them [bishops, priests] accompanying the poor. So I did what many Catholics have done – separated my faith from social justice.” but then Pope Francis became pope and everything changed. I tell my friends this is the best time to be a Catholic”
- “if you have a strong faith, if you have a really strong real faith, you are going to fight against injustice” and “if you want to fight against oppression, you need to have faith.”
“We Catholics have much to learn from the migrants.”

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

“What migration represents today is an act of resistance of people who refuse to disappear, refuse to be what Pope Francis calls the disposable created by this system.”

The quote above is, I think, the most important insight from Carlos, a lifelong Catholic who

is committed to serving, accompanying, and promoting migrants. It lines up deeply with the theology of Pope Francis. This emphasis on migrants as protagonists from whom we have much to learn is absolutely central. Additionally, Carlos provides a common narrative of those who see social justice as coming out of their faith who often do not feel confirmed or strengthened based upon their parish experiences. His frank statement that Pope Francis changed everything for him – opening up a spiritual space for him to proclaim more deeply his commitment to social justice as the way of the gospel is important. Moreover, that the previous dichotomy where he did not hear the gospel of Jesus preached as a call to accompaniment caused him to have “doubts” in his faith is a spiritual harm that must be named—**Meghan Clark**.

ii. **“we dedicate ourselves to God on this journey” (Victor and Griselda)**

Background: On May 19th, 2022, Meghan Clark, Fr. Stan Chu Ilo Ilo, and Dylan Corbett (HOPE/MRS) met with Victor and Griselda at *Casa Migrante* Shelter in Juarez. They are a married couple with two children who fled their town because of fear and insecurity due to the cartels. They have lost family to covid19. Dylan Corbett conducted simultaneous translation when needed.

Keywords: migration, fear, violence, prayer, rosary

Theme 1: Welcoming the Stranger

Our joy/hope: “a safe, dignified life for our children, our Catholic faith. **“we dedicate ourselves to God on this journey”**”

Theme 2: Hope and Trust

Who is God? “The one who knows our destiny, at the end of all this, he is the one who will have been with us.”

As a family, “we pray as a family, the rosary before bed and now here, mass on Wednesdays”

Victor: “had strong devotion to John Paul II,” was part of a pastoral group. The church “is a place of peace against the cartels”

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

Victor and Griselda conveyed a deep faith and gratitude for their safety as a family along this migration journey. They felt comfortable at *Casa Migrante* yet challenging as women and children as separated from men within the facility. Prayer and the rosary give them strength. Throughout these interviews with migrants currently in the process of migration, a clear reliance on God as accompanying them is clear. As a theologian, this for me raises a stronger question for the Church, as the people of God, called to accompany as God accompanies—**Meghan Clark**.

iii. **“God is with us because we still have our lives.” (Families affected by Title 42)**

Background: On May 18th, 2022, Meghan Clark, Fr. Stan Chu Ilo, Dylan Corbett (HOPE/MRS) and Vanessa Salazar (HOPE), met with a few hundred families at the Mexican Federal Government Complex in Juárez. All families were being sheltered and detained under the United States Title 42 program. Mostly women and a few men spoke, sharing their faith and experiences on the journey. All in this session were families traveling with children. The largest group began their journey in Honduras, next were internally displaced from other regions of Mexico. Migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, and Nicaragua were also among the families.

Keywords: violence, family, God, Mary, stranger, borders, kidnapping, prayer, hope,

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Note: While I may note the country that someone is from, there was a united sense of collective longing, hope, hurt, and vulnerability that made identifying any individual quote as from one person/from one community of origin, minimize that collective expression of faith and pain expressed. For almost every individual quote, dozens, even hundreds, nodded in agreement.

Theme 1: Welcome the Stranger

- **“When you have faith, anything is possible,” “We don’t feel safe here, please pray for us,” “I open the Bible and he (God) speaks to me, gives me strength and encouragement”** ~Mother from Guatemala
- Many shared experiences of being kidnapped, fleeing, traveling with great difficulty, fear, and violence but this deep sense, as Victor from Guatemala said, “that God protected us on our journey.”
- Alegria, used to have dreams of Mary/Guadeloupe, “I was kidnapped...the Virgin she brought me here, took care of me on my journey.” She had no water, couldn’t bare the sun, “but the Virgin and God got me out more or less safe.”
- One mother, from Honduras, deaf in one ear, said seeing her children alive is how she sees God. “we pray every night the 4 of us – thank you God for your love and mercy.” She emphasized, **“we leave not because we want to dream, people say we want the American Dream, that is not why we leave. We leave because of the necessity of life. We want to live.”**
- Mother after mother, father after father, reiterated “I am thankful to God because I am here,” or **“God is with us because we still have our lives.”** A deep, abiding, yet uncompromisingly simple affirmation of faith and dependence upon God. **Theme 2: Wisdom from the Margins**
- **A mother from Guatemala: “I think about the Prodigal Son in different times and I know that God wants us to come back to the fathers house.”**
- Francisca from Honduras, whose brothers were killed by gangs and while in Mexico they’ve killed her sister too, focuses on the story of Joshua “wherever you are I will be with you”
- Mother from Honduras, who is deaf in one ear, “I identify with Job. People think when you have a defect you can’t be a leader but you can – I have the respect of my children.” · Wide agreement that Pope Francis represents faith, humility, hope, love: “teaching us on this journal all to have peace and love and treat each other as brothers and sisters” · “May God protect him” and gratitude that Pope Francis prays for “peace in many of our countries”

Theme 3: Hope & Trust

- **Suyapa from Honduras asks all from Honduras to stand up: “we are not looking for a gift....seeking a nation of hope...they haven’t heard our voices because if they did they would open their hearts.”**
- “It would be better if no borders so don’t fight against each other”
- “I can’t go back, I don’t want to become another statistic, assassinated”
- “We don’t want our children forced into gangs”
- **“We expect God to be just and bring us peace and mercy”**
- “we want to be far away from violence”

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

Before noting the wisdom that comes from the faith of those we met, I first want to pause on the scourge of violence and vulnerability they experience. In his responses on migration, Pope Francis has emphasized four verbs: *welcome, protect, promote, and integrate*. The acute need to protect and promote was evident in listening to the stories of migrant families

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

at the center. They seek welcome, yes, but much deeper than welcoming there is a moral requirement to protect and promote the good of our brothers and sisters fleeing terrible violence in fear. Data and the women and men we met confirm the widespread reality of kidnappings, rape, assault, and other forms of violence in the process of migration. Amidst all of that, the migrant families being held under Title 42, are families of a deep faith in God, Jesus, and the Virgin.

“God is with us because we still have our lives.” They expressed a deep sense of **accompaniment** along the way. This feeling of being accompanied gives them strength, hope, and perseverance. It is this incarnated feeling of God’s accompaniment that feeds their faith along the way—**Meghan Clark**.

iv. **“The Migrants are like Jesus to Us” (Kiki and Gloria)**

Background: The Hope Border Institute (HOPE) brings the perspective of Catholic social teaching to bear on the realities unique to the US-Mexico border region. Through a robust program of research and policy work, leadership development and action, Hope works to build justice and deepen solidarity across the borderlands. Hope also supports arriving migrants to find homes and provides temporary shelter and food for them, while they struggle through the legal process. Meghan and Stan met two outstanding volunteers here, who were our conversation partners. First, is Gloria Cervantes, a teacher and one who describes herself as “one who welcomes strangers with a smile” and who has been volunteering here with her husband for over five years. Gloria is inspired by John 3: 16, “for God loved the world so much and gave her only Son.” Gloria tells the story of one of the migrant girls that taught herself Spanish. This young migrant is from Haiti and with her family crossed 11 countries before getting to the U.S. Second, is Enrique Kiki Dias who has volunteered for three years. Kiki’s extraordinary and heroic life is quite remarkable because he is amputated on both legs and uses a wheel chair. Kiki is a U.S veteran and fought in the first Iraqi War.

Themes and Keywords: Welcoming strangers; immigrants, helping people, blessings, smile.

- **Solidarity:** “I wanted to help. I wanted to do it because that is what the Lord calls me to do” —**Enrique Kiki Dias**.
- **Hope and Trust:** “I had both legs amputated, but I keep going...to make sure that these wonderful families and people (migrants) that they deserve the best. I look at the faces of people, they come in her miserable; they leave here with smiles, hopes, and blessings” — **Enrique Kiki Dias**.
- “I know what it means to say, ‘I am going home’, I saw war in the Desert Storm. It is wonderful to see the migrants say that ‘they are going home’ because they have found a home.”—**Enrique Kiki Dias**.
- **Vulnerability:** “They all have a story of a journey. We were told in the past not to touch the babies. I was told not to touch them even pre-COVID. The migrants wanna be touched. I touch. I hug. I carry and I do what I have to do. God gave me the strength. I am 65 years. Today, I am wearied and weak, but God gives me the strength to serve”—**Gloria Cervantes**
- “I have my physical limitations, but I don’t see it but the Lord is working with us and is giving us the strength. We see the Lord in all we do. We don’t judge. We don’t criticize. We are here to take care of them (the immigrants) and we ask them what they need.” — **Enrique Kiki Dias**.
- **Prayer and Revelation:** “The children stay in my heart. I want to bring all of them home. The migrants are like Jesus to us. They help each other; they love each other and they teach us about God.” **Gloria Cervantes**.
- “You have to draw strength from God. I know that the Lord is marking my path to a safe

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

place. The Lord has brought me here. I wish that I could spend more time. But I am dealing with some health issues. I use one leg to get here. I want to be here to take care of these migrants. I am taking care of my granddaughter. I need to pass on what I know and what I believe in to her to know that she has the power to do the kind of thing I do. I want her to be a Gloria.” **–Enrique Kiki Dias**

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei

The words that stayed with me after the conversation with these two great volunteers were Kiki’s words, “we are here with open hands and open hearts” and Gloria’s “we want the migrants to come home.” This Gospel of open hearts and hands is central to the message of Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*. It resonates with the parable of the Good Samaritan who brought the wounded man to an inn which served as a home or space for healing of wounds and a place of comfort and safety from a hostile experience.

Furthermore, the constant and unrestricted movement of the hearts of these two individuals towards the migrants and a direct identification of the migrants as the faces of Jesus is a great reversal that Gloria and Kiki’s faith has formed in them. This is particularly remarkable given the strong anti-immigration sentiment and the rejection of migrants and strangers and the negative characterization of the migrants by a significant section of the American public. What it reveals is that the experience of transformation does occur when authentic faith translated into action liberates the heart to move in the direction of God through an encounter with the other. There is something that is transmitted in this gift exchange that makes possible the revelatory moment that brings about a new creation for both the migrants and those who welcome them leading to the mutual confession of the love of God and thanksgiving—**Stan Chu Ilo**.

b. New York

i. **“Pilgrim from the Margins” (Ignacia)**

Background: Ignacia R., who is a 52 year old Mexican immigrant living in New York was interviewed on June 20th, 2022 in Spanish / Mixteco by Leonel Guardado, report by Bradford Hinze

Keywords: Migration from Mexico to flee poverty, faith formation, Catholic convictions

Theme: Welcome the Stranger

- My name is Ignacia. I am Mexican. My town is called Ixcuinatoyac, Guerrero, and I'm here in New York. I came (because) back in my hometown there is almost no work, there is no opportunity. That's why I came here to work, to support my children. I've been here for almost two years.
- The first time, when I came (to the United States), I left on November 6th, and three days I was on the road. I arrived in Camargo Tamaulipas, and I was there for about twelve days. I came across by a boat. And in ten minutes, I'm already inside [the U.S. but also] in about ten minutes I was (caught by immigration officials). Three months with more than twelve days I was in jail...They sent me back to Mexico, to Laredo Tamaulipas and I was in a migrant shelter for about a week and then I crossed again by boat, then by bus and a car.
- Thank God I am here. Thank God because the spirit of God comes with me. I have faith in God.
- **Theme: Hope and Trust--How do you Pray?**
- When I was a little girl, I would watch how (my father) did it. He has faith in God. I learned from them (my parents) because I saw what they did...they always beseech God, and that is why I do so too. When I want to pray, my mind is always with God. The Spirit of God is with me. Always. When I want to pray, I don't sleep, I don't eat, I fast.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- I have faith in God, (and) in the spirits of the cemetery (*camposanto*, holy field). When someone's head hurts, or their back hurts, or any disease, (and) I grab their neck, their head, or at that moment for like ten minutes, it (the pain) is gone...because God, regardless of whether the person is bad or good, God does not leave you at all. God is always helping everyone.
- When I (migrated to the United States) God was always with me. And when I was in jail, they (immigration officials) would give us one or two hours to go outside, and I would go to where there were green plants and pray there. I would speak with the Spirit of God and I cut three green branches, with flowers, and I beseeched God. I left them outside and when I returned a few days later they were still green, and I realized that we were going to cross soon... I am Catholic, I am never...going to leave God. I am always with a votive candle and with flowers. Yes, I am like that. I will never change that.

Theme: Revelation and Joy—On Dreams

- God knows that I know about all of that because I dream. I dreamt like I was in heaven. And there was a little door that was closed. When I got there, there was a lady. (She asked me) Where are you going? (I responded) Well, I'm going upstairs. (She said) Not right now. If you want to go, come early tomorrow morning at seven o'clock. (I said) Oh, that's fine.
- (Then the woman in the vision said) Look now if you want to go it's already open. (I said) Okay, I'm going, and in two steps I was already upstairs. And she told me, thank God that you came because everybody was sick. (I said) But how am I going to help you? I don't know anything. (she said) Sshhhh. [Don't deny the healing gift you have received.] You are not going to say that, it is not good. You have to help anyone who comes (for healing) at any moment.
- The day the dream came a woman had sought me out (for healing, and I told her) thank you, no, I don't know anything about that. And that is why the dream came as it did.

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei

Ignacia is a woman of faith. Her parents, especially her father, passed on to her the importance of prayer, fasting, vigils, faith beliefs, and ancestral traditions of healing. Her father passed on to her stories about Jesus. However, there are no translations of the Bible and specifically the New Testament in her particular dialect of Mixteco, her native language from Mexico. She self-identifies as Catholic following in the tradition of her family. In this interview, she acknowledges the destructive powers that can be at work in the self and in the world. She feels at peace and joyful in cemeteries, for Ignacia cemeteries are a holy place to experience a communion of friendship with the deceased. She lays hands on those who have been hurt or are sick, and celebrates rituals of healing and makes offerings for those who are sick to invoke the healing power of God. She also exhibits an attentiveness to God and to spirits who reveal things to her in her dreams. -**Bradford Hinze**

ii. A Theology Student Confronts the Dark Night of Racism (John B.)

Background: On June 31st, 2022, I encountered John B, who is a 57 year old Black Doctoral Student, Fordham University.

Keywords: Racism, God's Sovereignty and Judgment, Hope and Joy

Theme: Welcoming the Stranger—Hostility Toward Black People

- When I talk about race, particularly in the church, it is sorrowful because I belong to a racist church. And to say that and to live in that tension and to see it is sorrowful. Some of the conversations that are being had in the church around race are extremely basic, are extremely elementary, and almost feels regressive because (they elicit the reaction)

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

so what?

- The fact that we're having some of these basic elemental conversations (about racism) is ultimately discouraging.... The race issue is not as big in the Latino community, ...in the Mexican American community I guess because they culturally are assumed to be Catholic and so they are treated right, in a different way.
- We are so politically polarized. if something economically happens, people of color are the first ones to feel it, a financial crisis, a recession, the market collapses, wars and rumors of wars, COVID ... people of color are always the first to get hit and get hit the hardest. So I get worried about things like that, like what happens to us if something spectacular happens.

Theme: Hope and Trust in God

- I see God at work everywhere. It's hard not to see God at work. That's not to say that I know what God is doing. And that's not to assume that I have any knowledge of God's trajectory or what God might be thinking about what is to come or what may not come. But I think God is always at work if nothing else. I think God in the form of the Spirit as sustainer... God has sustained. It's clear to me that God is here. God is active.
- God is definitely working in the church to continue the process of conversion... God is moving to not only convert, but to sort of purge. It is unfortunate that Roman Catholicism has got this horrible scandal that haunts everything. All of the good discharged is tainted, dark and haunted by the sex abuse scandal. And it's hard and rough.
- I'm not interested in reconciliation. You know the formerly enslaved knew that their condition was outrageous. It was not divinely oriented. They knew that. And for those that converted, Jesus was important for them. But they also believed in the judgment. People were going to have to account for this.

Theme: Revelation and Joy (in the Eucharist)

- One of my primary reasons was for (my) conversion (to Catholicism) was the sacraments and the Eucharist.... So I'm really, really committed to ritual in the church. That is huge for me. These rituals exercised in the liturgy, in the life of the church (are) very important to me because there is some sense around the transformation in whatever way of what we would consider to be mundane now becomes holy and efficacious for spiritual work.
- That matters to me because that's what my ancestors did. I think about ... African traditional religion, my ancestors had (and have) this same idea that we can take water. We can take dirt. And somehow what was mundane or ordinary is now efficacious for spiritual good, for spiritual work, for edification of the body. And Catholicism is very, very reminiscent of that sort of ethos.
- I can take regular material and somehow be connected to that, which is transcendent. And that helps me greatly because it makes you value the world in a different way. So not everything has the potential to be holy. Everything has the potential to be a means of grace to some degree. And that is extremely important. You know, Catholics talk a lot about the Saints and the intercession of the saints. You know, and from an African perspective, you're thinking about the ancestors. You know, you really are thinking about these ancestors and the cult of the ancestors, which is something that my ancestors truly believed in, that they don't die and are like gone in a sense.

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei

John is a man of deep faith. His conversion to Catholicism took place in Atlanta, Georgia and was fostered by Wilton Gregory who was bishop of this city at the time. He had a solid background in theology when he entered Fordham University with especially strong

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

convictions about the Triune God, and in particular about Christology. His strong faith and hope in God was certainly tested during the years when Donald Trump was president and there was an escalation of police killings of Black men and women. This took its toll on John, but not his trust in the sovereignty of God and God's care for the victims of injustice, especially among Black people. John is a member of the St. Charles Borromeo Church who did not participate in the interview I conducted with community members, but his great gratitude for the faith and community and liturgical vitality of that community has been a source of consolation for him. - **Bradford Hinze**

iii. The Challenges of Being Gay and Catholic (St. Francis Xavier Parishioners)

Background: On May 10, 2022, Bradford Hinze conducted a listening session with ten LGBTQ people, groups of 2 in their 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, and 1 73 year old from St. Francis Xavier Parish, in the Lower East Side of New York.

Key Words: gay, vulnerability, tenderness, LGBT ministry.

Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- When I was in the minor seminary, one day the rector called me in and said, you need to leave. We don't think you (should stay). He couldn't say you're gay. So, he said you have mannerisms that we don't think would be good for being a parish priest. (W)e'll refer you to another place. (T)hat was crushing. That was the only time I really thought of suicide. And the only reason I didn't do it is because I just believed in hell, not in God's love that I was going to go to hell. But that too, was God saving
- A few years back when in 15 months I lost five people (to AIDS), one of whom was the bishop ...who supported me and with whom we founded a collaborative LGBT ministry. I start with that, because ... I realized that the sorrows have led me to the joys. The sorrows have given me a direction, have given me an avocation, which is my vocation in health and mental health. The sorrows have taught me how important it is to belong.
- So therefore, I dedicated my life. And then as a social or sacred justice advocate, to try to live the gospel, to bring people together. These things have taught me about what it's like to be on the outside, the pain of what it feels like to hide. And so therefore, it has helped me just to welcome the people around me and the things that give me the greatest joy.

Theme: Leaving Clericalism Behind

- I think that the church was an incredible force in my life as a child because we were devout Catholics. I'm the youngest of six kids. We went to Mass as a family every Sunday. And so Sunday held an important weight in our lives. And it brought us together as a family and I think helped form my faith up to a certain age. But then unfortunately as a child I developed this image of God I was taught.
- It was an incredibly painful and long, arduous journey to separate myself from the man made church. When I started to come to terms with my sexuality and understand that the church was (and) is a flawed institution. And now as an adult who's secure in his sexuality, the church does not offer any guidance with sexuality.
- What was so painful is that it took me a really long time... I had to divorce myself from the church for many years and reform my idea of God away from the church. So any image that I had of God that was formed as a child had to be reprogrammed. And so there's a real lack of trust now that I have and no authority that the church has over me morally anymore. And it's a good and a bad thing. You know, it's a good thing because I had to listen to my own conscience and struggle and wrestle with it. And, and that has made me an independent thinker. And the challenges, (include) those of my friends who are not Catholic have a really hard time understanding the value of the church, to be totally honest.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Theme: Revelation and Joy—Discovering One's Sexual Identity

- I would say being both gay and Catholic has been the greatest joy and the greatest struggle. I grew up Catholic. My parents were involved and are very progressive. There was a sense of community that was constantly present in our lives, and I watched them form that and I knew I wanted that, and so I intentionally created that.
- From college onward, I was part of a faith sharing group for 21 years, we met monthly, and it was extraordinary. I've also worked in the church all my life, from a Jesuit volunteer to a youth minister to a high school teacher, to Serra, and now to Maryknoll.
- At every step along the way, all of that was grounded in such a profound commitment to justice and community and solidarity added in each step. It just changed my life, and it grew deeper and deeper. But there is always this fighting, though, amidst all of that of being gay, because if you work in the Catholic Church, you can come out or it's always been a struggle too. And moreover, too, as I came to terms with being gay, it began to feel like I was living this bipolar life ...we all had to keep it in the closet. And that just grew to become frustrating... Some people ask me, why do I continue to work in the church? And especially now when I fully know that my job is at risk... People ask, why do I stay in the church? Because I do believe that there are those who are called to stay within and to challenge from within. Just as there was a challenge from that, and I've had enough role models in my life who have demonstrated that. And I believe Pope Francis is demonstrating that.

Lifting Up the *Sensus Fidei*

The women, men, and transgender people interviewed have had their faith and understanding of God and the church tested by bishops, clergy, and institutions, and over time they have reached a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith as they have "reprogrammed" their faith-knowledge and "reformed" their understanding of the church. These are people who have cultivated deep convictions about the importance of denouncing idolatrous views of the faith, of the church, and of the self, while discovering a true sense of God, themselves, and the need for a genuine faith community. -**Bradford Hinze**

c. San Diego

i. " *The image of God is love has been so huge for me, and I also wish I would've heard...[that] God is not hate.*" (Erik)

Background: Erik is a gay Catholic man who works as a music minister at Dolores Mission in Boyle Heights, CA. He is second-generation Mexican-American and grew up in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, having attended Catholic schools. The parish primarily serves its surrounding economically poor neighborhood of first- and second-generation Salvadoran-American and Mexican-American immigrants, and it enjoys significant support from those of more economically and racially privileged backgrounds.

Theme: Wisdom from the Margins

So the God that I am talking about first of all, is a loving God, a God who only knows love, who is love, and I think that is first and foremost who and what God is to me. And I think that's came to a very long time ago, I think as I was going through confirmation...I was very moved by two things I can recall. I think it's in the one of the letters of John, where it says, God is love, it straight up just says it, and I'm like...Yeah, God is love! I remember being in English class, and you learn about linking verbs, and it was like "is" is an equals sign, so to hear, "God is love," it's like, God=love...and it just resonated, it stuck with me, and for me, that is the God that I believe in, the God that I pray to, that when I talk about God, that is who I'm talking about.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

To me, God is just...and Mary is the one who stands up for her kid, even though her kid might've done the worst thing in the world and is like, Please, God, give him a second chance. That's very much the Mary I relate to, as well, the Mary who stands up for anybody and everybody.

I'm a huge believer in being the hands and feet of Jesus here on earth, so I'm all for being down with the people and walking with the people...I think where I struggle with it is, where, if you and I are part of the same church—well, not you you, but...a random person—and you're gonna come in here and be like, Yeah, let's do it...sometimes, I feel like there's a lot of show in it...sometimes it's like, Are you really in it? Or are you only here for the photo op?

Vulnerability and Tenderness

Sometimes I can't name my own struggles, and that can make it hard for me to pray.

I'm kind of fatigued right now by [other people's reactions to my coming out], I'm like, I've tried. At this point, I've put in my work. It's not to say that I can't keep trying, but I gotta move on other areas of my life...there are other areas of my life that need some attention right now. That's a little bit painful for me right now, I'll be honest with you.

The image of God is love has been so huge for me, and I also wish I would've heard...the inverse of that, which is God is not hate... And I don't think I heard that enough, I think if I had heard that from more people, even if not in an official capacity, but maybe just in a one-on-one, informal...if I would've heard or seen or experienced more of "God is not hate," that would've been huge because we could say "God is love" all day long and that can mean whatever we want it to mean...and a hateful person can get away with saying, "God is love," but that won't cover...[we need] to go beyond words and see more deeds.

Dialogue and Encounter

We don't have to like each other, but we do have to love each other. And I think as human beings, we're capable of that. We can get wrapped up in our own, kind of, institutional or political thing, or maybe it's our own self-interest or something, but we create these barriers...and it's ugly, so that's discouraging to me. So it's moments like that, where I do feel like...in my own lived experience, I'll be at church, whether I'm playing or attending, it's just like, I'm not here for that, I'm here for church, I'm here for community, and I'm here for communion...I'm here to commune...but sometimes it gets a little hard to block out the noise and the ugliness of it sometimes.

I'll even say to the priests at our church, Y'all will get up there and preach at the English Mass and have a very pro-LGBTQ English homily...and then you'll go and give the same homily at the Spanish Masses, and you won't speak directly to that, you won't say what that is. And you know, some of them have been very honest with me and have said, I don't think they'd be ready for it, and I'm like, Well, #1, you don't know that. And #2, but I need that. I need that. I needed that [when I was coming out]. And thankfully, because of the work I do at the parish, at least I heard it in this Mass, but you know what? You know who didn't hear it at the other one? My mom. My dad. Other people in my family. And I feel like, You could've helped me out there. They love and respect you [priests]. (clapping). It would've really helped me out if they would've heard...just three words, something...because now they'd know, it's not just Erik being rebellious...this is real.

Lifting up the *sensus fidei*: In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis writes, "The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society" (no. 180). Throughout my conversation with Erik, I felt from him a deep

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

longing to experience abundantly not only that kind of love from God, but also from his community, from those with whom he has shared his life for so long. He spoke initially of the positive reaction he experienced from those to whom he came out, but one can hear the pain in his voice when he describes more negative reactions from loved ones when they realized that it wasn't "a phase." I also heard from Erik a desire to be seen as more than this aspect of his identity, to be permitted to be a fully human person, in all his complexities and beauty. Listening closely to Erik—both his words and the powerful feelings and experiences behind them—calls us consider how the church—both in teaching and in practice—might more closely reflect the will of that loving God who reigns not only in our world, but also within us. **-Jennifer Owens-Jofre**

3. Vulnerability and Tenderness

a. Chicago

i. **"Stop Objectifying Me because I am a Gay Catholic!" (Gordon) Background:** Gordon is a gay Catholic who is in a stable same-sex union with a partner together they have adopted a child. Gordon is a CEO of a charter school network in Chicago and considers himself a committed and practicing Catholic. He was a Sulpician brother for two years.

Keywords: vulnerability, wounded, Trust in God, inclusion, exclusion, love of God.

Theme1: Experience of God

- "I have always found God in relationships. I have always found God in nature. I have always found God simply in the air that I breathe. And I got that from my family because that's what my father and my mother believed. And they were full of love and full of God. I found God in a very practical experience this morning when I had difficulty with my son getting up to go to school."
- "So, it's not necessarily praying to any particular God, any particular entity, but we will begin with gratitude and we stay focused on gratitude. And then we simply ask God for support."
- **Theme 2: Vulnerability and Tenderness (Gay Catholic)**
- "Why doesn't the church choose to say, 'Hey, let's work with civil society. Let's work with the law. Let's work with what is legal in this country and actually challenge a same sex couple to become better. Just as the church can do with everyone. That's one of her roles...to challenge. You can't challenge when you simply say you can't even exist. That's not a challenge. That's a disgrace. That's a denigration. There's no common ground. And so, I can only imagine Jesus weeps to see the church eliminating such a large segment of humanity"
- "Matrimony as a sacrament is something that the two people actually confer on themselves and not necessarily by the Church. It is witnessed to by a priest. Right? So, I feel that I can do that without the church. What a shame! I would prefer to do it in my faith community. I would prefer that. What a shame to be excluded. I am not going to let that ruin my relationship with God or my faith. I look at it more with pity because the church does not know and the church does not understand"
- "And the church I experienced all the way through my formation from the Servite community and the far South Side of Chicago is about community. It is about love. It is about looking out for each other. It is about extraordinarily radical, collective teachings, about the dignity of human life and the graciousness and gracefulness of all creation, of all human life, of our created life, including nature"
- "Perhaps that really isn't the foundation of church that is speaking in such a harsh, derogatory, dehumanizing way to gay Catholics. But rather it's one's own personal choice as a minister, as a bishop, as a cardinal, as a former pope, to choose to speak

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

in a profound way that defiles Jesus. When anybody who represents Jesus speaks in a way other than loving, then there is no community, then no relationship. So, my experience of that, which rattled me to no end but never for a second, made me question God or questioned my faith, was that I had left the brothers only”

- “A Catholic school asked me to please be the president, the chief executive of the school, and I said, yes, of course I would after many years. And what unfolded was this board of directors happened to be owned or controlled by the religious order and the religious order got boxed in with an understanding that a gay person in a relationship cannot be the chief executive. So, I was terminated (pauses). So, from the school that I founded, from the children, from the families, from the board, from the money, from the resources that supported the school. I could not stay there. because I was in violation of what it means to be Catholic because I am gay.” (10.19).
- “I felt terrible. I felt dehumanized. I felt objectified. I felt excluded. Eliminated. Extraordinarily vulnerable. Left out to dry. Left out hanging. Because actually, these even were my brothers. And in the religious order. And these were the families. This was the place that I invested my heart and soul as a Catholic doing mission. As a Catholic living my life there. Believing that I was expressing my faith, believing that I was living my faith. And then to be told that I cannot lead the school”
- “I am part of an organization that itself has great obstacles being the organization that it professes to be”

Theme 3: Wisdom from the Margins

- “The other part of my experience has made me stronger as an educator and as a man of God. Never objectify anybody. It's just totally always evil; never objectify. I can never presume that I have power over you to talk about you, think about you or exclude you because of who you are. That's not my place.”
- “The Catholic Church can do so much good and always has done so much good. I have done so much good as a Catholic. I still am doing so much good as a Catholic...The structural church can be so much better and can be so much more powerful and can speak to more people... The Catholic Church right now cannot speak anything but vomit to a same sex couple because the voice has a rejection. The voice is denigration”
- “I consider myself in great company because I consider myself in the company of the people Jesus chose to have dinner with. If the current church cannot choose the same people to have dinner with, they are losing out. It's not me anymore. Who's losing out? It's the church. And I pity the church for the small heartedness. Let's worry about Ukraine. Let's worry about African nations. Less worry where poverty is, less worry about the Philippines. Let's worry about the South Side, Chicago. Let's worry about these kids and Kolbe House. Why are you worrying about me? I have just given a life of service. Worry about the people who need Christ. Stop worrying about who I am. Stop objectifying who I am. Because in the end, God is love”
- “Excluding is not engaging”

Lifting the *Sensus Fidei*

There are some manifestations of the *sensus fidei* that I found in this conversation. First, is the question of where God is to be found. Gordon's words, “Excluding is not engaging,” is a clear indication that even though the church excludes him from the sacrament and has not blessed his same-sex marriage, at the deepest level of his being, he finds God fully and dynamically present in his love, family life and his work as an educator, who serves the poor.

Second, God and grace are being mediated to Gordon from his experience of love and

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

service. I found wisdom in these words: “Why not come up with a ritual for gay Catholics to honor them.” This is particularly because with regard to marriage –the only sacrament where the Church actually witnesses to the work of God already present in moving the hearts of the partners to love—the revelatory light of the love present in the same-sex partners is what the church is not seeing. In that sense, Gordon’s anguish when he says that “The Church is actively working against my dignity,” invites a deeper reflection to the hidden logic of grace in his life as a gay Catholic, experienced by him as a powerful presence of God, but sadly is not affirmed by the Church.

Finally, if one were to place this narrative side by side with the narrative of the healing of the man born blind in the Gospel of John, could it be that it is the Church that is blind rather than this gay child of God who finds and experiences God in his love life? Whereas, the Church considers him as ‘blind’, a ‘sinner’, just like the pharisees considered the blind man as being born in sin, it is Gordon who is seeing the light because he sees and witnesses to the experience of love in his heart. Just like it is actually the Pharisees who are blind and who are sinners because they fail to recognize the work of God in the blind man, the church today fails to recognize the work of God in Gordon and is indeed blind. These words of Gordon serve as a prophetic reprimand and warning but also as an invitation: *“I didn’t know that a priest can deny baptism to a child of same-sex couple...Shame on the Church” “Stop objectifying me because I am gay”-Stan Chu Ilo*

ii. “This church [St. Francis Borgia] offers inclusiveness. Inclusiveness in the Catholic tradition, but inclusiveness, nonetheless. It’s also in their language.” (Fr. Mulcrone, St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center)

Background: Jaime Waters interviewed Fr. Joseph Mulcrone, a priest at St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center in Chicago, IL. Fr on May 8, 2022. Joe signs mass in American Sign Language and speaks in English (and Spanish at some points) to offer Total Communication masses.

Key words: deaf Catholics, inclusivity, clerical sexual abuse

Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness / Clerical Sexual Abuse

- “Deaf children are sexually molested at more than twice the rate as their hearing peers. Children with disabilities are sexually abused at more than twice the rate as their non disabled peers.”
- “In the Catholic Church, we have had priests and teachers working in the church who sexually molested a number of deaf children, but interestingly enough, those predators— and they were predators—those predators all signed very well.”
- “I would never ever say I know what it means to be deaf. I would never say I know their experience.”
- “My faith is stronger because of my involvement in this community [the deaf community].” Theme: Inclusivity
- “There was a study done a few years ago from Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. It pointed out that 93% of deaf people in the United States are unevangelized. 93% are unevangelized. Not just Catholic...Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist...For most deaf people, they see the church as a hearing institution.”
- “Nobody has a church like this...deaf readers, deaf Eucharistic ministers, deaf choir.”
- “This church [St. Francis Borgia] offers inclusiveness. Inclusiveness in the Catholic tradition, but inclusiveness, nonetheless. It’s also in their language.”
- “If you think about the experience of deaf people and of people who have disabilities...What is their life experience? The key experience for people who are deaf or people with disabilities is: Do you have access or no access? [St. Francis Borgia] is a church that provides access for deaf people to access the sacraments of the church.”

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*:

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

One of the recurring themes of this interview was the importance of offering people who are deaf access to the church. Fr. Joe noted that many deaf people see the church, and religious institutions more broadly, as hearing institutions. Deaf people might occasionally be invited to participate, but in general many deaf people view religion as something for the hearing. Fr. Joe's knowledge and experience working with national and international deaf communities revealed his understanding of their needs and concerns. Access to fully participate is important to promote the faith and change the image of the church as an institution for the hearing.

Fr. Joe also noted the strong faith that is present in the deaf community and the ways that he is personally enriched by his ministry. The community is warm, welcoming, and strong in faith, even as some of them have been isolated, ignored, and violated by members of the church. Fr. Joe noted that while he signs very well and has served deaf communities for decades, he does not know the experience of being deaf. He recognized that being with people on the margins does not mean you know their lived experience. This highlights the need to be respectful and acknowledge some limitations, even of this project.

Another central aspect of this interview was the impact of clerical sexual abuse on deaf children. Fr. Joe shared statistics and characteristics of many perpetrators of sexual abuse, and deaf children are twice as likely to be victims of sexual assault than those who hear. Fr. Joe noted that unfortunately many predators learned signed language in order to connect with children who are frequently isolated in their homes and schools. Unfortunately, these children grew to trust their priests or teachers in the church who took advantage of that trust.

Fr. Joe also noted some positive steps that dioceses and the Vatican have been taking to encourage and support reporting of sexual abuse. Moreover, Fr. Joe noted the Vatican's recent use of language about "vulnerable populations," language that he found especially important. The Vatican's explicit interest and commitment to vulnerable populations is essential for the church to truly reach those who are on the peripheries of societies. - **Jaime Waters**

iii. "Prayer is very, very powerful. I think the congregation, the people in the community, helped me to realize how powerful my prayer or their prayer is." (Jing Zhang)

Background: On May 31, 2022, Jaime Waters interviewed Jing Zhang at St. Therese Chinese Catholic Church located in Chinatown in Chicago, IL. They offer Mandarin and Cantonese masses. There are also many Italian American Catholics, as the church was originally an Italian parish. St. Therese has been combined with St. Barbara Church which has created a more diverse parish. Indonesian masses are held monthly at St. Barbara. St. Therese and St. Barbara are known collectively as St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta Parish which is the Chinese Apostolate in Chicago.

Key words: vulnerability and tenderness, revelation and joy, Covid-19 pandemic, prayer
Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- "Over the years, I have been wondering what is out there. I don't believe life is just this. I felt vulnerable, lost, and was searching."
- "I feel heavy. I feel very, very, very heavy. The world right now we are living in is real. It's a new reality. It feels like a new beginning with the pandemic. Right now, people are lost."
- "People [focus] on themselves. Me. Me. Me. Other people don't even exist." "It is time for all Catholics, all Christians...just go out. Simple smile with each other. Connect with people."
- "Personally, I haven't experienced it [racism.] Well, I don't let people give me that

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- feeling. That's key."
- "We need to go out, reach out to people."
 - "Our mission and duty is to mission to others...We need to encourage gatherings and retreats."
 - Theme: Revelation and Joy
 - [I am] "blessed to be here. Blessed by the community. I am a new convert baptized six years ago."
 - "My first encounter with God. It felt so real."
 - "There is hope if we believe in God."
 - Theme: Covid-19 Pandemic
 - "The pandemic is getting a little bit better...But, for me, it has some good in it. It built unity."
 - "We did a lot of prayer groups [during the pandemic]...Mission Charity Sisters come on every Monday. We do a procession throughout the community to pray for the pandemic. Then we do adoration."
 - Theme: Prayer
 - "Every week [my sponsor and I] pray rosary together."
 - "Many people call me and ask me for my prayer, especially urgent prayer...in my house, on my knees I pray so hard with a tear. I pray Padre Pio prayer when somebody is sick. I felt a connection with Padre Pio."
 - "Prayer is very, very powerful. I think the congregation, the people in the community, helped me to realize how powerful my prayer or their prayer is."
 - "We should do more congregational prayer. People need to connect...We need to get together."

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*:

This interview focused especially on encountering God, spiritual growth and development, and reflections on the world. Jing discussed how and why she became Catholic. She found the Church to be especially open, welcoming, and inspiring. She recounted her experiences of God in her heart and in her mind through transformative dreams.

Important themes that emerged in this interview were community engagement and prayer. Jing discussed the need for members of the community and leaders to connect with one another and build the faith in relation to one another. She highlighted her encounter with God and her community which inspired her to complete RCIA and join the faith. Despite many negative aspects of the world, Jing recounted the hope she finds in her relationship with God.

Prayer is an important vehicle for connecting with God, and individual and communal prayer is central to Jing's faith. She sees prayerful activities and public devotional practices and integral to strengthening her faith and her connection to the world. She noted that many people seem disconnected and not concerned about others, but her faith has helped her to forge meaningful connections. - **Jaime Waters**

b. El Paso/Ciudad Juarez

i. "I see God on the cross," prayed and "felt like someone near me" (Jose)

Background: On May 16, Meghan Clark, Fr. Stan Chu Ilo, Dylan Corbett (HOPE/MRS) and Vanessa Salazar met with Jose, a 56 year old Mexican immigrant farm worker in El Paso. Interview after a workday at *Sin Fronteras Border Agricultural Workers Project*, a worker center that provides training, organizing, and respite space for farm workers. Conducted in Spanish by Vanessa Salazar with simultaneous translation from Dylan Corbett.

Keywords: prayer, gratitude, border, migration

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Theme 1: vulnerability and tenderness

Crossing the border, “God accompanied me at every moment on my path.” Greatest joy is his children – focused on how he teaches them as he was taught to pray. Grew up in great poverty, there were 12 children and often no food but “my mom taught

us to kneel, in the dirt, and we couldn’t get up until we prayed the creed, our father” each night

Theme 2: hope and trust

“I see God on the cross,” prayed and “felt like someone near me” and that this praying to God to change helped him change his life (ex: used to drink too much). It wasn’t the Church/Catholicism but God, “surrendered everything to God,” and changed his life.

Pope Francis, has helped us, “hold onto our soul.” If he could speak with Pope Francis, would give him a hug and ask about his life because “it is beautiful thing to hear about someone’s life.”

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

Jose shared his deep pain – the loss of a child, growing up in poverty, the breakup of his marriage, as well as his great joy in his children. Through decades of struggling with poverty and recognition of his own need to change, surrendering to God and placing himself in the hands of God clearly gave him strength. Prayer and a deep feeling of God’s presence permeated his stories. His identification with Guadeloupe and the cross while identifying a primary sin of the wealthy and powerful as feeling you are better than others—**Meghan Clark.**

ii. “God took us out of those places because he wanted us to have life” (Men under MPP)

Background: On May 18th, 2022, Meghan Clark, Fr. Stan Chu Ilo, Dylan Corbett (HOPE/MRS) and Vanessa Salazar (HOPE), met with around 70-80 men held at the Mexican Federal Government Complex in Juárez under the United States Remain in Mexico policy. Men from Nicaragua, Columbia, Honduras, Bolivia, and other countries. The men wished to express the dehumanizing and poor treatment they received many different points in their migration processes by police, governments, etc. Interview led by Vanessa Salazar and simultaneous translation by Dylan Corbett.

Keywords: violence, detention, stranger, borders, kidnapping, prayer, hope,

Note: While I may note the country that someone is from, themes and comments are often repeated across men participating in the listening session.

Theme 1: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- “I give thanks to God. We leave for a reason, God has brought us here, a lot of people are on the street suffering, but we are here.” (Nicaragua)
- “God acts in many ways” said a man who left a dictatorship in Nicaragua, crossed Mexico, got kidnapped, assaulted by police but said “God got me through”
- “If everything was fine in our countries, we wouldn’t be here.”
- **“The mercy of God is new every day when you wake up”**
- “we are men, we are being discriminated against because we are single men; men can be vulnerable too like women.”
- One man from Columbia said health, shelter, food is how God is working in his life.

Theme 2: Hope and Trust

- “We ask the Pope, all of us, that he continues to pray for us to have strength to continue” (Cuba)

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- “God works through the people who work here, may God bless them and their families.”
“God is everything given me life and the life of my family”
- **“God took us out of those places because he wanted us to have life” Lifting up Sensus Fidei:**

In our listening session, the men expressed a great deal of frustration and anger at their situation. When Pope Francis castigates and laments those who are thrown away by an inhuman migration crisis, we saw them in the men we met at the detention center –**Meghan Clark.**

c. New York

i. Finding a New Life Beyond Prison (Mychal)

Background: On May 24, 2022, Mychal P, approximately 30 years old, who was formerly incarcerated for 15 years and now is studying in the university, was interviewed by Bradford Hinze

Keywords: dialogue, encounter, self-discovery, vocation, freedom, community.

Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- At the beginning of my prison experience I was (given an opportunity to meet regularly with a bishop.) He told me “You’re a good man. You (can) learn to help people.” And that was important for me to hear at that moment in a lot of different ways, because I was in a dark place, and I was spiraling down, and I felt like like a terrible person. I hurt people and ... it made me feel bad about my life, about myself.
- I was really vulnerable... I was around a lot of bad people who were draw(ing) me in one way—we’d talk about gangs, we’d talk about drugs, and we’d talk about fights. So there was like a battle going on (during) those two years. And I’d go (to) meetings with the bishop and he was available. He was always there.... and every Thursday we’d talk.
- For me to be around someone that recognized goodness in me despite the wrong that I did, it was important for me. It set the stage for a lot that happened like after that because with that belief that I am in this world for a reason, I have a purpose, to create healing, to create wellness, ...to build communities, to whatever the work is. I have to take on that responsibility that begins with me recognizing that there’s good in me.

Theme: Revelation and Joy

- Philosophers (in) ancient Roman times used to (take) meditative walks, and that was like a form of prayer for them. They (would) just walk and walk and ... be in their minds. While I was incarcerated, I really had a hard time praying. I’d have to go outside and walk. I would walk around the yard for a couple hours. It mobilize(d) something inside of me that I can’t stir up in any other way. I know it’s a form of higher power or something that’s greater than me.
- I feel like ... God has broken in(to) my life...and it’s not all him, because I feel like it’s a collaboration in a way, because I have to show up. I have to do my part. I have to study, I have to go (to school). That must go along as I just keep showing up, you know, these connections are going to still be being made.
- While I was incarcerated, ...I wanted wisdom I wanted the power of discernment. I wanted to be good at public relations, judgment, how to make decisions. I wanted to be a strong leader. And I spent [time] reading the Bible. I spent most of my time around Proverbs, and those stories about the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 3:16-28)....

Theme: Dialogue and Encounter

- (I associate) “the pain for the duration when I was in prison, (with feeling) severely

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

disconnected from the people I was around. The other guys I lived with, guys that shared different areas of the prison experience with me. You know, I was always around guys or there was just this deep disconnect. That was an enormous source of pain for me.

- How do I connect with people as someone that's incarcerated (and) that kind of establishes another barrier that makes it hard to connect with people because...I'm a criminal and I can't be trusted, I'm dishonest. And all those labels make it hard for me to get close to people who are close to me. So that really hurt me while I was in prison.
- I take great pleasure in being able to connect with people and being able to just listen. And when I'm in that role, I'm just listening to people and just being curious about their life, about their story, about...what's going on with them internally. I feel a very (deep) sense of joy in doing that. ...

Lifting Up the *Sensus Fidei*

Mychal appears to have had little to no religious background. The life formation experiences that led to his arrest hurting another person or other people and his incarceration were not revealed in the interview. But there is a life context and a backstory of neglect and absence of care that comes out in his remarks, and in its place, there are intimations of bullying, gangs, drugs, and violence alluded to in the interview. His exposure to the Roman Stoics and meditation provides the first steps toward self-exploration, and in this process, he encounters the presence of the divine mystery and grace calling forth more in him. His encounters with the bishop offer him saving messages of healing, conversion, and reorientation. His reentry plans upon leaving prison after 15 years were ruined and deferred by COVID and the “school-first” commitment required at Ignacio House and the Thrive for Life Program offered a new orientation for self-discovery and vocation, a way of discernment and discipline as a way to go forward. -**Bradford Hinze**.

ii. Resisting Racism with Faith (St. Charles Borromeo Parish)

Background: Six Black Catholics with 2 in their 40s, 2 in 50s, 1 who is 60 and 1 who is 71 from St. Charles Borromeo Parish Harlem, New York were interviewed by Bradford Hinze

Keywords: Wisdom from the Margins, Leaving Clericalism Behind, Revelation and Joy

Theme: Wisdom from the Margins—Racism in the Church

- My brother was in the seminary. My mother decided that everybody (in my family) was going to get baptized Catholic. At about six or seven years old I was baptized. My mother said, okay, we're going to send you to a good Catholic school. And we got into this great all white Catholic school. And I found that we weren't really welcome there. And we were asked to leave soon after and to go to a black school where we would be welcome. The principal told my mother that, and I will never forget how hurt she was and how hard (it was) that we weren't welcome ... and it was supposed to be such a great experience.
- The racism that I experienced then within the Catholic Church has carried on through to this day, and I'm 70 years old now, and I still see it. And I should say things have gotten much better in a superfluous way... But the racism in our church, the denying of our importance that we bring to the church as a people, the ignoring of policies and legislation and outright blatant racism like the killing of our people in the streets [still exists]. My church will not stand up and make a point of saying that these injustices are happening, and they should not happen. It's ... fluffed over and mostly swept under the rug to this very day.
- I love my church family here at Saint Charles. It's just been amazing. But I can't for the life of me understand why my church, our church ignores bigotry, ignores the hatred, the political evil that's been happening and continues to go on. So, I pray, but it is a

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

source of tremendous pain. But my family, those around me who I love, and they are many of you, made a big difference. I'm not a bitter person in any way. But I would say that I think that it's very important to be actively involved in making a difference and being heard because if we're not heard in our church, if we're not acknowledged, then we have to make ourselves be heard and be acknowledged. And that's the way I feel.

Theme: Leaving Clericalism Behind—Clergy Sexual Abuse

- The biggest source of pain (in my life) . . . was during the whole clergy sexual abuse. (Our pastor from 1990 to 2012) was taken from us....(T)he key piece was ... this person ... was accused of something, but we were forgotten about in terms of the influence that he had on so many of our lives....(W)hether you were a school-aged kid, a baby of a teenager, a young adult, to an elder, we all had a relationship with a man who was incredible.
- That was just kind of a moment where we felt like [the] baby was stolen away and there was no support provided to us. I'm sure the complainants probably get support. But we had no mental health piece here. There was no, you know, spirit. I mean, we had spiritual guidance of the clergy that was left behind, but they were also bruised by what occurred ... That (was) the biggest source of pain and sorrow.
- I think ... we've always been that marginalized group where no one cares. So even if they didn't take it and categorize it as, oh, we took him out of that Black parish, that's still how a lot of us interpreted it.
- **Theme: Revelation and Joy—Liturgy in the Black Church**
- I realized in terms of experiences of racism in the church,...as Black Catholics I want the church to recognize us culturally and how we serve our God, how we enjoy our mass, our celebration. And if that's with gospel music, that's us. That's what you get, and you have to take all of us. You can't choose what you're going to take from us and say that it's okay, because that makes us feel good.
- What makes us feel good is our music, our dance, is having priests who are giving us the Word of God, but also letting us understand how it works, and who we are in this [reality and] in this world, and how to put those two together. We shouldn't have to say that they must run parallel. They should be one. But to have that person (the priest) help us through that. And I didn't grow up in a parish like Saint Charles. I grew up in a predominantly white parish. And honestly, I think that in retrospect, I don't remember [that experience.] Only thing I remember is my communion and my confirmation... But I don't remember anything else. And I think that's sad.
- I don't feel like I'm a reborn Christian Catholic. But I have [come to believe that] we're definitely born again and again.

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei

The people from St. Charles Borromeo Parish have long histories in this parish and in Harlem and have experienced racism here in the Catholic Church at every level and in society. Nevertheless, they are genuinely and deeply devoted to God through daily prayer, through their participation in the Eucharist, but also through their experience of Christ's presence in the gathered assembly of worship, in Gospel music as well as in other stylistic idioms, in dance. As profound as their experience is of this faith community, regardless of who their priest is, they also have a clear sense that pastors and priests who participate in the life of the sacraments should be able to interpret the Word of God in relation to the experiences of life, and far too often this includes experiences of racism. They come and worship with trust, with joy, and with hope that God will help them find their way. There are shared concerns, frustrations, disappointments, and anger these parishioners experience that have been aroused by the words and actions of members of the archdiocesan hierarchy, priests, and white representatives of the lay faithful, whether it is in white

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

parishes or on high level archdiocesan committees that selected members of this parish who are asked to serve but feel disconnected and disregarded by the white members on these committees. -**Bradford Hinze**

d. San Diego/Los Angeles

i. **"I didn't want to feel that I thought I was going to be using God to get what I want."**
(Vincent)

Background: On May 17, 2022, Tom Landy interviewed Vincent C., a 59 year old man, former gang member and formerly imprisoned at Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles.

Keywords: forgiveness, violence, dialogue, prison, responsibility

Theme 1: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- At 38, after being shot, asked God for forgiveness: "It was over gang violence. And then, I'm laying up in the hospital, well I know that now that, I asked God for forgiveness. And you know most times when you do something bad, real bad stuff, the first thing that comes to mind was God. Now they ain't going to do it no more. God please save me. And, I didn't do it for that reason, I just asked God to save my life. But, I still got, after I got, he saved my life, I went out there, I still wanted to see you all and I was still gang banging. And it took me years down the road for me to stop, really stop gang banging. Eight years before I got out, before I stopped gang banging."
- "So, I didn't, I asked God forgiveness and then started going to church, and I'm changing my life goals. I'm changing my life goals, but I didn't change my life goals by going to church. I changed my life goals by going to groups and classes, and leaving the gang life alone. But I did go to church on Sundays, but I didn't go every Sunday."
- "My greatest sorrow is losing my brothers and sisters. And I couldn't be there for my mom. That's my greatest sorrow. That hurt and it still hurts to this day because I wasn't there when she had to bury her kids. And I'm the youngest out of all of them, so that was my greatest sorrow. Not being in prison, but it is the greatest sorrow because I took a life too when I was gang banging...I'm forgiven... When I think about him, always I say his name, Rodney Poindexter. Because that was, when I took his life, I was 15 and he was 15. We were living the gang life."
- "When I got into prison, I didn't know how to write to my mom. And they told me to write about... Well, I know how to, once I got able to educate myself, I knew how to write letters then, there wasn't no pain then, a source of pain. But not only just my family suffered or Mr. Poindexter's family suffered, but I started to realize the police suffered, the judge
- suffered, the DA suffered, medic people suffered, everybody, the doctor suffered because they to deal with a life that was lost. But I understand back then what I understand now. My whole community suffered, his community suffered, because he didn't have a chance to go up in life, have kids, and whatever. I removed that."
- Theme 2: Hope and Trust
- "Well, I believe in God. I think he's a loving God. I really do. I believe, I don't look at him like if I need something, God will help me, and if he don't help right then and there, then there's not a God. I don't think like that. I know there's a God, it was his blood, everything. God created everything, the grass, everything, I really believe that."
- On God being with him: "he let me make it through prison 41 years. If there wasn't God on my side and I had to have the material things he said, if it wasn't for God on my, I don't know if I would've made it through prison. It was a blessing and I didn't ask for God to show me that, it's just, I just know God got me through prison 41 years. Because he got a plan for me and I truly believe that. He got a plan for me."

Theme 3: Dialogue & Encounter

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- On Racism - “door open but its not open” - what would draw back in? “Well, what would draw them back in church is dialogue and come out there and show why they should be part of this. Because when you don't know about something, you can't join something and you ain't going to join no cult. So, there's not a lot of dialogue in that community about the Catholic thing. Hispanics, yes, but African American, no. There's no dialogue in the church and people looking for a religion to be part of. They're tired of Christianity. I ain't saying there's nothing wrong with Christianity, they're just looking for something new.”
- Fr. Greg @ Homeboy: “think he's the greatest person ... since I got out of prison. Because when I got out of prison, and I came down here in one month he didn't ask how long I was in prison, he didn't ask for no ID, he didn't ask for nothing. **He just said, “Welcome. You at home. Once you cross over that threshold, you at home. You got a job.”**”

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

Two theological points pervade Tom's interview with Vincent - the desire for a faith life that is not transactional and the desire for a welcoming, inclusive space. Vincent notes more than once that he does not want a relationship with God that is just about asking for things. He also demonstrates a real sense of an internalized recognition that change and forgiveness are difficult. He notes, **“I didn't change my life goals by going to church. I changed my life goals by going to groups and classes, and leaving the gang life alone. But I did go to church on Sundays, but I didn't go every Sunday.”** Part of rejecting a transactional faith, is an implicit rejection of a kind of *cheap grace*. Vincent knows while prayer may play a part, praying without groups and classes - all the practical help he needed, will be unsuccessful in changing his life. Similarly, he and others interviewed at Homeboy Industries juxtapose the welcome felt at Homeboy with the tension or outright suspicion felt upon entering churches. There is a desire for faith and to be part of a faith community, but genuine anxiety about welcome and belonging. **-Meghan Clark**

ii. **“I know God forgives but we as people, cultures, everything, we don't really forgive” (Homeboy Industries)**

Background: On May 17 and May 18th, 2022, Tom Landy interviewed two groups (13 people) at Homeboy Industries. Homeboy Industries “provides hope, training, and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated people, allowing them to redirect their lives and become contributing members of our community.” (Mission statement). Founded by Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ and Delores Mission in the City of Los Angeles. (David V, Deborah, Marlo, David W, Stevie, Mark, David M, Fabian, Rene, Luis, and others)

Keywords: prayer, vulnerability, Jesus, forgiveness, inclusion

Theme 1: Hope and Trust

- On Prayer: “I pray to Jesus Christ. I'm Christian, I gave my life to God. And so, I gave my life to God six years ago. And I find it hard to pray, but I fully dedicate my life into serving God, so in which I meditate on the word of God every day.”
- ○ On Jesus/God: “I believe that in his son... he took everything upon himself. That was the elimination of the goat sacrifice, the doves, the sacrifice that was given ... Yeah, so I believe that he did take everything and he bore it on his shoulders on behalf because I was not even alive at the time that he did that. But yet it extended to the day that I was born even until now. Actually, said that yeah, so that sacrifice is still mine today. So, and I believe that the reason that he was baptized is because he didn't have to. He was perfect. He was without sin and that he was baptized so that he could also take that out of the way. He removed and took everything out of the way so that there would be no more things that we did as tradition which they happened to do at that particular time

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

through tradition...And so the things that was brought down to my mother, her mother, her mother before and so forth and so on are things that was taught to us by tradition and not through study. But through things that were preached into them and that they believed like hell for example."

- ○ "I grew up Jehovah Witness too. I studied with Catholics. I studied with Christians, but Jehovah Witness was mostly my parents. But and it's true that's the thing about you were about to say about hell. I don't believe in hell because I always thought that people that believe in hell so you believe if you see your child grow up and he makes mistakes, he commits sins. Yeah, so you would actually be okay with him burning in hell? Burning in a place for eternal life? You're not going to want to watch that. You're not going to do that. You're not going to do that to your son or your daughter and it's the same thing with God. God's not going to do that to us. Because we are his kids so he's not going to allow us to suffer and watch us because he watches everything. So, he's not going to sit there and watch us suffer. So, it's like so a lot of things in the Bible doesn't make sense, honestly."
- ○ "since I've been out for three months, I've been going to church every Saturday with my aunt. And I pray, like Daniel, he prays three times a day. I try to pray no less than three, but I have a continued talk or, "Thank you God for this," or something. Even if a trial happens, I'm like, "God get me through this." And I don't show my presence of, "Oh, I'm a Bible thumper," because God says just how you pray, come to me, pray in secret, that's how you know it's true. And that's where I'm at, I became to myself true now that I found myself with God."
- ○ "My mom's a catechism teacher. She banged that church into our heads growing up. And I always growing up whatever you're going through, whatever you're suffering in my days of running in the streets and gang banging. And any kind of suffering that I endured and that I just wanted to get away from I remember my mom always telling me offer it up to God. So that whatever you're going through is not in vain and I always felt comfort in that. Praying and offering that up and in the end everything coming out okay."
- Struggle to pray: "Just because I've never really felt his presence. And I just felt like I was raised or brought up, just taught to just pray to this, not imaginary person, but well we can't see God, it's just a spirit that you got to have faith in. So, I think I just have a hard time knowing or finding out who God really is."
- "When I got arrested for my last crime, when I went to prison, I felt like it was an act of God because I wanted to get sober so bad. And I really feel like I can talk to God, and I also feel like he knows without me having to say it, how I feel emotionally or what I'm going through."
- Who is God?
- ○ God's everything to me. God is everything to me.
- ○ God's a celestial being.
- ○ "I don't feel like I'm judged by God. I feel like if I make a mistake or if I make a bad choice that I already know better, that it's a bad choice to begin with. But I don't feel like he's judging me or I'm going to be punished, it's weird but I'll punish myself."
- ○ "Gods are real, there's more than one God, I believe, and certain gods are just as jealous as the God that we were taught about in church. And it's not a good thing to mess around with different things if you don't know a lot about it...I went back and I started learning more about God and I wanted to know who God was. ...[which god?]. The God that we learned about in church. But I learned that the God that I learned about in church is not who God is. I learned that God is in everything and everybody, and God is more than just a big old man up in heaven. I believe that God works through everybody and everything, and he gives us gifts. And I've experienced so many different things, positive things through praying to God. But I also pray to the

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- universe, and then I pray to my angels and it's helped me a lot.”
- ○ But I believe in God, I do pray to God. Like David said, God is in all of us, he loves all of us. I do be questioning God too, as far as the different religions. I was born a Christian, I'm Christian but I am curious about how they say you got to accept Jesus as your Lord Savior in order to get to heaven. Like I said, I'm a Christian, but I wonder about what everybody else says, what's with all these other religions, they're not supposed to make it, are they not going to make it?
 - Finding God @ Homeboy: “If it is hard to find God or if you find yourself in troubles, this is a good place to be because it makes it easier. This place makes a world of difference, especially if you don't have nowhere to go or if you want to better yourself, this is the place to do it. There's so many opportunities here, so much support and so much love, not just from the staff and from people, but just from us.”

Theme 3: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- “The greatest joy in my life is to be here today. I think a lot of the sorrow and the pain that I feel is behind the way things are nowadays. But again, like I said, just to be able to face that, the reality that I face today is better, especially being sober. That's God for you.”
- “I used to think my joy in life was my kids and that was my greatest accomplishment. But when I lost my daughters, I found myself and I learned who I was and I learned that joy and happiness comes from within. And now I can experience things and be present in the moment and enjoy it even though I still have sorrow in my heart, I've learned that happiness is within me and wherever I go.”
- “I used to hate my sister too, and I love her now. I've loved her for a long time but growing up I had a lot of hate, I used to hate her. I didn't start loving her until I grew older. I couldn't say I loved my sister, and as we got older and she was hurting my mom, and I didn't know what to do. That was a real bad point in my life because I didn't want to hurt my sister but it comes down to that happening. I've built a relationship with her now and I'm glad.”
- “I know God forgives but we as people, cultures, everything, we don't really forgive”
- “I thank God that I'm not doing heroin anymore, I'm on Suboxone, still getting high and I'm trying to be sober off that too. And I'm just worried that once I'm clean and I'm sober-sober, if a situation happens or if I don't want to feel the pain, I don't want to feel the sadness, and I'm going to run the drugs. That's what I'm scared of because what I am right now is, it keeps me calm, it keeps my sorrow, my pain to a minimum. That's my sorrow.”
- One common theme was being targeted for suspicion when going to Church - because of their tattoos, how they look, etc.
- ○ They didn't just pray for me once, they kept praying, that's where it got me mad because now you're trying to take those demons out of me. And you know before church is about to end, they say like, “Well, if anyone wants to come to the altar and just ask for forgiveness,” the pastor he was looking at me like, “You need to come up here.”
- ○ So, you'll get criticized, I've been to plenty of churches and as soon as I walk in, they put all their attention on me, it's like, “Now you belong here.” ○ When he came back after prison, “I wasn't tatted down, I only had my hands, now I'm all tatted down. And the people that knew me back then, they embraced me, told me they prayed for me. But the new members, the new people, they looked at me and they just gave me smug”

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

Throughout the listening sessions at Homeboy Industries, prayer outside of church and being welcomed permeate. Prayer is complicated and the very idea of praying as a group

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

for someone can be quite fraught. In many of the reflections in the listening sessions, the men and women at Homeboy note the unease and unwelcome they feel when they go into a church, often tied to suspicion of their tattoos. **“So, you’ll get criticized, I’ve been to plenty of churches and as soon as I walk in, they put all their attention on me, it’s like, “Now you belong here.”** This so-called welcome described feels more like a threat than an invitation. It is not that you belong here because you too are a child of God, and one of us, but experienced as a judgment of sinfulness and needed repentance. When one man came back after prison, “I wasn’t tatted down, I only had my hands, now I’m all tatted down. And the people that knew me back then, they embraced me, told me they prayed for me. But the new members, the new people, they looked at me and they just gave me smug” In this witness, we see both genuine community and prayer, and the use of prayer to divide and judge. This is in stark contrast with the experience at Homeboy Industries itself. The men and women who shared in Dr. Landy’s listening session speak of a longing for God, of a complicated but real prayer life; yet one located primarily outside church buildings and community. As Pope Francis has noted, the “rhetoric of inclusion” without a deep spirituality of inclusion does not build a culture of mercy and tenderness. The experiences of persons at Homeboy should challenge church communities to reflect upon the disconnect between rhetoric and practice - particularly with respect to welcome and prayer.

- Meghan Clark.

iii. *“I hope one day, I really, really hope that I could get married in the Catholic Church.”*
(Brett)

Background: At the time of this interview, Brett Schafer was finishing his last year of undergraduate studies at the University of San Diego. I was able to get to know him a bit through our work together in my liberation theologies course. Having grown up Catholic in Portland, Oregon, Brett learned he was gay in middle school and has struggled with the lack of acceptance he experienced in many corners of the Catholic community there. He describes feeling lucky that his family and his classmates at the Catholic and Jesuit high school he attended were accepting of him and his sexuality.

Themes: *Vulnerability and Tenderness*

“I’ve definitely grown into myself in college, but sometimes I struggle with my sexuality and it’s not... I think the LGBTQ community is very welcoming at USD, but obviously almost anywhere you go, there are still pockets of disagreement. And I’ve heard that on campus and that said to me, to my face. And...that’s really hard because that’s something I really can’t change. But...I’m coming from a Catholic high school and Portland’s very, very liberal. So I was very fortunate to grow up there, and I was sort of expecting the same Catholic community here... It’s not entirely the same [here]. And I think some of my religious friends, they also don’t agree with the LGBTQ community... So, in a nutshell, I guess just not feeling like I’m being accepted. That’s one of the biggest ones.”

“Growing up in that, when I learned I was gay...it was sort of like these two different identities [being gay and being Catholic] came crashing together. And that was really hard for a couple years, just to feel like something I was uncomfortable with. And I felt like I shouldn’t have that anymore.”

“I think for me the hardest part was telling everyone, you know, I was too afraid of rejection to tell anyone and bringing up anyone that I thought it was just better if you pray. So hearing these things being preached in church and then I feel like since I was just a freshman, I just, I, I was too afraid to risk losing out. And I think if I had known that my parents would be more open or open about it, I would have found a lot more closure sooner. So I think being open about how welcoming a parish is about homosexuality.”

“The pastor at my church, he passed away probably two years ago. But he would talk about

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

how it wasn't exactly holy and how people that are homosexual or are and part of the LGBTQ community aren't to go to heaven. And I'm coming from a young age, you know, when you're naive, you'll listen to anything, pretty much. You're a lot more willing to be open to ideas. So that was just really hard because obviously I was the kid, and hearing it from an adult, it had to be right. So yeah, just, certain homilies, just didn't make me feel like I could be welcome in church."

Theme: Hope and Trust

"[Praying to God], it's kind of hopeful, I think. You know, you read my [spiritual autobiography] essay, but for the longest time, I desperately needed some hope in my life. And I think praying that things would get better is really what forced me to pray."

"Growing up, I didn't really know I was gay until probably middle school. And then at that point I had already been going to church for many years, and it was really sort of like a self doubt moment like, Do I really belong here? Mm hmm. And then, like I had mentioned in passing, that, you know, my first couple of years of high school were really tough because I was still going to a Catholic high school. I didn't feel like I belonged just because of what I had heard from my church. But then going on that retreat and seeing the community and seeing how welcoming the Catholic Church could be, the potential that was just so much help. And I feel like that retreat just really was very transformative. And after that, I really felt like I had a place in the church. Mm hmm. And then because of. Because it was a Catholic retreat, it really fostered that community for me."

"And, you know, I hope one day, I really, really hope that I could get married in the Catholic Church. And I hope that Pope Francis could do something about that. But I know that that's a lofty goal."

Theme: Christians in the Public Sphere

"I definitely think...there's issues in the world where the Catholic Church could be more involved because of the message that it preaches, taking care of people, you know, like open arms."

"Gender inequality. My parish is total, all males, not the parishioners, but the pastors and everything. Even the choir. Everything. There's just not very, you know, like what we talked about in class. It's just, it would take a really, really long time for the Catholic Church to be open to the idea of, like, a female in a position of power in the church. And since that's the case, I don't think it's just hard to see there being any change. But I think since it's so male dominated, I think being more open to the idea of women being the church could be at least the first shift away the Catholic Church could make or, you know, donating or sort of like reallocating their donations to other donations to help for charities."

Lifting up the *sensus fidei*: Francis' response to reporters *en route* to Rome from World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013 has had a significant impact on perceptions of the Catholic Church on homosexuality. Of our gay siblings, Francis is reported to have said, "Who am I to judge them if they're seeking the Lord in good faith?"¹ Brett is one such person—a young man who continues to seek our God in good faith, even as some in the Church have judged him, both directly and indirectly. Throughout our conversation, he spoke earnestly about the challenges that have distanced him in some ways from traditional Catholic practices like Mass attendance, to which he has said he has returned since this interview. While priestly ministry can bear many good gifts in the lives of parishioners, I continue to be struck by Brett's memory of a parish priest saying from the pulpit that gay people won't be welcomed into heaven and the vulnerability of young people who look to faithful adults for guidance, especially on realities as close to our hearts as this one.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

¹John L. Allen, Jr. "Pope on homosexuals: 'Who am I to judge?'" *National Catholic Reporter*, July 29, 2013, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/pope-homosexuals-who-am-i-judge>.

In Brett's words, I hear an honest and faithful seeking of a church space that will welcome all of him, without asking him to leave his sexuality at the door. While he didn't say so explicitly, I am curious about whether his sensitivity to the possibility of a disconnect between words and actions and his concerns about gender inequality might be outcomes of his own experiences of emotional marginalization due to harmful actions like those of his parish priest. That marginalization poses a stark contrast to the sense of at-home-ness he felt during a retreat at his Catholic high school and when he came out to his family. That he would dream of being married in the Church is telling. His words speak to his longing to be fully accepted by the Church that raised him. -**Jennifer Owens-Jofre**

iv. *"I'm still struggling with being a Catholic man and a gay man at the same time."* (Diego)

Background: Diego is an undergraduate studying political science at the University of San Diego, an independent Catholic university in Southern California. He describes the creative and painful tension between being gay and Catholic throughout our conversation.

Themes: *Vulnerability and Tenderness*

I think, like I mentioned before, my family and I haven't always had the best relationships, we've definitely sort of struggled, at different points in my life. Mainly my sources of pain have all kind of sourced from the fact that I am gay. I identify as a gay man, I'm very proud of that. And when I came out, I decided, I don't hide it at all, and that was very much a tough thing for some of my family members to accept.

And then, as well, I'm still struggling with being a Catholic man and a gay man at the same time. Holding those two identities can often be very contradictory. And although I love my university completely, like I said, many of my sources of joy have come from the university, there have definitely been some points where I've felt like the university hasn't wanted to step up, in terms of support for the LGBTQ community...and with the church in general, it does make me sad to see that progress has been extremely slow in the Catholic Church.

We do things like this, you know...and it can be a bit frustrating because things don't change afterwards. I don't mean to be pessimistic, but if at the end of the day, I do this interview, and around the world, interviews like this are happening, and nothing changes, then I think, it's just kind of adding to this image that the Church likes to put on sometimes, in my opinion, of like, Oh, we want to hear from everyone and support everyone. Here, come help us do this, but at the end of the day, nothing's gonna change. So that's very much a source of frustration for me, I think.

I think maybe it's a human thing in me, where I wish that God would just come down and change things. I see things going on, especially in the news and in my country. For context, I'm a political science major here at the University of San Diego, and I wanna go pre-law...but it's really sad, especially as an American, to see the state of my country now. Regardless of political ideologies, there's definitely a divide in our country now.... How could God let some of these things happen? As much as I like to think that everything happens for a reason, I think [about what just happened in Uvalde], Why would a mom or dad not get to pick up their child from school? What is the reason for that?

Hope and Trust

When I'm looking back on my life...I think oftentimes, in the moment, it can be hard to see God working. For me, it's not like, when I pray, something happens... but when I look back on my life, even through all the hardships I've experienced...I look back now, and I would

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

not have gotten to this point without God working because He's led me to this point now, where I am truly happy. I very much enjoy my life right now, and it's not to say that everything is perfect, but I know, deep down and inside, that this is where I'm supposed to be. And it's made me into this person that I think...God wanted me to be at this point in my life.

There are multiple times in the Bible...where God knows us before we're even born or before we're even made, and I think that brings a lot of comfort to me...especially as a gay Catholic man, there are a lot of contradictions in what I do in my life and what the Catholic Church kind of wants me to do as a Catholic man, and to know that God knew me before I was even born or even created, and this is the way He wanted me to be, regardless of what certain things or doctrines say in the institution. My relationship with God is separate from...my relationship with the institution. When I look at passages like that in the Bible, it's like, Ok, this is what God wanted me to do and the way God wanted me to be.

I think for the most part the church has been a source of peace and of love for me. Like I've mentioned a few times already, I know it's not perfect, and there are things I don't agree with, but in the hard times in my life, I think I have turned to the church for support and for peace, and I've received it, especially at my parish here at the University of San Diego. It's just been complete love and complete acceptance, and I feel like I can be myself... I genuinely have just felt loved.... The majority of it has been a source of peace for me.

Theme: Christians in the Public Sphere

I know that I will never turn my back on my religion, but it does get difficult sometimes when those doctrines get put out there, or even when there's lack of action when certain things happen, and the church doesn't speak out against it.

The church has been kind of like a friend, where I've been able to turn to them and just seek peace in the institution, but it's almost like I'm being stabbed in the back sometimes, when the church is fast to protect certain things, in my opinion, and good things, I think they should protect those things and they should be advocated for, like the homeless, migrants, things like that, but I think it's very strange to see that as soon as the LGBTQ community is brought into play, the brakes are pumped. It's like, Whoa whoa whoa, we need to be careful with what we say.

Lifting up the *sensus fidei*: In *Fratelli Tutti* no. 94, Francis writes, "Love, then, is more than just a series of benevolent actions. Those actions have their source in a union increasingly directed towards others, considering them of value, worthy, pleasing and beautiful apart from their physical or moral appearances. Our love for others, for who they *are*, moves us to seek the best for their lives. Only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all." In Diego's words, I hear deep gratitude to the individuals and communities who have taught him the truth of the Holy Father's insight here. When he speaks of his friends and the work they have done together through University Ministry, he lights up; and the pride he feels about being a part of something that has contributed to the good of those who take part in it shines through. Even so, his grief is palpable. The rejection he has experienced within his family and in other parts of his life because of his sexual identity is a wound he carries, and he describes the tension between gay and being Catholic in ways that are painstakingly bittersweet. Like other interviewees, he seeks institutional resolution to that tension. That wound is deepened when the church is silent or speaks in "contradictory" ways, as Diego describes it, on realities that affect him and other LGBTQ Catholics. Also in *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis laments the darker side of politics, especially when personal gain is prioritized over collective well-being (no. 197). He encourages us to consider how much love we invest in our work in the public sphere, whether we have been

**DOING THEOLOGY
FROM THE EXISTENTIAL
PERIPHERIES
REPORT**

mindful of those most marginalized in our political involvement. Diego expresses his appreciation for the ways the Church endeavors to protect and advocate for those on the margins, especially those who are unhoused and migrants; but he expresses a longing for the LGBTQ community to be similarly advocated for and protected. - **Jennifer Owens-Jofre**

4. Dialogue and Encounter

a. New York

i. “God is God, Prayer is Prayer” (Survivors of Labor Trafficking)

Background: On June 1, 2022, Meghan Clark and Ana Tavares (Spanish assistance) visited one of the Lifeway Networks Safe housing programs. Lifeway Network, founded by Sr. Joan Dawber, SC, is one of only two programs in the New York metro area providing safe housing specifically for both domestic and foreign-born women survivors of human trafficking. We shared a meal with four immigrant women (from Mexico, Guyana, Philippines, Kenya) who have experienced forced labor, trafficking, and related situations. Only the woman from the Philippines was Catholic, 2 Muslim, and 1 Jehovah’s Witness (not photographed)

Keywords: honesty, inter-religious, Christian, Muslim, trafficking, dishonest, Mary,

Theme: Dialogue and Encounter

*Two Muslim women shared their stories of maintaining their Muslim faith (praying with the Koran but listening to Christian sermons and feeling welcomed by Christians along their journeys. In particular, in their difficulties... additionally we had an interesting discussion of Catholics understanding of Mary

- “**God is God, Prayer is Prayer**” (Sayan, Guinea)
- “Jesus left us the model to pray, Matthew 6 all of it but especially the Our Father. First he said to sanctify the name of the Father.... priorities that Jesus is the name of God be sanctified and that the Kingdom of God come. That same prayer tells us what to do” (Carol, Jehovah’s witness)
- Prayer: “since his communication with him, it is like talking to a friend. So when one has a good friend and you have good communication with their friend and you have a problem, you go to that friend. But in the case of God it is bigger and more important” (Carol, Jehovah’s Witness”)
- “**Prayer is needed to survive not just spiritually but physically...it is especially like water, you can spend time without eating but not without water**” (Carol, Jehovah’s witness) – explaining prayer is a basic need.
- “Because I have more friends, Christian people who have a faith. I like the company. Christian people are not because I’m complex or I don’t like my people. I like my people. I respect my people. But there there’s something Christian people do. I like that.” (Sayan, Muslim, Guinea)
- “**you can be Muslim you can be Christian it does matter for me when you honest I follow you whatever you are, I don’t care**” (Sayan, Muslim, Guinea)
- **Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness**
- Note: VULNERABILITY: *one persistent theme that does not fit with the overall themes but is relevant to the question of vulnerability is that over and over the women spoke about the importance of honesty and invoking different kinds of fraud/scams – obviously deception was a shared experience in their labor trafficking experiences.
- “I believe in God, only six grade education, but I am here.” (Tita, raised Catholic, Philippines)
- “I do not go to church. Uh, maybe because I always work, but every single, every minute, every hour God is in my mind, in my heart. So I always prayed. That’s why I always survive with my life and my life, because I’m only I’m a single mother, so. And I know Jesus is there for me. He guide me and he’d take care of me always.” (Tita, Philippines)
- Almost died of severe illness and had a spiritual vision of like Devil/snake and then a vision of Mary, “That night I am sleeping. I don’t know if you believe Mama Mary, the

Virgin Mary that night before I go to the hospital after nine and the one hour I get up and then the the night I dreamed of mother mary, I look I opened my eyes and moments is there like this? She is looking at me, just looking at me.” (Tita, Philippines) (Janitor offered her his blood when the hospital had no blood)

- Saw/Felt God’s presence during childbirth. – feeling of God’s presence in times of pain and difficulty said: “to pray every time to same one. God. Yes, there’s someone God I believe in Jesus Christ I, I will ever I believe yes, I know God is there everywhere. So even the first even I remember the time I went to my doctor, they told me to they ask me your religion. I say that I’m Christian. They ask me if you want. You want us to pray for you in Christian. I told them on Islamic, but they told they told - They ask me to pray for me in Christian. I said yes, no problem. There’s no problem there and I’m happy with it. Yes, there’s only one God.” ... “I believe in Jesus too much...I’m not saying that I’m Christian, but I feel like most Christians.” (Maki, Muslim, Kenya)

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei

Within this interreligious group of women, there is a profound faith in God. Deep belief in the one God that unites the Muslim women with the Christians/Catholics they encounter. It is noteworthy that it is the welcoming concern (like from Lifeway) that shape their view of Christianity. Carol, a Jehovah’s witness, were she to meet Pope Francis, she would like to discuss with him the Sermon on the Mount. Despite great difficulties and lack of access to education, these women all thought deeply about faith and find God in their resilience. Of particular note, is the specific draw of Christianity tied to experiencing welcome, love, and help from particular Christians (including being comforted by preaching about the love of God they have heard). Underneath many of the stories they shared, was the deep experience of fraud, dishonesty, manipulation – in contrast with a firm conviction that people of faith should / must be honest, first and foremost. **“you can be Muslim you can be Christian it does matter for me when you are honest I follow you whatever you are, I don’t care”** (got the most agreement over conversation). Theological insight: God is the one you can trust, who won’t betray you or defraud you—**Meghan Clark**.

b. El Paso/Ciudad Juárez

i. Stop the Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples (Indigenous community at Parroquia San Vincente de Paul)

Background: The Parroquia San Vincente de Paul Catholic parish is led by Pbro. Alejandro Martinez. The parish, while it is the home Church for the Catholic Ramamurri community, members of 8 other indigenous nations came for the meeting: Purépecha, Wahaka, Mixtec, Chinantec, Mazatec, Chichimeca. The parish church was built amidst rocky grounds on a hilly slope overlooking the city of Ciudad Juárez. The setting for our meeting was inside the church and the people sat in a circle like a family. We began the encounter with a prayer and ended with a prayer said spontaneously. The meeting was also accompanied by a good dinner. It was interesting to note that children were also present at the listening session and there was a rich mix of the young and old; men and women; children and adults. The strong presence and voice of women leaders in the conversation was notable showing a tradition of equality and capacity for advocacy that is associated with indigenous women—a demonstrative model of women leadership and inclusion of women in the mainstream in the Catholic Church. Simultaneous translation provided by Dylan Corbett.

Key Words: encounter, dialogue, listen, suffering, abandoned, discrimination, culture

Theme 1: Vulnerability

- “The condition of indigenous peoples during the pandemic was very difficult. It was so difficult for our children who could not have access to online learning”—**Adriana**.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- “During COVID, we carried the Cross and we sacrificed chicken to prevent this sickness from entering into our community.”—**Santaria**
- “Many of our people died from COVID and many are still dying from suffering. Ask the Pope to continue to pray for us and to pray so that our children will have the opportunity to go to school and have a better future”—**Martha**.
 - “They should have kept the church open during COVID or the priests should have brought the Blessed Sacrament to the homes”—**Rosalinda**
 - **Theme 2: Dialogue/Encounter**
 - “We believe in God; we have values, but these have been invaded by many negativities about indigenous peoples and cultures”—**Wahaka spokesperson**.
 - “We need to have pastors close to us and churches close to us. We travel long distances for spiritual support. Pope Francis should make it possible for the churches to be near so that we do not travel long distance to get the baptismal certificates of our children”—**Luis Elizabeth**.
 - “Stop the discrimination against indigenous peoples”—**Theresa**.
 - “Priests at the national level should teach the bible to our children; priests should learn how to be humble and listen to indigenous peoples and walk with us as a community. It is important to recognize a lot of abuse and suffering in our indigenous communities from the Church. We should be ministered to in our language. Some of our people cannot understand Spanish and it is discriminatory speaking to us in a foreign language; this requires greater sensibility”—**spokesperson for the Raramuri**.
 - “Nobody listens to us; we are happy that Pope Francis sent you here”—**spokesperson for the Raramuri community**.
 - “We suffer from climate change, insecurity. People have taken our land away from us for agriculture and narco-trade, many of our people who work receive low wages and die of frustration and take their own lives. Many Raramuri people are being killed by low wages. We want to reconstruct the social fabric of our communities”—**spokesperson for the Raramuri**.
 - “The priests are charging us a lot of money for the sacraments. Priests charge us 1000 pesos for Mass and 1500 pesos for marriage. So, our people get discouraged and many have left the Church”—**Mazatec elder**.

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei

This was a very profoundly moving encounter. There was a sense of being one family that one experiences in the midst of this community; the feeling that ‘we are all in this together.’ One wisdom that one gains from this site is that the indigenous peoples are beginning to take ownership of their own lives and are reclaiming their own history and reinterpreting their past. We received two petitions addressed to the Holy Father on the revocation of the charter and papal bulls that gave Spain and Portugal the right to take over the land of the indigenous peoples (1493). The indigenous peoples are so conscious and rightly outraged by the failings of the Catholic Church and the complicity of the Church in some of the most brutal and painful events that still define their lot today.

The liberative impulse that arises from within the indigenous culture finds a strong resonance in Christianity. The conversational partners in this encounter describe the suffering, oppression and discrimination that they have faced for ages as ‘walking with the Cross’; but they also see the Cross as a sign of liberation and an inspiration for agency and resistance. In this journey with the Lord, they find that the church does not always accompany them and rather that the church takes advantage of them. This might not be as a result of any official policy or program, but sometime the worst form of abuse is that of silence. And in this regard, the spokespersons in this encounter spoke of the need for the church to be a partner with the indigenous peoples and a traveling companion. However, this can only happen when grassroot pastoral agents are present with the people, have

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

their boots on the ground so that they can hear God's words echoing mutually from the heart of the cultures of the indigenous peoples and from the Gospel.

Finally, one tension point that emerged during the encounter is important for surfacing the wisdom from this site. In the course of our conversation on how COVID impacted the lives of indigenous peoples, there emerged two dialectical responses from two indigenous communities here. One is the view of the Mixtec spokesperson that they slaughtered chickens and that through it the community was protected from COVID infection. On the other hand, the Raramuri spokesperson disagreed strongly with this approach, referring to how her community embraced modern medicine and vaccines even though the vaccines were not readily available in that community as pointed out by another conversation partner who is a medical doctor. The point here is that often there is a homogenization of indigenous peoples and their experiences and cultures. This encounter and this particular exchange are good reminders of the rich diversity within the indigenous cultures and the need to pay particular attention to how these diversities are unique in themselves and how they shape particular indigenous communities in a unique way as distinct from other communities – **Stan Chu Ilo**.

c. Chicago

i. **"This is the only church that has a deaf care minister, deaf choir, [and] deaf communion minister" (James Smith)**

Background: Jaime Waters interviewed James Smith at St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center in Chicago, IL on May 8, 2022. James is an active member of the community who facilitates technical services for people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing.

Key words: belonging, deaf Catholics, inclusive community, Covid-19 pandemic Theme: Dialogue and Encounter

- [During the pandemic] "we found out that people were hungry for knowledge... People are really hungry for messages."
- "I grew up with the hearing church. Later in life, I found this place [St. Francis Borgia]... I'm in heaven. I understood what was going on."
- "I noticed some deaf people from different areas come here [St. Francis Borgia]... We get people from different countries. They want to know how we do this."
- Theme: Inclusivity
- "This is the only church that has a deaf care minister, deaf choir, [and] deaf communion minister."
- "I would like to see the hearing community including the deaf, like getting an interpreter. But, not just getting an interpreter. Let the deaf participate with the hearing. Like a hearing person do the first reading, and a deaf person do the second reading. Not only for the deaf but people with other disabilities." Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness
- On children coming forward during mass to say the Lord's prayer: "It gives them [children] a feeling of belonging, and they interact with the church."
- "In the deaf community, before the pandemic, we opened the hall at 7:30am, and we closed at 2:30pm."
- "It [The faith community] helps me understand human perspective. How one person helps another. We do special collections for different deaf groups."

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*:

One of the recurring themes of this interview was the need for the church to broaden its communication style to be more inclusive. James shared his experience growing up in a church of the hearing and not being able to interact with the community. He would often disconnect during mass because he didn't know what was happening, especially during the

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

homily because he couldn't hear it. In adulthood, James found the St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center and finally felt like he could fully encounter God in the community and fully participate in worship.

The full communication mass that St. Francis Borgia offers is wonderfully dynamic and interactive. It is fully spoken in English and simultaneously signed in American Sign Language. Some portions of mass were spoken in Spanish. Lectors, cantors, and Eucharistic ministers are deaf. The congregation actively participates, with people signing and speaking responses aloud. A bass drum is used to accentuate high points during mass, which causes vibrations throughout the chapel. James uses technology to show images to assist the community with reflecting during mass. James also makes masses and reflections available for online viewers who have not returned to church since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The theme of dialogue and encounter was notable in this interview. James stressed that he felt a sense of belonging, and the community at St. Francis Borgia is intentional in wanting all people in the community (e.g., deaf and hard-of-hearing, hearing, children, international visitors) to feel included. This was evident in the welcoming environment, including and teaching children during mass, social events before and after mass, and multiple languages in use.

St. Francis Borgia is a bustling faith community. James noted that at many hearing churches people attend mass and then quickly leave. The opposite is the case at St. Francis Borgia. People socialize for hours before and after masses. They have truly built a faith community where people want to be around each other.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused St. Francis Borgia to be innovative in connecting with people remotely. Like many churches, they offer masses online, and the priest, Fr. Joe, does weekly reflections. When they temporarily stopped doing reflections during the summer, people urged them to bring the reflections back. There is a hunger, as James puts it, to hear messages and learn from the church.

People are calling for the church to speak to the diverse needs of the community and to address the challenges of the world. This encounter at St. Francis Borgia is an important reminder that the church must speak the languages of the people and speak so that people can understand. Becoming a church that serves, addresses, and **includes** communities with disabilities is key. The church must work to correct and avoid ableism and recognize the diverse needs and diverse gifts of its members. -**Jamie Waters**

ii. **"You have to change church teaching on sexuality...It's from the Middle Ages and based on natural law."(Christopher Pett)**

Background: On June 1, 2022, Jaime Waters interviewed Christopher Pett, a member of Dignity/Chicago, an LGBTQIA+ identified community which is a city chapter of a larger organization Dignity/USA. The organization supports Catholics who have frequently been in hiding and offers a safe space for people to integrate sexuality and spirituality.

Key words: LGBTQIA+, Clericalism, Church Reform, Leaving Ministry, Dialogue and Encounter

Theme: LGBTQIA+

- "We need to have an alternative voice that's challenging the Church to live up to what it's meant to be. The promise of what Jesus intended it to be. And if the church was living that promise, there would be total inclusion...we would have women in ministry"
- On Dignity/Chicago – "We consider ourselves the go-to gay Catholic church community." "They will baptize our children in very select parishes...there are several

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

parishes that are very welcoming, but you will not hear a conversation or talking about why the church should change its teaching.”

- “We have bishops and cardinals who are supportive of anti-gay, anti-trans, in particular, in support of those legislations.”
- “You have to change church teaching on sexuality...It’s from the Middle Ages and based on natural law.”
- Theme: Women in the Church
- “We cannot deny that we have women who are called to be priests.”
- “If you look at the profile of the church, and how it’s evolved today, it’s male-dominated. I can’t say it’s white. It’s pretty diverse in terms of people who identify as Catholic...but it’s really institutionally not what was intended.”
- On Pope Francis: “In particular women...he has done more in a few years than any pope did forever. To say we should consider having women deacons, to say you could raise the question, it’s pretty radical. And, appointing many women to senior positions in the Vatican, to the Curia has been another positive.”
- “The Church’s teaching on contraception is insane.”
- Theme: Clericalism / Leaving Ministry / Church Reform
- “Let’s go back to the Gospels. Let’s go back to the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles. How did the church evolve and create its identity?”
- “The Gospels are radically inclusive.”
- “Can we go back and recapture what Vatican II was about, and can we go back to the Gospel? What can we do to stand back, away from, and reform the church.” “I decided after twelve years of being a priest it just wasn’t a good lifestyle for me. It wasn’t healthy. And also I wanted a relationship. I had felt very strongly that I had taken a vow of celibacy which I had kept and decided that if I was going to pursue a relationship I needed to do it outside of active ministry.”
- On Pope Francis: “There’s an intellectual integrity there. There have been examples in Jesuit theology and spirituality of great heroes and ...who have really worked for justice...He carries a pastoral component and a leadership component that was recognized very early...He identified with the poor very early on.”
- To the bishops: “We respect you, but you need to respect us [LGBTQIA+ Catholics].”
- Theme: Faith / Spirituality
- “The Gospels are our seminal documents...I think an iconic passage is the Sermon on the Mount.”
- “I think God exists as a non-gender, as this energy. We are created into a world that is full of love, that is meant to be full of love....and I think that’s what God is about. It’s up to us to live lives we’re meant to live.”
- “I don’t believe in a judgmental God.”
- On Pope Francis: “You see him as a man of God, as a man of faith...we acknowledge and welcome and appreciate his change in tone...He calls for a pastoral approach.”

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*:

This interview focused the work of Dignity/Chicago, a gay Catholic organization that supports LGBTQIA+ Catholics and works for a more progressive and inclusive church. The organization is connected with the national group Dignity/USA. The community promotes and supports people’s authentic understanding, beliefs, and expressions of faith, welcoming all people of faith, especially those who have been marginalized based on sexuality and gender.

Chris acknowledged several positive aspects of Pope Francis’ tone and actions in the Church which call for more respect and inclusivity. He also noted the welcomed pastoral approach that Pope Francis demonstrates. However, Chris sees limitations on issues related to the Church’s teaching of sex and gender and the role of women in the Church.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

The work of Dignity/Chicago is grounded in the themes of love and inclusivity. The community promotes women to lead services. The community also advocates for change within the church and is a frequent voice in media to speak on behalf of gay Catholic communities. The faith community is influenced and rooted in the Gospels. Jesus' openness and radical engagement with his community is used as a model for how the Church should function today. Chris noted that many of the developments of the institutional Church are not rooted in Scripture, and he called for a renewal and return to the Church of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. - **Jaime Waters**

d. San Diego

i. **"The people are forming the community"** (Casa de Miserecordia)

Background: Mary Waskowiak is a Sister of Mercy and a founding member of Casa de Misericordia (Mercy House), an intentional community that engages the needs of migrants at the US/Mexico border in Southern California. A former president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, she is deeply committed to the Sisters' charisms and to the Church. She was raised in the Bay Area and entered religious life at a young age, and the seed for Casa de Misericordia/Mercy House was sown as she prayed about what God was calling her to do in her 70s. The community has been existence for just over a year, and they continue to discern together how best to live into their mission.

Theme: *Dialogue and Encounter*

"The other piece that is beautiful is...our community is there. But Jen, the people...the people are forming the community, and we'll have...some might call them team meetings...and I call them community meetings. We need a community meeting. Let's just talk about how we put up food and clothes for people. It's unbelievable. Unbelievable. I could go on about that. But what makes me happy is community is not just at 745 Beardsley. Community is a growing entity. And the more I can, if I can't see it, the more I can believe it, the more it will shape me, and I shape it."

"So I'm not sure what God's doing, but God's not stopping, and I want to be a part of it. And Jen, I'm extroverted. But even talking to this woman this morning, whom I've known for a number of years now, she's what we call a Mercy Associate and also a professional advancement person.... Toward the end of our conversation, she said, "Mary, in the newsletter, send in the stories you tell. Make sure you speak from your strength. And the strength you have is spirituality. Don't be afraid to tell that God story." You know, I want to. It makes me cry because this is God. This is a 74 year old sister at the Mexican border saying, "Let's help the people, and let the people shape us." Let's make it a two way street, not a one way, and I'm loving it."

"One of the breaking news stories [was] that the pope has initiated a meeting with Putin and has not yet heard back from him, but that he's willing to do that, to be a peacemaker is very Pope Francis. If you were here, I'd say it to you as well. But you could do better on the LGBTQ stuff."

"But our identity statement talks about an intentional community of various faith traditions, genders, occupations, etc. However, as each person has time, we would commit ourselves somehow to service to the migrant person. And in the community, we would commit ourselves to chosen spiritual practices and chosen community practices. And we've done that. And, you know, we see we're moving forward. We need to modify some things, even probably modify our identity statement, having lived with it, to sharpen the commitment to community and commitment to service. So it's in process. But I'd say to the best of our ability, each one of us walked in with our eyes open. And of course our eyes are always open more widely as you live it. But that's that's our mission."

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

"And, you know, John Paul, you're in heaven. But I said to my friends, "He and I probably would agree on very little, but we are sister and brother. No matter what." And I believe that. I believe that."

Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness

"In April of 2018, I turned 70. I was living in San Francisco in what we call a local community. I have my prayer time, my quiet time, and I love it. So I had a special little prayer corner in my bedroom, and I finished my quiet time, and I heard myself as the words came, say to God, "What is your call to me for this decade of my life?" And I thought, "Oh my God, I said, 'Decade.'" And so I was quiet. Nothing happened. I noted it in my journal. That was April. Nothing that at least I noticed. And then early January, January 3rd or 4th of 2019, I was sitting in the same place, finished my quiet time, and it was as if I heard God's voice. "I want you to go to the California Mexico border." And I thought, "Oh my God...I don't know what that really means."

"Well, somebody even quoted the passage. I pray with scripture every day, and I'm usually good at it, but she said, "Mary, if people question you, it's a work of mercy to visit the sick, to care for the suffering." And I love that piece of [things], you know, I was there...it was I who was with you. And I think of that for the people. I think of it for me. I'm very moved by another part of Catherine McCauley's life...in the early days, [it was sometimes asked], "Why are you doing this?" And her piece was, "Mercy responds to need." That's known. The greater the need, the stronger the response. That has animated me for 55 years...if there's a need Mercy's there. I mean, it makes me cry because the need is great."

"Oh, [the church could not have better helped] me personally. Not me personally, but, because of things going on that are very real right now, I think the Church could be doing much, much better to listen to the LGBTQ community and to those individuals. There is so much pain there, Jen. I'm sure you know that better than I do. And happily, over the two years we've been here, people who've passed through this house have been able to share some of that. And it's good to be able to receive that. And to just pray with them and pray with it. But I think we as a church community need to be honest. You know, I just wish we could be honest and say, "Yeah, I'm a lesbian woman, I'm a gay man, I'm this, I'm that, whatever it is."

Theme: Leaving Clericalism Behind

"But the rest of us got invited to the evening supper in groups of 12. And so we went in. When I was leaving, when he came out before dinner, we each introduced ourselves, and he said to me in his style of English, "Are you a sister?" I said, "Yes, Holy Father." And then when we were leaving, people in front of me shook his hand. And so when I got up, I put my hand out. And he put my hand down. Then he put a cross on my forehead. And he said, "You are my sister."

"How lucky to be in San Diego with three superb bishops for the first time. I hope Bishop McElroy doesn't mind this. He was one of the 85 people to interview, and he was taught by Sisters of Mercy for eight years. So mercy means a lot to him, and I have a connection to his father and all this stuff. But I'm visiting with him to see where we might live. And I'm calling him Bishop and Bishop. And at one point I said, "Well, I'm sorry, Bishop." He was so good. He leaned over. He said,

"You're Mary. I'm Bob. Keep talking." You know, so we can break through to the deeper connection we have. And that's what I believe."

Lifting up the *sensus fidei*: *Misericordia et Misera* reads, "Now is the time to unleash the creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the fruit of grace. The Church today needs to tell of those "many other signs" that Jesus worked, which "are not written" (*Jn*

20:30), so that they too may be an eloquent expression of the fruitfulness of the love of Christ and of the community that draws its life from him. Two thousand years have passed, yet works of mercy continue to make God's goodness visible" (no. 18). Mercy House is a prime expression of such creativity, with each member of that community bringing their gifts to bear on the crisis of migration on the San Diego side of the US/Mexico border. Mary has opened herself to follow where God calls her and to invite others to do the same, and Mercy House is beginning to bear the fruit of that availability to the stirrings of the Spirit that she and the other members of that community embody. They have come to build community with those on the margins—in this case, migrants—and Mary delights in the spirit of mutual transformation encountered there. She is clear that the work of the house is not an exercise of traditional charity in which one gives and another receives, but rather, it truly is an encounter by which both entities are changed as a result of their experiences of one another. Such experiences speak to the "social value" of mercy, as Francis describes it (MM, no. 18)-**Jennifer Owens-Jofre**

5. Women's Perspectives

a. Chicago

i. "To See Reality with a Different Eye" (Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph)

Background: On May 24, 2022, Stan Chu Ilo and Sergio Massironi visited the La Grange center of the Sisters of St Joseph. The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph is a community of vowed Catholic women and lay associates who live and minister in the U.S. and around the world supporting a diverse array of ministries including three Catholic high schools; tutoring and literacy programs; spirituality centers; social service programs, spiritual direction; and pastoral assistance. They also support numerous social justice and peace initiatives including anti-racism and inclusion efforts, the abolishment of the death penalty, fair and just immigration policies, non-violence advocacy, anti-human trafficking efforts and care of the earth. The focus group we encountered was made of 12 sisters who we consider elders in the Church because they have served the mission, gained a lot of experience, and have a lot of experience from the peripheries to share. Their ages range from 76-91 years.

Conversation Partners: Sr Jeanne Dursler, Sr Dorothy Randall, Sr Ann Terese Reznick, Sr JoeEllen Sbrissa, Sr Mary Catherine Schaeffer, Sr Mary Southard, Sr Janet Bolger, Sr Patricia Borchardt, Sr Julie Cannon, Sr Frances (Frankie) Dutil, Sr Laurina Kahne, Sr Rosemary Laflour.

keywords: *Women's Perspective, images of God, sadness, joy, inclusive church, women leadership, leaving clericalism behind.*

Revelation:

- "God is presence; we find God in nature"—**Sr Janet Bolger.**
- "God is a friend; a companion; I see God in people helping each other as they give food to others. God is someone who is always with us." —**Sr Frankie Dutil.**
- "God is a lover. I work with mysteries in my art that I don't have a word for. So, I don't have a word for God." —**Sr Mary Southard.**
- "I have difficulty calling God Father. We should use inclusive language when we pray."— **Sr JoeEllen Sbrissa.**
- "God has changed for me over these 86 years. The All-powerful God has changed. The unconditional love of God is beyond understanding. But I wonder how can God be love when I look at what is going on in the world. But we are invited to love God in people who are different. My favorite prayers are contemplative prayer, but God is still a

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- mystery for me.”—**Sr Dorothy Randall.**
- “God is wonder” My favorite image of God is captured in the poem, ‘Christ play in ten thousand places.’”—**Sr Mary Catherine Schaeffer.**
 - **Leaving Clericalism Behind:**
 - “It is painful seeing that priests and bishop deny communion to people. I see this as scandalous and a lack of compassion.” —**Sr Dorothy.**
 - “It is scandalous that women are not allowed to minister to Christians in the deathbeds even though these women are nurses and doctors working in hospitals. People sometimes in the hospital want to clear their hearts, but no they call the father. We need a leeway for women to use their God-given opportunity in the church. Women cannot anoint the sick that they are attending to as healthcare workers.”—**Sr Rosemary.**
 - “The church must move away from the Middle Ages and get into the 20th century. We need to realize as a Church that we are dealing with a different culture today. We need to realize that God made us all equal—men and women. There is no reason the church should not be inclusive. We have a lot of highly educated women theologians and in other professions. I have found some parishes that are so rigid. Priests and bishops are still like kings and everyone bows to the king and everyone was subservient in many ways. This isn’t what Jesus is about and what the apostles were about when they were founding the Church.”—**Sr Julie.**
 - “The *Opus Dei* has been very disruptive in the Church. I remember an *Opus Dei* priest saying that the reason women should not be allowed into the priesthood is that they are sexually tempting. The way they are set up to take over the church is very disturbing.”— **Sr Dorothy.**
 - “Pope Francis is the image of a true Church”—**Sr Mary Southard.**
 - “We need to self-empty as a Church in order to let go and allow God’s Spirit in. This way we can do what God is asking us to do for our times. And through the synodal process, the people of God will actually be allowed to lead the church”—**Sr Dorothy.**
 - “We religious women have become the hope of the Church.”—**Sr Julie** “What can we do to get rid of racism and white supremacy in our Church”—**Sr JoeEllen.** “I hope the Pope can pick a woman as a cardinal; they don’t have to be priests”—**Sr Joe Ellen.**
 - “We as religious women will change the world. We want to be good news of God’s mercy into this world.”—**Sr Dorothy**
 - “Half of the women, the world’s population are appalled that men are telling women what to do with their bodies. We have to speak out.”—**Sr Rosemary**
 - “My mother always says, ‘All things work together unto the good for those who love God’ this always drives me even in these times—**Sr Ann Terese.**

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei

This listening session brought up a lot of images. But one that captures everything is the analogy of the *Basket upset*, presented by Sr Mary Southart, which is a play. “This game is similar to musical chairs. To start, everyone stands in a circle with one person in the middle. Each person gets to choose to be one of 3 fruits (the 3 fruits are collectively chosen by the group). The person in the middle calls out one of these 3 fruits. The people who have identified as that fruit have to move to a different spot in the circle that has just opened up (including the person in the middle who called out the fruit). The last person to find a spot becomes the caller and calls a new fruit next round.”

(<https://fkhk.sportmanitoba.ca/node/19>). This play reflects a sense of equality and openness to participation by everyone. In this play, everyone is given the freedom in this circle of equals to play their own part, to receive the fruit and to move into a different spot. No one holds on rigidly to a spot permanently; there is always a movement but this movement is collectively determined by all the members of the group who all are playing in

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

the team with different roles.

As Sr Mary Southard observed, “There are so many areas of chaos and upheaval in our world, but **it is an opportunity for us to see reality with a different eye.**” In order to be able to see with a different eye, she continues, “We need to see the inner dimension of reality that we haven’t been seeing in our structures. So, ‘rethinking everything’ is the message.” Seeing with a different eye will help the church to reject White supremacy and to finally address Sr Joe Ellen’s question: “What are we doing to get rid of racism in our church.” Seeing with a different eye, will move the church to finally to be a witness of how all things work together (Sr Anne Terese), meaning how all the parts and people in the church can work together without patriarchy, sexism, and toxic masculinity as the whole people of God sets off on the road to doing the will of God. But this requires as Sr Dorothy noted a reversal, or to use the analogy with which we started, ‘a basket upset.’ This is because in her words, “We need to allow ourselves to get into what God is asking us at this time. We are witnessing a paradigm shift.”

The sisters in this focus group conversation were respectfully referred to as the elders and the conversation was framed as our search for wisdom for the Church through the experience of these sisters who have given their all to God. The wisdom here can be summed up in this way: There is so much pain and many wounds in the church today and they continue to fester in the lives of women religious, whose experience within the church is that of marginalization and objectification. The greatest witness to the call of women to mainstream leadership in the Church is God who has gifted women with gifts that are manifest in many ways in their lives and ministries. God does not wait for the church to allow women into ministries before using their enormous gifts and talents as reflected in the history of the CSJ. The CSJ sisters in this conversation, recognize their gifts and talents and vocation as an invitation from God to give hope the church, the poor, earth our home. They see themselves as the wisdom of the church, and the witness of love to God’s people, especially those who are suffering and our fragile earth. Will Pope Francis and the hierarchy of the Church see the ‘inner dimension’ of this experience of the female religious as an invitation to recognize ritually what God had already given fully interiorly in the hearts of these fairest maidens of the Lord? The image of what happened in the House of Cornelius in the Acts of the Apostles comes up here. Peter, the head of the Church, upon coming to the house of Cornelius said that God was already at work in Cornelius and then proceeded to baptize the entire household who had already received the gift of the Holy Spirit. One word that strikes me strongly in the passage (Acts 10: 47) is when Peter said, “Surely none should stand in the way” to the household being baptized and received into the Church. This is also a question for the church as we apply these words of ‘standing in the way’ to the tears, joys, hope, and dreams of these sisters. Like Peter, the church is just playing a catch up game because God has already started the work in these committed religious women—**Stan Chu Ilo.**

ii. “The church belongs to the pilgrim people of God.” (Mercy Circle)

Background: On May 19, 2022, Jaime Waters interviewed a focus group of 13 women at Mercy Circle, a continuing care retirement facility. Many residents are in independent or assisted living. Most participants in this group live at Mercy Circle although a few traveled from nearby communities. Several of the women are Sisters of Mercy. There are also women religious from the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and a woman who is a Lady of Bethany. 1: Eleanor Doidge, LOB

2: Jean Okroi, IBVM

3: Sr. Mary DePaul Paszek, RSM 4: Patricia (Pat) Murphy, RSM 5: Jacqueline (Jackie) Dewar, RSM 6: Anita Talar, RSM

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

7: Betty Smith, RSM

8: Joann Persch, RSM

9: Nancy Kennelly, IBVM 10: Mary Ruth Broz, RSM 11: Jane Schlosser, RSM

12: S. M. Brian Costello, RSM 13: Sr. Lorraine Crawford, IBVM **Key words:** women's perspectives, women religious, perspectives from the margins, clericalism, synodality

Theme: Women's Perspectives

- "I think women religious, we have taken hold of Vatican II and have paid a price to do that. We really knew that leadership can't be contained with us or the priesthood or whatever. The church belongs to the pilgrim people of God." -Mary Ruth
- We've worked with many different kinds of people on the margins, but women are on the margins. We give talks and young women often ask us, "How can you stay in the church?" I hear us saying church a lot. What is the church? The church is the people of God. That's my church. Then there is an institutional church." -Joann
- "The role of Pastoral Associate is almost gone, which was occupied by women mostly for many years and flourished in the 70s. It was a powerful presence of women at a pastoral level. You'd have to look hard for that role." -Mary Ruth
- "Sexism. I think that is a very significant image in this church." -Nancy "The government and the world have taken over women's bodies. It's wrong." -Jean "When we (Jane and Mary Ruth) got our Doctor of Ministry degree, [Cardinal] Cody was
- still alive. He wouldn't let us in the graduation. So, when he died finally, [Cardinal] Bernardin had a big party making up for all the women who had gone through 'the priesthood.'" -Jane Theme: Wisdom from the Margins
- On being interviewed for this project: "What I feel good about is that we're being listened to. You could think, "Oh a retirement center." They're retired. It's all over. It's not. Because when we listen to each other we have some insights and lots of experience." -Jane
- "I think there's something that needs to be done, ways of supporting people and bringing them into the center." -Mary Ruth
- "My work was in training people to work in other cultures. In that experience, I had the opportunity to help students interact with people from all different faith traditions, no faith. Different ethnic groups. Different racial groups. One of those was 30 years of traveling to the reservations in South Dakota 2-3 times a year. Letting the Lakota people teach the students...There is a terrible, terrible history of the church with Native Peoples whether in this country or in Canada...I've listened to stories of people who were abused in boarding schools run by the church. Listen to their tears. Listen to them." -Eleanor
- "I'd like to bring up racism...A pastor said, "There will be no more Black students coming into the school." That was at St. Catherine of Alexandria in the 1970s. I asked why, and I didn't get an answer. But, I got fired. When I went over the next day, he says, "I'm not renewing your contract." -Jean
- Theme: Clericalism
- "Some pastors have too much control and are not educated to the people." -Anita "Education is so important. After Vatican II, that was the big problem. I don't think the bishops themselves understood what they had done, and it didn't get to the priests. So the priests couldn't help the people. The people are hungry." -Jackie
- "One of the biggest problems is that our priests are not educated. They leave the seminary, and that's it. Doctors need continuing education in order to practice. Nurses need continuing education...Teachers need continuing education, but priests can sit on what they learned 50 years ago, and things have changed." -Jackie
- "I just think that the hierarchical church is so taken up with rules and regulations and

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- rituals that they've forgotten Jesus and the mission." -Jackie
- "Education for the clergy. I'm just concerned about the formation of the clergy. Their spiritual formation. Not just the intellectual or classes on theology...The importance of individually directed retreats where you really get in touch with the Spirit in your own heart, soul and life." -Nancy
 - Quoting a seminarian, "Our hands were made for chalices, not calluses." -Jackie "The church needs to be decentralized...Unity does not mean uniformity." -Jackie
 - Theme: Synodality / Dialogue and Encounter
 - "At first I wasn't sure if this [synod listening session] is something I want to do. After the first gathering, I was really pleased. My reflections were that I got to know the people around my table in a different way." - Eleanor
 - "Most of my life since Vatican II has been one of frustration because Vatican II got put on the back burner. And, when this [synod listening session] happened, I was really glad to be
 - a part of it to think that maybe we can gently nudge the church into Vatican II, and then I think: Is it worth it? Are they even going to listen?" -Jackie
 - "I was cynical at the beginning...but I realize there are so few opportunities to really share and have a conversation about the institutional church." -Mary Ruth
 - "The notion of synod suggests that there are local differences that need to be addressed." - Betty
 - "I'm skeptical on what's getting filtered out [of synod reports] and how will it come back to us in the day-to-day because that's where we live our lives, locally." -Betty "There's no turning back!" -Pat
 - "I invited three people who I know are searching, seeking. The spirit is alive. They want something more than what they're getting in their parishes...You could hear the hunger that they have for something more." -Nancy

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*:

The focus group shared many examples of their experiences as women religious in the church. They noted the effects of disagreeing with priests. Several women shared stories of facing isolation, demotion, and other forms of punishment for expressing views that were contrary to the priests/pastors. Sisters noted that they stood up for people on the margins, such as immigrants, Black people, and children. One sister noted that in the 1970s, a pastor said that no Black children would be permitted in the school. The sister asked why, and he didn't give an answer. The next day she was fired for questioning his racist policy.

While listening to the experiences of women religious, it became clear that power dynamics/misuse and abuse of power was a recurring theme. Experiences of sexism from the clergy were commonplace. The women noted that there were some allies, some "good ones," although there were many "bad ones," priests who were explicitly or implicitly sexist. One sister noted that when she and another sister completed their DMin degrees, Cardinal Cody of Chicago excluded them from commencement exercises because they were women. The women also noted that Pastoral Associate roles used to be opportunities for women to be more actively involved in parish leadership; however, this role has diminished or disappeared in many churches.

Although they had many experiences of sexism, the group was happy to see progress at the Vatican with Pope Francis appointing women to high-ranking positions. They see this as a step in the right direction, and they are hopeful that this practice will continue. The group did note, however, that Pope Francis has been criticized for this practice.

Several participants shared concerns regarding clerical formation, stressing that continuing education is needed so that priests are more aware and open to new perspectives and challenges that arise beyond their time in seminary. The sisters also expressed concern

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

over who is doing spiritual direction and how it is done. Several women religious were trained in spiritual direction but were unable to do it in seminary contexts, as those roles were limited to priests. Yet, many of the priests were not necessarily the best at doing spiritual direction. One sister noted that some spiritual direction was more socializing and talking about sports rather than tapping into one's relationship with God and the world.

Mercy Circle had done multiple synodal listening sessions, so during this focus group I inquired of their perspective of the process and of the global synod on synodality. There were a mix of attitudes, with several people noting that they felt hopeful that the church might finally implement the ideas of Vatican II that had never come to fruition. They were hopeful although some questioned whether leaders in the church would listen, take seriously, and implement the feedback.

During our meeting, the women shared ways that Scripture might help to address the challenges of the church and world. They noted "Love your neighbor as yourself" as a principle that should inform how people interact with one another, especially those on the margins. Moreover, the Beatitudes, Judgment of Nations, and prominent women in Jesus' life and ministry (e.g., Mary giving birth to Jesus, woman at the well, and Mary Magdalene and women at the tomb). Poignantly, the final thought of the session came from Sr. Pat who encouraged all to "Be kind." She also stressed the need to treat people with love and kindness as they are made in the image and likeness of God. - **Jamie Waters**

b. El Paso/Ciudad Juárez

i. **We are "creating a community against destruction." (Mujer Obrera)**

Background: On May 17, Meghan Clark, Fr. Stan Chu Ilo, and Vanessa Salazar (HOPE) met with eleven Catholic women working for social justice at Café Mayapan. Café Mayapan is a social enterprise of *Mujer Obrera*, which began to organize oppressed and ignored garment workers in 1981. Lorena, Selina, Josefina, Sandra, Olivia, Rosa, Selene, Antya, Hilda, Mailisa, Kathy, and two women who preferred to remain anonymous spoke with us over lunch, Vanessa Salazar conducted simultaneous translation. The eleven women are all active in *Familias Unidas* bringing together excluded women workers to organize for the rights of workers, families, and in particular, safe environments for their children. They organized a day care center, a café, a community farm, and indigenous cooperatives in Mexico **Their overarching focus, rooted in their faith, is "care for the earth and for each other that is the biggest struggle."**

Keywords: women, migration, labor, dignity of work, family, care for children, care for creation, Laudato Si', Pope Francis

Theme: Women's Perspective

- Hilda emphasized the importance of family and treating everyone as human – **"women come together, they have sacrificed a lot."**
- Olivia: **"I do not know how you can be a person of faith and not care about protecting children and the environment."**
- Lorena: **"As women we walk our faith as best we can.** The only one who can help us is God. Sometimes I want to say no more, but I pray to God for strength to continue to fight for their rights."
- **"The work we are doing is not separate from our faith. It is a practice of the faith."** **"We are here because God wants us to be together."**
- **Where do you see God? "the sun, the air, the children, the people, God is everywhere"** **"God comes in children's form, they are more open to learn. Kids are like lights in the garden....work to protect all the lights so they don't go out just trying to survive"**

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- Studying Laudato Si' were able to see the connection between "how do we heal relationship with the earth and with each other."
- Lorena: (On Pope Francis & Laudato Si'): "To see in writing from someone like that is important. Feels like a burden lifted by Pope Francis and every time we speak with a priest who is with us in the struggle"
- Pope Francis - "talking about nature. How he talks about the destruction of the earth for profit. He talks about all this all this destruction of important spaces for us as human beings. And so that's very much tied to defending our spaces, but not just defending, especially since protecting the earth, protecting all these things like the warming we're saying, like the air, the water, the sun. We sometimes find I'm like, I hate the sun so much, but it's not the sun economic."
- We are **"creating a community against destruction."**
- "We've always been told that we're doing things wrong. I suppose a lot of criticism will come and tell us that we don't know what we're doing, that we to come and tell this because a lot of our work is [organizing]."
- "Organizing work and somehow we're being rebellious because we're doing the organizing work and speaking as women and putting a position up there, and that somehow that's a contradiction to the part where we." (see as integrated with their faith).

Theme: Hope and Building Trust

- **Challenge:** "as individuals, we have the power to stop from hurting others. But when you have this evilness subjected to entire communities, it's how does how does the church support families like ours?"
- "The constant oppression, having to defend oneself it wears you down." o Hard to have/build trust within local structures where the elementary school closest to the immigrant communities closed – "The school that worked with and for the immigrant community closed and now our children being bused to a school next to a recycling plant and found lead in the playground – but not over Texas standard" (Pollution near children's school and spaces of great concern)
- Noted more turnover of priests in the immigrant communities, makes it hard to build relationships.
- Many women commented that their faith is stronger when the Church stands with them.
- Theme: Welcome the Stranger
- On the exploitation and vulnerability of immigrant women workers: **"We have a right to community, we have a right to stay here, my identity is not as cheap labor"**
Families separated by the border – struggle to maintain tied to families on the other side "not having a community that supports our children is detrimental."
- Pope Francis's trip to Juarez "feels like he comes from God to represent us."

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

"The work we are doing is not separate from our faith. It is a practice of the faith."

The women demonstrated a deep and abiding faith that permeated their personal and organizing lives. Their justice work was strengthened and confirmed in faith when they were accompanied by local clergy and deeply felt that Pope Francis accompanied them as well. Conversely, when they were rejected by local faith leaders, that represented a deep pain but even then, they knew they were doing God's work especially when protecting the rights of children and the environment. Economic justice and Environmental justice are FAMILY issues. The women organizers truly represented Laudato Si' in action by **"creating a community against destruction."** Their own experiences were living witness to the deep connection between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor – **Meghan Clark.**

ii. **"We see God here because we are safe, because in the journey, on the trip, we go**

through terrible things” (Casa Eudes)

Background: *Casa Eudes* is a home run by the Sisters of the Order of Our Lady of Charity for migrant women with young children in Ciudad Juarez. Meghan Clark, Fr. Stan Chu Ilo, and Dylan Corbett visited, said mass, shared meals and spoke with the sisters and residents. Dylan Corbett provided simultaneous translation when necessary.

While visiting Casa Eudes, we spoke to 20 yr old Mexican woman, Zulema* who had a 10month old son. Back home, violence grew in the community, Zulema was kidnapped, and her family paid the ransom. However, her niece was killed so she fled. Her kidnapper absconded with the ransom money and organized criminal syndicate have now accused her of killing her kidnapper, their operative. When she fled she did not have papers, which meant that she was at risk every time she crossed a Mexican checkpoint. Even as a Mexican citizen, she would need to show registration and proof that her son is in fact hers. She has found security in *Casa Eudes*, where she does not even feel safe sharing her story with the other women.

Additionally, we had a large group discussion with a little over a dozen other women staying. These women and their children come from rural Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, etc. Some had been at Casa Eudes for many months. No audio, video, or photos were taken to protect these women.

Their insights and experiences of God presented here aggregated and anonymized to allow them to be heard in a safe way.

Keywords: vulnerability, God, prayer, migration, violence, fear, mothers, providence, faith

1. Vulnerability and Tenderness On Where they see God:

- “I see God, in this place here, where I feel that we are safe. Evidence that God is with us, as mothers, is that we are here”
- “We see God here because we are safe, because in the journey, on the trip, we go through terrible things.”
- “I see God putting good people in our path because my children are safe.” “God hasn’t abandoned us because we are here”
- **2. Women’s Perspectives**
- “all we can do is persist.”
- “We are all mothers”
- “our sense of community is strong, we meet other wmen and they become like family”
- If could speak to Pope Francis:
- “the only thing I would ask is to put children in the hands of God.”
- “”more than anything ask that he speak to the entire world that we are all equal”
- I’d like to give him a hug
- **On Prayer:**
- “I chat with him [God] not just to ask things of him but to give thanks, to thank him for the difficult trials that I have been able to survive”
- “pray the rosary at night, while doing chores”
- Multiple women noted that they prayed the rosary with their
- children on the journey.
- Pray with images of God and the Virgin [of Guadeloupe]

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

Two brief points I wish to highlight from our conversations at Casa Eudes, that also dovetail with all of our meetings with vulnerable migrant women who were in the process of migration (at shelters, detention centers, etc): First, a deep sense of faith that God is with them. When describing horrible violence and insecurity, and at times abandonment by

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

others in their lives, these women/mothers all insist upon a strong palpable, incarnate belief that God is present with them in their vulnerability and journey. This is not to be viewed as a sentimental faith, but one born in pain and experience, these women find hope and the love of God amidst terrible fear and violence. Second, the role of prayer, including the rosary, is of note. This popular piety that melds devotions to the Virgin of Guadeloupe with the practical praying of the rosary tracks with both the evidence that migrants often have rosary beads but also of this persistent, deep connection to Mary, the mother of God, one finds across different groups on the margins –**Meghan Clark**.

iii. **“It would be good for the church to do more to support women” (Ana)**

Background: On May 19th, 2022, Meghan Clark, Fr. Stan Chu Ilo, and Dylan Corbett spoke with Ana at *Casa Migrante*. Also present were Ana’s 4 grown children and young daughter. Ana is a 46yr old, single mother of five and domestic violence survivor.

Keywords: women, family, domestic violence, hope

Theme: Women’s Experiences

- “Always believed in God, always been our hope” and now they pray and hope for a chance to cross the US border and join with family in the US.
- “In prayer, we have a little bible” they pray as a family
- Devotion to Our Lady of Guadeloupe: “we’ve had difficulties, but thanks to the Virgin” came through, together.
- **Decided to leave so her children could overcome the trauma of “really bad experiences” with a violent husband**
- **“It would be good for the church to do more to support women” recognizing that a lot of women are victimized.**

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

Ana’s a mother devoted to her children and giving them a better chance at a dignified life. She shared that she was a victim of domestic violence and beyond that her children had experienced terrible trauma at the hands of her husband. Her pain and trauma was acute. In that pain, she clearly found solace and strength from both God and the Virgin of Guadeloupe. She described praying with her children using a small Bible. Still, her advice to the church urged giving more support to women who are victims of violence. This is in accord with Pope Francis’s recognition in *Amoris Laetitia* that leaving a situation of domestic violence is “morally necessary” noting “in some cases, respect for one’s own dignity and the good of the children requires not giving in to excessive demands or preventing a grave injustice, violence, or chronic ill-treatment” (No. 241)–**Meghan Clark**.

c. New York

i. **A Woman in a Patriarchal Church and World (Meilyn)**

Background: On June 29, 2022, Meilyn C, who is 60 years old, and was born in the Dominican Republic, raised in the Bronx, was interviewed by Bradford Hinze

Keywords: Destiny Challenged, Dignity Maintained, Missionary Mandate Enkindled

Theme: A Woman’s Perspective

- Growing up in a Hispanic household was difficult in and of itself because being a girl, there was a lot of things that I was not able to do that my brother being male was able to do, for instance, go away to college.
- My father did not allow me to go away to college because I was a girl. Whereas my brother got to go away to college. I always resented that. And so, I was always very strong willed. And I spoke my mind, which was a no-no in a Hispanic household. So,

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

there was always conflict.

- So, you know, excuse me, coming up in the workplace, also being a woman of color, I was considered minority. So, it was hard. I did pretty good, thank God. But, you know, it was difficult, I admit it.

Theme: Leaving Clericalism Behind

- And (this view of women) also transcends into one's own faith because it's a male dominated institution, which I don't think is fair. And the reason I don't think it's fair is because if you really look at it, the mother is the one that establishes going to church on Sunday, making sure that the children do the sacraments. You know that the kids are baptized. One that's involved more with the church than the father is.
- I always think, why shouldn't women have more of a voice in the church? It's not even a women's liberation thing. It's just that you've got to look and see. You know, these women are the foundation. They're the ones that bring in the families, that make sure the children are involved; I made sure I brought my kids so they receive their sacraments. My husband was working; he was doing other things. I was the one that made sure that my kids made their first communion, that my kids were confirmed, that they went to Catholic school, that they became altar servers. You know, (I was the one who made sure) they knew the (parish) priests. They knew Father Kevin, may he rest in peace, Father Bob, Father Tom, may he rest in peace. They knew them because I was so involved. And me being so involved, I brought them in it as well.
- You have women that worked tirelessly in their parishes, you know, sisters. Why shouldn't the nuns have the same privileges as the men do as the priests [and] the deacons do? I think it's ridiculous that a deacon has more of a say than a nun. I really think things need to change if we want to keep, you know, our church going and our faith going. But our church, we want to keep it going if we want it to survive and flourish. I really do believe that women should be more involved at the higher level, not just, you know, being nuns or, you know, teachers in Catholic schools.
- **Theme: Christians in the Public Square—Evangelizing Mission Reclaimed** The one thing that I always criticized about our church is evangelization. We are horrible at evangelization.
- One of the reasons why we lose people to other faiths, is because we are not good with evangelization. I mean, you go to services, for instance, in other faiths that, you know, it's joyful, it's, you know, song and people are happy, and you know and if there is life in the sermons and there's life with the people that are there, but in our church, it's not like that.

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei

Meilyn has been and remains one of the most active people in Our Lady of Angels Parish in the Bronx. By her own testimony you hear about her fidelity to her Catholic faith, even though she admits that she has nothing against those with other faith traditions. However, her witness here reveals dimensions of her experience of sexism and prejudice against women of color in families, in the workplace, and in the church. One of the admired pastors of this parish, Fr. Tom, who served in the parish for roughly 14 years, just recently died. He asked Meilyn to serve on the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council in New York, which she fulfilled for four years. Besides her eloquent statements about the need to recognize the aspirations of girls for more education and expand the role of women in the workplace and in the church, she clearly expresses the great need for Catholics to develop their sense of missiological discipleship as the baptismal core of evangelization in the church. -**Bradford Hinze**

ii. Latina Migrants Find Their Way (women at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish)

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Background: On May 6, 2022 six Latinas, 2 in their 60s, 2 in their 50, 1 who is 49 and 1 who is 30 from Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in the Bronx were interviewed by Trena Yonkers-Talz, reported by Bradford Hinze

Keywords: The Wisdom of women, absentee fathers, human limitations, forgiveness, individual gifts

Theme: Women's Perspectives—Being Abandoned by Fathers

- My biggest source of pain (continued) for many years was an absentee father (who) left us when I was 18. (I)t was a great pain that I didn't understand as an adult. (H)e went with his friends to spend the money he earned, knowing that he had six children and a wife who were starving... I didn't forgive him until I was 23 years old, when at one of my jobs someone told me to get rid of that hate because the only one who suffers is you; get rid of that pain because he is having a good time with whoever he is with [and] has rebuilt his family. Get rid of that pain and get rid of that hate, because that hate eats away at you.
- (Later I was told that) my parents suffered abandonment when they were little. My father was abandoned by his mother. No one taught him how to be a father. (When I heard this) I forgave him that day.
- I had an absentee father that came home every 15, or 20 days. So, when I was going to school my mom didn't have enough to give me breakfast. What hurt me the most was when he came home, he always spoke to us with rude words. And yet my mom was always, always there...

Theme: Women's Perspectives—Charisms of the Individual

- Follow your path. That which you have, and you think is nothing. Instead think positive, never negative, always forward, ...think positive, do not say oh no, if you see the negative with the positive you always go backwards, but if you see the positive ... it is always forward and that is what I learned from God... Let us be as we are. (God) accepts us as we are because he does not see differences in color, nor in races. Not really. You're tall, you're short, you're fat, you're skinny, whatever. For him we're all the same and like (the gospel story) says that even the hairs we have, he has counted, each one, imagine.
- When you see a person who doesn't have a leg ... observe how he tries to work... (W)hat if I have my two feet and I'm not doing anything. In other words, you ask God to give you intelligence, to make you more intelligent, and to help you excel. But he also says help yourself and I will help you. I am not saying 'Oh Lord, help me find a job while I am lying down sleeping, the Lord is not going to look for me at home.' But if you cling to God, you have more love, you have more faith, and you try to take his word and also many times you go to church.
- You can make the change in your life. No one else. You yourself, as a human being, you have the vote of you to decide whether you throw yourself off that cliff and no one else. We [don't] have the power to change anyone, not even parents, because they are imperfect beings like us. Simply put, God, more and more every day. When you ask him, he gives you. Do you understand why? Because each person is doing his work in a different way.

Theme: Hope and Trust—Inspired by Pope Francis

- I would like (Pope Francis) to know that I admire him, and I respect him, I mean I really like the way he is very charitable, he's very noble and above all he has a lot of humility towards people.
- I would tell him that the admiration that one has for him, the respect that one has for him [makes me want to give] thanks to him and thanks to God. I'm trying to lead my

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

children to the path of the Lord, and thanks to the Pope's teachings, he has taught us a lot about humility, which sometimes many people lack.

- I feel that he is a person admired and respected and that he has taught us many things. First of all, respect for social issues, because as they say, I mean, he doesn't discriminate against any person, it's like respect for everything, so it's the admiration more than anything else that one has for the person that he is and that he is there with a purpose that God has given him, and he is worthy of admiration.

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei

This group of women has experienced and witnessed a great deal of suffering, especially poverty, both before they immigrated to the United States and after they arrived and as they make a life in the Bronx. Their testimonies offer resounding evidence that their life of faith, trust in God, and for some their devotion to Mary, provide their source of strength, perseverance, and resilience amid poverty and precarity in life. Their testimonies focus on domestic life and their aspiration to find a job to augment the meager financial support provided by their husbands or partners. Through this parish-based women's group they learn how to sew and use computers to find employment. Financial insecurity is a basic ingredient in daily life as it contributes to their quest for food, housing, and education for their children. -**Bradford Hinze**

D. Toronto, Ontario

i. Broken Hearts

Background: *Catholic Network for Women's Equality* (CNWE) was founded in 1981 to advocate for the ordination of women within the framework of the Roman Catholic Church under the name *Catholics for Women's Ordination*. In 1988 the group changed its name to reflect the expansion of its scope to "include equality for women in all aspects of church and society." The key values of this geographically diverse Canadian group are: inclusivity, creativity, celebration, compassion, solidarity, collaboration, and dialogue. The group acknowledges that while their membership is open to all, they are primarily white, middle-class women of the "Vatican II" generation. They would welcome younger and racially diverse members.

On May 29, 2022, a group of five members from the Toronto area welcomed Darren Dias to a meeting they prepared for the focus group for this project. Each woman spoke of her personal story of the church and of CNWE. They spoke about what "broke their heart" about the church as well as their hopes.

Keywords: women, church, equity, justice, solidarity, exclusion/inclusion, faith transmission, ecology.

1. Theme: Women's Perspectives

- "We hear the words in Genesis that we are made in the image of God, that we have equal dignity, every person on this earth, and that that is what I try to imbue my children with."
- "I think what is breaking my heart is primarily that the church still functions as a patriarchy."
- "I stopped trying. And became part of an independent, small faith community of progressive Catholics. Now, as one woman said, I am a Catholic in writing." "The possibilities and the opportunity for young women to serve and to grow into being are so wonderful everywhere, except they're not in a church."
- "...the men in power will allow us to perform certain functions, but they will not allow us to be part of the leadership."
- "When we model seeing women as not equal in our church, we harm women around

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

the world in communities where they need to be lifted up by the local church so that the whole family can be lifted out of poverty.”

- “I’ve heard women who are no longer, no longer consider themselves part of the church say that being a woman in the Roman Catholic Church is like being in an abusive relationship and that they have to leave and can’t stay... And when I reflect on why do I stay? It’s because I love my community. I love the people I’ve met over the years, the people I’ve met and worked with ... there’s so much goodness in the liturgy and the sacraments, the earthiness of the Roman Catholic Church, the Easter picture, there’s so much goodness and the teachings and social justice... But I must say, there are days when I’m just hanging on by a thread.”

2. Theme: Hope and Faith

- “Another thing that gives me hope is what I see in young people.”
- “Our whole race is relationship and dialog and encounter, especially in an increasingly polarized world. We look and say, how can we be the bridge people? And I think that’s going to be really important going forward when young people don’t have the language of the church at all, don’t have the language of worship, don’t have the background in Scripture, but we are still bringing our love of the Gospel to them. We just need to find new languages around how to do that.”
- “And yet I still raised my children, [I] have three children, in the Catholic faith. But I then wondered, what am I doing? And I struggled with that.”

3. Theme: Ecological Conscience

- “I think even our own movement is embracing more that notion of our interconnectedness and the interconnectedness that we see all around us in the world of nature.”
- “We’re at a critical point in the world where we need to look beyond just the human to all of creation, all of creation. So there is my hope.”
- “We need to learn from Earth how Earth does things. We’re all interconnected, interdependent... Every little last molecule is needed.”
- “And we need to look at Earth as to how we change our economic communities, our social communities and our faith communities.”

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

The members of CNWE in this sharing articulated a deep commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They spoke of varied experiences of the hierarchical and ministerial aspects of church, both positive and negative. However, none of them find a ‘place’ in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC); they experience exclusion at the hands of a patriarchal system. Many seek spiritual sustenance outside of the visible and ordinary structures of the RCC, yet they still feel that the RCC is their home. Their relationship with the RCC is critical, complex and ambiguous. While there was some lament that a younger generation (e.g., children and grandchildren) may or may not practice the faith anymore, there was equally a sense that the younger generation seems capable of critically appropriating Gospel values transmitted to them and putting those into action in the world. Nevertheless, there was a fear that the church is becoming increasingly irrelevant to the younger generation. The group also exhibited a non-referential concern for others: the young, children and grandchildren, women experiencing poverty both locally and globally, homosexuals, and the environment. Their frustration at the way women are treated in the church seems to have expanded their generosity in care for others who experience injustice—**Darren Dias**.

ii. Dancing is Dancing and Preaching is Preaching (Mary Baier)

Background: On July 6, 2022, Darren Dias interviewed Mary Baier. Mary shared her story

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

of a powerful experience of church and ministry while she was part of the pastoral team of a parish in the Archdiocese of Toronto from 1971-1977. The pastoral team consisted of 5 members of the Order of Preachers, 3 friars and 2 sisters. In addition to sharing in the various ministries according to gifts and strengths, each member of the team preached at the Sunday Eucharist until the practice was stopped suddenly by fiat of the local ordinary. The loss of women's voices in preaching was a blow to the parishioners who asked the archbishop to come to the parish and meet the community, and see what was going on, before enforcing such a decision.

As the church prepares for the synod, Mary shares her story because that powerful and creative experience of church, ministry, collaboration, equality, inclusion and participation is not just a dream for the church but has been a lived experience, especially in the decade that followed the close of Vatican II. Mary says of her experience, "This was something new and different. And it came out of the council. It came out of the documents of the council."

Keywords: Preaching, ministries, clericalism, women, Spirit

1. Theme: Leaving Clericalism Behind

- "We the church...[n]eed to recover and to live and to be disciples of the Gospel. The good news of Jesus, the Christ. We can spend more time on institutional arrangements. ...Anchoring in to be God centered...to be Christ centered, to know the Gospel, to choose to be disciples. That's the beginning of the end, everything else must come out of that."
- "So I think in many ways, if you talk to sometimes to very loyal and beautiful and wonderful Catholics, they know much more about how the Vatican is run or who the bishop is, or we want to change bishops, now we want to be able to vote for our bishops. That's secondary to getting back to being what does it mean to believe?"
- "We need what the priest does, which I'm not sure that that doesn't need to be restated and examined and so on and so forth. But I'm not trying to get rid of priests and priesthood. But the priest[hood] is not the only ministry. I mean, all we have to do is open the scripture and read Paul. And we know that there are and there the works of the spirit among us. They're holy. They're there."

2. Theme: Women's Perspectives

- "...several weeks after the announcement was made [to end the sisters' preaching at mass] in the parish, this man said to me: you know, Mary, our experience of church will never be the same again. Every Sunday for six years, when we looked up and saw our pastors, we saw men and women. Now we will see only men. But the world we live in is a world of men and women. The ministry we receive will now be distorted by the absence of hearing the gospel preached by both male and female voices."
- Archbishop Pocock said to us, "I know Joan and Mary that you're preaching has reached the minds and hearts of many people, he said. I know that without a doubt from the letters I have received, I've received hundreds of letters. And I know your preaching has reached people's minds and hearts. But you don't have the authorization." And he went on to say, "even if there if there was a priest who, in all his years of preaching, never once touched the heart of anybody, he still has the right to preach." And I dare say here is a question for the church, of gift, of vocation, of calling, of competence, of affirmation over ...regulation that was maybe even initially well founded maybe, or at least culturally understood, but isn't anymore."

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

Just as the era after the Second Vatican Council was one of creativity, Mary suggests that the synodal process could be an opportunity for something "new and different" consistent

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

with the teachings of the Council for our times. A counter to clericalism is not to add to the clerical class (though the question of admitting women to orders is one that should be addressed) in the church, but to recognize the various gifts and ministries that are present in the People of God, men and women. Recognizing that the Holy Spirit animates communities and centering ministerial life on the Gospel of Jesus Christ does challenge ecclesial structures and policies that often ironically hamper the mission of the church to preach the Gospel. -Darren Dias

6. Hope & Trust

a. Chicago

i. Fostering both spiritual and economic communion (Sharon)

Background: Sharon Morgan is an African-American woman who works at a school on the West Side of Chicago, an underserved community with significant rates of poverty and crime. She was a pastoral associate for two predominantly African-American Catholic parishes that have since been closed. She is also a cancer survivor.

Keywords: African-American, church closings, lay ministry, Mass, communion

Theme: Hope and trust (on not trusting the Church)

- “The archdiocese... could have done a much better job of trying to keep Black churches open. You know, okay, so you only have 50 members. It's not going to help when you close it and they go somewhere or don't go, which a lot of people don't do once their church closes because they're just so hurt.”
- “I don't know if they still have wealth, but when they did have wealth, they should have done a better job of being stewards to the communities that were struggling. And I think we would still be powerhouses, in our inner cities. Black people, we really did like to be Catholic, but if you don't have any faith in us and you throw us out. You don't care about us. And no matter ‘We hear you, we're listening to you’ and then you still close. I don't think you listened to me. You would have saw that we really want our church to stay open and we look to you as the parent church or the parent to help. This is like having a child and you say ‘I'm not helping you do anything anymore; you just have to leave.’ So that makes the child say ‘Well you don't care about us, you don't care about me because I need help. And you're not trying to help me.’ That's what we thought.”
- “Bring churches back, open up churches that have been closed in marginalized areas, especially now, because look at our city, look at our streets. You can't go out... You might get shot at. And churches are a beacon for afterschool things and social work and social programs and that's what churches do. And if other churches can do it, Catholics can do it, but they can't do it without a church. So, bring some churches back. Bring these old churches that you shuttered up but the building is still there, put resources in it. It doesn't have to be a priest. Get a deacon, a deacon can do the same thing as the priest. So put deacons in it. Put one priest for all three churches to go and say mass, but let the deacons run the church. We can do it. I did.”

Theme: Women's perspectives (a woman running the church)

- “I helped run the church, I was the administrator. I paid bills, wrote checks. I did most of everything. You know, organize the funerals, organize the people for RCIA, hired and fired people. Much like the pastor. And then when St Angela, when their priest left and then the general manager left, I was doing that over there too. So at one point I was doing two churches. Same thing. Paying bills and paying salaries and keeping the parish running...if you couldn't find a pastor, then just come to me. And I basically, well

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

I gave communion too because that's what communion ministers do. Pretty much the only thing, unless you have a deacon, you can't read the gospel, but I was a reader, I was a lector, everything."

Theme: Revelation and joy (united in the Mass)

- "The one thing that I really love about Catholicism is we all do the same thing every Sunday. So I know no matter where I am, no matter what church I go to, it's still a Mass. It may be a little different and they may add an extra four or five songs or the homily is a lot longer or whatever. But it's still the Mass. We're going to have the readings, we got the gospel, we're gonna hear the homily, we're going to say the same prayers and we're going to have communion. And that gives me great solace and it gives me great pleasure to know that no matter where I am, it's the same Mass and everybody is doing it with me."

Theme: Leaving clericalism behind (the people are the church)

- I don't think anything of [Pope Francis]. I mean, in the scheme of things it's the immediate family is your priest and your church, it's the people who are sitting next to you who make it a church... When people get so attached to priests, they want to leave because of the priests. But the priest does not run the church, it's the people in the streets... You might go to a priest for counseling or whatever, but when you really want to pour your heart out, it's usually to the people in the pews with you, those are the ones you stand out in the parking lot after church talking, and you don't do that to the priest. I mean, you go to confession. You do your Hail Marys and then you're out of there. But after mass, we stand up for 2 hours in a parking lot, helping each other, bolstering each other up, checking each other's faith, giving each other faith. That's the church. It's not the pope, it's not even the priest sometimes because he's gone in four years or eight years. So he'll leave. And you've been there for 20 years. You've probably seen a bunch of priests, but probably the person sitting next to you has been there 20 years, too. That's your priest.

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*

Sharon brings to light both the joy and the pain of being a Black Catholic on the West Side of Chicago. The joy is apparent as she stresses how Black people like being Catholic. The churches are clearly important centers of social activity in an underserved area of the city. It is one of the few safe places to gather, to socialize, to participate in uplifting programming, and to get help when needed. But the churches are more than just social clubs or aid centers. Sharon talks about the spiritual communion fostered in the Church, the way the people bolster each other's faith. She especially emphasizes the universality of the Church, the sense that one is participating in a worldwide communion every time we attend Mass.

The pain of the Black Catholic experience in Chicago comes out as Sharon discusses church closings and the fact that there are only four Catholic churches left on the West Side, and two have recently been merged. From Sharon's point of view, church closings are just one more sign of the larger societal disinvestment in communities of color. Businesses and financial institutions have fled her neighborhood, and now the Church is fleeing too. She calls for a more equitable redistribution of resources, so that wealthy churches in the suburbs might give of their resources to poorer churches in her part of the city. Sharon's example calls us to examine the way that wealth is distributed in the Church. As Catholics, we enjoy a spiritual communion when we celebrate Mass around the world. But economic communion is something we would rather not discuss – **Bill Cavanaugh**.

Background

“I found God again in the jail. My faith kept me going....Without the support of my mother, aunt and sister, I am not sure that I was gonna make it. (Michael Rubio)

Stan Chu Ilo visited Kolbe House, a ministry supported by the Archdiocese of Chicago to accompany prisoners in the nearby Cook County Jail—the largest jail in the U.S Midwest with about 6000 inmates, and to support the re-entry of former inmates. The first meeting with some of the former inmates was not recorded because I needed to build trust with them. Interestingly, it was a lively conversation. The first part of the citations represents the notes I took in this first conversation. The second set of citations are those of the participants in the second day of our meeting—members of the family of Michael Rubio who was released less than a year ago after eight and half years of imprisonment.

Key Words: Wisdom from the Margins/Vulnerability/Trust in God: God was with me, never give up, guilt, pain, hope, trust.

Citations Part One:

- *Vulnerability:* “People give up on you easily when you are in trouble, but they stuck with me at Kolbe house” **Andrew Dias**.
- “I am still fighting my case; I wish I could turn back the hand of the clock. I am trying to turn my life around.” **Afredo**.
- “When you are locked up, you are afraid of people inside and outside the jail when you come out. When I got out of jail, I was scared of people. But Deacon Pablo of Kolbe House has helped me a lot” **Jonathan**.
- *Trust in God:* “You must seek healing for yourself when you are in prison and trust that God will help you to heal.” **Andrew Diaz**.
- *Trust in God:* “The Lord gives us what we need not what we want; it does not depend how people treat you, but how God loves you.” **Rose Cano**
- *Revelation:* “I found God again in the jail. My faith kept me going. I wanted to stay alone in my solitude in jail, but the Lord was with me. Without the support of my

mother, aunt and sister, I am not sure that I was gonna make it.” **Michael Rubio**.

Citations: Part II Focus Group conversation with Michael Rubio’s Family (assisted in the interview by Fr Moses Navarro)

- *Prayer*: “There’s no special place in jail. You’re just locked up behind the door or the gates and with a cellmate. And so your room is an arm’s length. So I would sit in my bed and then I would say my prayers, especially in the beginning, because it was very difficult for me. Very new to me. I had never been to prison in my life and I knew nothing of the way prison life was.” (2:55): **Michael Rubio**.
- *Vulnerability*: “So I went to prison. And in prison I begged God to allow me back into his life. After Ignoring him for a long while. So, yes, I begged for him to allow me to come back into his life, just to please watch over me, protect me, keep me safe, allow me the will, strength and power to get through what I have to get through. Because it was right. I was paying the consequences for what I have done. I prayed for my family. Because I was no longer there. I felt that I wasn’t able to help them get through their bad times (7:44): **Michael Rubio**.
- *Hope and Trust*: “I pray for Michael constantly. Oh, I worried about him. But again, the Lord says, if you have faith, you should not have fear. And so I kind of that’s why I had to develop my faith. I had to be strong through my faith like my mom was. And that’s what helped me get through. Every chance I had, every opportunity that they were going to see Michael, I would take it, you know, because I wanted to see him, want to be near him, encourage him and know that I was there to support him. It was difficult. At night, I’d go to sleep and I’d worry about him (9:50) **Dolores Winker**
- “And so that being said, you know, family got us through. So as hard as it may have been, the joys were making sure and making it, seeing Mike being able to be a family and seeing him, my mom, seeing him, you know, the different joys of that, his safety, that could be joy” (14: 35): **Dawn Rubio**
- *Revelation*: “there’s not a moment now that I don’t see God because each and every day, I make it through. It’s because of him, each and every day that I am here. I have a lot of challenges to go through. After being released from prison each and every day that I can leave my bed I’m thankful to God because he allowed me to get through that day. (20:51): **Michael Rubio**

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

A fundamental insight in my encounter with this family and particularly the discussion that followed is the narrative of the experience of God that Michael and the other four former inmates shared with us. The other point is the experience of the Church in the prison and outside the prison. Their experience of God was not through the sacraments. Michael noted that it was only in the last year of his incarceration that he was able to attend Mass, but still spoke of his intimate moments of encounters with God in his prison room. The experience of the Church from all of them was also not through a formal membership in any parish, but through the Kolbe House, a ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The experiences of and encounters with God and of the Church by these brothers both inside and outside of the jail point to the revelatory impulses that are often stirred in the soul of those at the peripheries. These moments occurred in those reverential spaces of solidarity and compassion like Kolbe House, where the footprints of God are revealed so clearly in the acts of love, mercy, compassion and total acceptance of the wounded who are welcomed into this shelter as the Good Samaritan did when he brought the wounded man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho to the inn—**Stan Chu Ilo**

b. El Paso/ Ciudad Juárez

. “I have a lot of hope that our family members will come back.” (Families at Centro de Derechos Humanos Cente)

Background: Centro de Derechos Humanos Center exists to support families whose family members have disappeared. It offers a space for people to lament their loss and gives them tools to seek all kinds of legal redress and support in the search for family members who disappeared. This is a very painful situation in Ciudad Juárez. The National Registry of the Interior Affairs Ministry of Mexico has recorded more than 100,023 missing persons in Mexico since 1964. One UN official described the femicide taking place in this city as a pandemic. Meghan and Stan encountered six persons whose family members have disappeared and who are searching for them without losing hope and keeping their memories alive. On the walls of the room where we met the families, we saw many pictures of the missing persons; posters and banners which they use for their fight and advocacy. The paintings and images on the wall here tell the stories of violence, gangs, abandonment, cultural indifference to violence against women and courage by family members. They also tell the stories of hope and fragility, trust in God and despair, solidarity, and collective energy of many people who say to the darkness, “we beg to differ.”

Our conversation partners here were Sylvia, Eliza, Ophelia, Maria, Rose, and Alejandro

Key Words: hope and trust, clericalism, vulnerability, fragility

- **Hope and Trust:** “I have a lot of hope that our family members will come back. I pray and hope that our family members who are missing are not suffering. Faith, hope, and being positive encourages the heart because it places us in the hand of God. We have to have faith.” —Sylvia
- “It is so hard to talk about this (crying)—**Eliza**
- “Thanks to my faith in God, I do not hate the people who took away my family members. I believe that the justice of God exists and will help in resolving this.” —**Ophelia**

Wisdom from the Margins:

- “It is good to know that the Pope is interested in what we are living through. My family member was taken from our house at 5am in the morning in a violent manner and they took him away and I have not seen him since. The church that the

Pope speaks of in his books is one of solidarity, but our experience is not of that kind of church, it is the church that lives contrary to what the Pope writes about; the church is sadly not responding to our pain. We live through a church that is not concerned about the victims of violence and those missing. It is difficult if the church is not involved in what one is living through. The Church does not respond to us; does not accompany us.” —**Maria**.

- “The church is insensitive to us; the priests lack sensibility; the priests do not listen to the pain and cries of the victims. In my community, the church lacks love, lacks support for us, we do not find support in our pain. The women religious are different; the females are different.”—**Sylvia**.
- **Clericalism:** The story recounted by Alejandro captures most painfully the general pain and situation in which these families find themselves. Alejandro’s brother has been missing since 2011. One day he felt so down and went to see the priest at the confessional. He hoped that seeing this priest could be a healing moment for him and that he would receive soothing words and if he had committed any sin that God may forgive him and help him find his brother. The priest instead told **Alejandro**, “Your brother is in hell. He judged my brother to be a bad person. But I recall meeting another priest who said to me, ‘here we have many missing persons and we must look for them.’ There are two faces of the church; the good and the bad ones.”

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei

First, there is a certain unity and love that one finds among the families affected by the disappearance of family members. There is a revelatory moment in the collective effort of those on the existential peripheries. As they enter deeper into a collective lament, there is opened up to any discerning heart a small glimpse of the presence of God. The God revealed in these moments is the God of justice who can only be encountered in the collective solidarity born from lament. The God revealed here is the God who stands with those whose humanity has been emptied by the void left by missing family members and who walks besides them to reverse the cycle of decay and destruction. It is in this lament that a collective hope can emerge from human pains and fragility.

Second, is the shared faith of family members and their commitment to holding on to God. This is quite a powerful witness because even though everything around them is showing signs of disappearance and they are emptied of their trust in humanity with the wickedness they experienced in the disappearance of their family members, and the insensibility which sadly they collectively felt from the hand of the Church; they still are putting their trust and hope in God. As Alejandro says, “There are two things that are painful to me today about our Church: first pretense/lying, and second re-victimizing us by the negative judgment that some priests pass on our missing and disappeared relative.” Rose, spoke with some pain to this in these words, “The promise of Pope Francis that priests should get out of their expensive cars and walk with the people and smell like the sheep has not happened.” Finally, is the wisdom that comes from an empty place. The biblical image that comes to mind is what the Holy Family went through when Jesus went missing and whether that experience is any help to these suffering families. What lessons can we learn from this family and how can the Church accompany them? The family members already are teaching us that, (i) every life matters and that love is stronger than death and disappearance and one should never lose hope; (ii) that the church is truly church when like the Good shepherd she goes out in search of the missing ones among us, especially those who disappear because of the great evil and social conditions created by unjust social, economic and global policies; (iii) the experience of the church is not only in the walls of our churches, rectories and chanceries, but in sites of lamentation like this place. The

experience of being church can be nourished and reimagined in alternate sites in the hearts of these family members who are carrying their family members wherever they go and who seek solidarity and accompaniment from all people in their fight. Alejandro, for instance, called me aside and gave a small stone, saying, “This was taken from the ground where I was with my brother ten years ago. Keep it and pray over it. It is taken from a holy ground because I stood together in love with him on that ground” -- **Stan Chu Ilo**

c. New York

“God wanted me healed and to see myself as what I was meant to be – a child of God with restored dignity, coherent in word, action, thought and being.” (Ana T.)

Background: On June 16th, 2022, Meghan Clark interviewed Ana Tavares, a 49-year-old Latina, single mother, high school teacher, and active member of both her parish and a lay Catholic charismatic community. Ana returned to the Catholic church after 20 years after a personal encounter with God at a retreat and after this conversion, lives “to serve God at all times.”

Keywords: Trinity, God the Father, Jesus, Healing, Hope, Trust, Encounter, Forgiveness

Theme 1: Hope and Trust (Where do you see God)

- **The Sacred Heart of Jesus: “basically a cleansing place. A place where you walk through, your received or embraced in his heart and restored, renewed, redressed, cleansed, purified to be that child of God you have been expected to be from the moment life was given to you.”**
- Mary: “She’s my mom, my spiritual mother,” she “opens doors, windows, whatever Mary can open, she opens.” – Currently praying the Rosary of 7 Sorrows in order “How can you identify with the sorrows of others so you can be even more humane with them.”
- Where do you see God? – Trinity:
- “The Father and I did a lot of reconciling in my heart. I didn’t grow up with a dad as the daughter of an ex-drug dealer...and as a child was sexually abused by my grandfather on my mother’s side...such rupture” and asked God, the Father, how could you allow? “and I heard the Father’s voice, so that you could eventually preach to the world that forgiveness is possible” and she did. Describes “now can pray for him” (dead grandfather) acknowledging “it is easier to reconcile with the dead...but it [reconciliation] allows for you to tell your story and share testimony with others who need healing.”
- Son: I get the strength “finding a sacramental life...thru Jesus...finding the strength...finding peace...sitting in front of the blessed sacrament. I lay it all down here. ... I’m not walking out with any of this angst. It’s refreshing”
- Holy Spirit as guide/compass: “I have a relationship with the Holy Spirit where its completely Divine guidance and healing too...the Holy Spirit gives you the strength, ok this is what has to be conquered today, this is what has to be done. Show me the way.”
- The Concept of Trial/Tribulation: “That is your life when you decide to serve God 100% and be an instrument of healing, of evangelization in the world. Every trial makes you stronger and wiser.”
- **HOPE: her driving force**
 - **Faith, hope, love: “of the three that you cannot loose is hope, there**

are moments you lose faith, that you question love because it breaks”

- **“People who have that resilience in life do not give up hope, ever.”**
- **“there is always peace after the storm and hope is that rainbow after the storm.”**
- **“Hope of giving love to others that drives what I do. If you allow God to fill you up with so much faith and so much love and so much hope you have so much to give others and hopefully it is the best that you can give”**
- **“Hope is your backbone in this faith walk. ... Love is bolder, faith is bolder, when filled with hope.”**

Theme 2: Revelation and Joy

- in response to discussing reconciling with her father, sharing the story of her sexual abuse, and his process of learning and rediscovering how to be a parent to his stepchildren, and her own living as a mother) “I have to trust God will put her through the right path and

protect her as well.

- brought up Abraham and Isaac: **“when you learn to trust God blindly, that that sacrifice was gonna show up no matter what. That you as a parent do not have to sacrifice your own children... that your faith has to be so great that the God that you do not see is completely in control and will provide and will never ask you to do more than you humanly can.”**
- **“I know he gives the grace to do what it is I’m expected to do for him.”**
- **In the Bible: “I always see every character in the Bible as someone who has to go through some sort of trial and that trial takes them to another moment of blessing or victory or triumph or whatever it is they need at the time.”**
- Identifies with the story of Jesus turning over the tables: “I feel like I’d like to turn some tables....Jesus was rebellious. The ultimate rebel, his rebelliousness created a whole religion with many branches.”

Theme 3: Dialogue and Encounter

- Mission of her lay catholic charismatic movement: to evangelize, to contemplate, and to transform in Christ; “you name it we do it.” – for her, “it has been a place to encounter God and lead others to encounter Him”
- **“God wanted me healed and to see myself as what I was meant to be – a child of God with restored dignity, coherent in word, action, thought and being.”**
- **“The church is one big hospital...have to practice forgiveness s o that we can move forward as one.”**
- **“the simplicity of embracing the other with any needs the other has tends to be forgotten”**
- **“If we could have a jubilee of forgiveness and teach people to forgive and be merciful in that sense...just encountering the other as we are.”**
- “Yes, I’ve adopted a very masculine view of God but I recognize God’s maternal instincts...that I choose HE pronoun is a choice, my choice, I like having a paternal relationship with the father, a brotherly relationship with the son, I do and think the Holy Spirit just helps me in that.”

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- Pope Francis: “a reminder of everything Jesus did while he was alive. Sometimes we create static images of Jesus in our lives, in our minds, of what faith is supposed to look like, of what the church is supposed to be so we need to be reminded of the actions of what he [Jesus] did when alive and what asked the apostles to do.”
- **“God does not see you as a minority, you are not broken despite your brokenness. You are just one, one life one being that deserves the best of everything.”**

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

“God wanted me healed and to see myself as what I was meant to be – a child of God with restored dignity, coherent in word, action, thought and being.”

“God does not see you as a minority, you are not broken despite your brokenness. You are just one, one life, one being that deserves the best of everything.”

Listening to Ana tell her story of her own faith journey of healing and reconciliation after twenty years away from the Church and amidst painful experiences of abandonment and sexual abuse, one cannot but be in awe of the power of God’s love. Embracing a prophetic mission to evangelize and with complete faith in God, she seeks to embody (although it is not one of the Biblical passages she referenced) “that they may be one as we are one.” It is a lived example of encountering the world and others through a Trinitarian lens, rooted in a personal relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. The call to develop a personal relationship with each person in the Trinity, a deep personal relationship with the Living God as father/providential creator, Son/saving brother, and Spirit/ever present guide is a powerful lived theology in which one truly sees the presence of God in every aspect of one’s life.

Her reflection on stories of Abraham and Isaac is remarkable, uncompromising, and convincing – **“your faith has to be so great that the God that you do not see is completely in control and will provide and will never ask you to do more than you humanly can.”** Resilience, as well as faith and love, depend upon hope – for her, **“hope is your backbone in this faith walk. ... Love is bolder, faith is bolder, when filled with hope.”**-Meghan Clark

c. Peterborough, Ontario

Mental Illness as Marginalization: “This helps me believe that what they say is true, what Jesus said is true.” (BW, Orillia, Ontario)

Background: The interviewee (BW) is a man in his early 40’s who has struggled with schizophrenia and addiction issues since adolescence. He had worked in the Church and still practices and runs an on-line business.

Key Words: sacraments, hearing God, hope, sustenance Theme 1: Divine Revelation:

- “I really appreciate his (priest) wisdom and God working through him (priest). And he (priest) prompted me, in his homily, to go to Confession.”
- “In Confession, it is most helpful. They (priests) will be straight with me and understanding and knowing...I feel accepted.”
- “And that Exodus 90 (3 month group experience of prayer, health and sharing) that was a real important part of life because it helped me...like a better life with struggle and giving up certain things.”

Theme 2: Hope and Trust:

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- “This is so important for me I feel Adoration is such a powerful prayer. I feel that Jesus desires me so much to meet Him in the Blessed Sacrament. I hope...I wish every church would have Adoration.”
- “There is also a Catholic 12-step group called Catholics in Recovery, and it is open for any addiction, and they have other specialized meetings for Catholics who are in recovery with lust addiction. And I think other ones, I haven’t been to that one, but I know other Catholics who have attended it. Maybe that is something they could refer people to.”
- “Do you think the Church listened to the feminine perspective?” “I know that my relationship with Mother Mary, because she is elevated as the greatest saint, it helps me believe, it helps me believe in the goodness of women, because of my closeness to Mary. Sometimes, because we think differently, I can kind of judge women too much and not see their goodness and I think Mary helps me with that.”
- “Maybe people in the public sphere have to consider that God is still working on them...as He is on me too.”

Theme 3: A Place of Prayer:

- “I still believe in the Sacraments, so the Eucharist is number one!”
- “I try to do nothing while I am in Adoration, and I feel that Jesus just wants to talk with me, that he longs for that and sometimes I’ll talk to people after church in the parking lot.”
- “I would encourage prayer. That was a big change for me, I wasn’t praying enough for my addiction and I try to encourage people I sponsor in my 12-step group to make that commitment to prayer.”

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei:

A constant theme of this interview was the Church responding in both its Person and in its Sacraments to the mentally ill as vulnerable and marginalized. There isn’t one definition or way to understand the complexity of mental illness and BW especially turned to the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist for both sustenance, hope and guidance. This dialogue was not just individual. This was constantly facilitated by a variety of twelve step groups and peer groups that were both facilitated and encouraged by clerical and lay leaders.

In the midst of many constant setbacks and severe social isolation, the interviewee felt that a continuing source of hope in the Holy Spirit were the programs and outreach of the Church. Though at times the demands of living a moral life seemed exhausting, he felt that to do otherwise made him even more “mixed up, sad and confused.”

BW didn’t have many reflections of the Church in the wider world because his world took so much energy to survive in it. Prayer was central to that and so is the constant reaching out of believers and the reality of the Body of Christ. His experience is one of constant healing but also constant hope and trust in God. He doesn’t see it in every parish but he is grateful when he does. -Thomas Lynch

ii. **“The Church has always been a place of refuge for me.” Divorced Mother Dealing with Family Addiction & Mental Health Issues**

Background: The interviewee (J) is a very well-educated Catholic woman who is divorced and had full responsibility for her 3 sons for the last 17 years. Being divorced has often made her feel judged and misunderstood by many fellow Catholics. Her unrelenting and overriding concern is the life and death opioid addiction and mental illness of her eldest

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

son.

Key Words: addiction, divorce, faith in the public square Theme 1: Christians in the Public Square

- "...I think faith formation, for the formation of young people from a very young age, it will be the most critical factor in having them live out their faith in the public square..."
- "So I think, if we want to see our faith more prevalent or more obvious in the public square, it will begin with the formation of our young people."

Theme 2: Hope and Trust

- "I go to Mass as frequently as possible, as not only does the Eucharist give me strength to carry out my responsibilities, but it does provide me with hope and joy in that I have an understanding that of the existential..."
- "I think the Mass, in and of itself, the offering of this act of the Mass, and making that available to people, achieves more than anything else, any other initiative could possibly achieve because it gives us a taste of heaven on a daily basis multiple times a day. And the readings and the good sermons that we have usually orientate us to that foretaste of heaven and if you're really suffering in this world, as so many people are, that is joy encapsulated. What more could one ask for than a little taste of heaven on earth? That's my perspective."
- "The Church has always been a place of refuge for not only me, but I see for my family, my extended family..."
- "I find because it's my sustenance too, I'm there, that's my primary purpose, it's not really fellowship, my primary purpose is to praise and worship and thank God and then to receive the Sacrament, but I'm happy to see and greet in a friendly manner anyone who's new or are just coming to the church."

Theme 3: Women's Perspectives

- "I think the one thing maybe the larger community, and that would be some practicing Catholics, don't understand about divorce is first of all, many people who are divorced and who are Catholic didn't want to get divorced. The majority of people I know did not want to get divorced. It was like a joke or something, but it's like being in a car with someone and you have no control on whether they take their foot off the brakes and you're going down a hill. When you enter into a marriage agreement, the Sacrament, you think the other person has the same appreciation or understanding that you do and over time you find out that they don't and you realize what a terrible situation or predicament you're in when what you think should be one of the most meaningful things in your life is not meaningful to them."
- "I found that some of the Church community...first of all some people wouldn't talk to me, and these were good Catholics. Some people were scandalized. Some people maybe thought I didn't work hard enough at my marriage without knowing anything about it and that they were in difficult marriages and thought if she only knew how hard it is to live in a difficult marriage, she wouldn't give up on marriage so easily. I felt the tremendous amount of judgement and I actually felt that it would be far, far easier, and one would have had far much more support, if one were widowed."
- "I'm a single mother, but I know married people who have addiction issues, their

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

children have addiction issues, and it seems usually the mother that seems to, the father seemed overwhelmed by it, it is a rare father that seems to be able to cope with it, so it seems that it's often left to the mothers, and the mothers, I think sometimes, they need more than the direction, 'you know Monica never gave up on her son; keep praying for your son'..."

Theme 4: Vulnerability

- "Now I do feel like some of priests could have had, for instance, about the issue, but this is all very recent, the scourge of the most recent drug addiction, that which is fentanyl on how dangerous it is and the opioid crisis. I do feel because that's probably affecting a great number of people in our community now that education may have been lacking..."
- "So my experience with that was that individuals help more than organizations."
- "I tried to help a young lady who doesn't have parents and has been an addict for 10 years. She was a top student in her high school class, she worked most of her life, she paid her way to go on a worldwide trip to New Zealand and India. She's extremely bright and she is at risk for dying any minute because she's so addicted. And she was brutally raped multiple times, and I found out about her and for the last year of trying to help her until it became quite dangerous because unfortunately, she's involved with the most dangerous people in our city, and because of addiction."
- "...the greatest obstacles have been overcome when you're working one on one, and that if most addicts had one or two people helping them – and usually that would be the family – so most addicts don't have families anymore, so...or their family can't cope because they're barely surviving themselves economically, or maybe mentally, but my experience has been, the people who recover from addiction, have one or two people never leaving them, helping them all the time..."

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei:

There are hidden margins in our world as well as the more visible ones. How do we deal with people that feel others are highly critical and dismissive of them because of their lifestyle? The personal and interpersonal complexities of divorce in our Church and our society mean that it is extremely hard to pick apart the reasons and causes of marriage breakdown. Almost inevitably, we assign blame but it is not really helpful judging people whose marriages have failed. What is important is to accompany them so that the presence of the church and her ministers in that painful situation will help to bring about healing?

Though the Covid crisis had worldwide attention, the high number of opioid deaths and the ferocious toll that it takes on victims, families, our cities and our institutions is horrifying. It is not surprising that the church in its leadership for its people doesn't have a fix either. The interviewee felt that at least the knowledge - and acknowledgement – of the daily toll of this life and death battle must be addressed. But she also felt that the Church and its Sacraments were her support, her life and her hope. - **Thomas Lynch**

**DOING THEOLOGY
FROM THE EXISTENTIAL
PERIPHERIES
REPORT**

0. Revelation and Joy

a. New York

“God already loves me. And this idea that the church is learning to love people like me” (Ken)

Background: On April 22, 2022, Meghan Clark interviewed Ken at St. John’s University. A 28 yr old gay man in a long-term committed relationship, Ken is an active Catholic with a deep prayer and sacramental life. Educated at Vincentian and Jesuit universities, he is currently a public school teacher after prior time teaching in a Catholic high school.

Theme 1: Vulnerability and Tenderness: (on experiencing the pains of homophobia growing up in Catholic schools and communities)

- “Learning that there was something intrinsically disordered in me, those words were particularly harmful for a child, an adolescent to hear ... Feeling like God set me up for defeat in my own identity” (went on to describe being made to feel as if “created to not be enough.” [00:11:46] - echoed more than once “this idea that I was almost like set up for failure by being the person that I am, by something that I didn’t choose, but something that I was created and created in, and that has been placed in my identity”
- **“If the Body of Christ thinks that I’m intrinsically disordered, then how does God see me?”** described as question that haunted him described bullying in school and in church and led to a lot of “unlearning spiritually”
- came to experience **“God already loves me. And this idea that the church is learning to love people like me”**
- Prayer/Scripture: Imagines himself inside John’s Gospel with Mary Magdalene finding the tomb empty, wondering where is Jesus? Entering into the frustrating feelings of confusion, failure, as if all is lost. Then “Mary heard Jesus call her name and that was the moment of clarification and recognition. I imagine Jesus turns to me and calls my name ... **To hear that naming is important because God knows and loves you as you are.**”

Theme 2: Hope and Trust (In response to questions on prayer, joy/pain, church, sexuality, and the Eucharist)

- “What does it mean to be a person of the Beatitudes?” – Sees answer in Dorothy Day - Day, also from Staten Island, as a kind of “refugee of the faith” who “persevered,” “authentic and raw” example of “challenging life experiences” but she (and God) persevered in directing her life. Sense of not needing to be or seem “perfect.”
- Catholicism: “sense of hope” and joy from the people who “loved me into existence” family (especially grandfather who raised him while parents worked), his partner, Vincentians/Jesuit communities, students...”Faith and Hope, I must trust what I learned and experienced of God.”
- Reflecting on being created “in the image and likeness of God,” describing image as given from God but likeness as something that we “co-create with God” noting Thomas Merton: “to be a saint is to be yourself.”

Theme 3: Dialogue and Encounter (selections in response to questions on prayer, sexuality, reciprocal questions about Pope Francis)

- “sexuality is the same as any desire in us to bring out life or to bring out relationship

with other people” tied to being called to be in relationship; “there are multiple ways to be fruitful and procreate/multiply,” (that isn’t just about biological children), “good sexuality is born out of justice...bad sexuality objectifies”

- “It is harmful to try and be something that you are not” (applies to sexuality)
 - “We are more than just sexual beings but it is part of who we are”
 - It is a “free offering of who you are to be someone else to be one,” rooted in a sense that “I love you so much I want to give this part of myself to you”
 - The Church blesses infertile couples “I don’t know why the same courtesy and generosity can’t be shown to people of the same gender who demonstrate the same loving commitment to each other. And do not want to denigrate or make fun of the institution of marriage but respect it so much that they want the support of a community to be extended to them as well”
- For me, Pope Francis is “model for dialogue” “invitation” and “He gives me hope that conversations could potentially be had about LGBT Catholics,” *who am i to judge?* “Brought to tears” because the tone changed and “opened space.”

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

“God already loves me, the Church is learning to love people like me”

In FT 75, Pope Francis calls, “Let us turn at last to the injured man. There are times when we feel like him, badly hurt and left on the side of the road.” Lifting up the *sensus fidei*, one turns our attention to the wounded man and listening to hear this deep sense of being loved by God, being known fully and completely by God - including in his sexuality - and being loved by God. The reality of internalizing a sense of “intrinsically disordered” as if one was “**created for failure**” and then the powerful answer to stay in the Church to demonstrate the place for someone like him, to be visible to the next person. Listening prompts looking with humility inward to where the church’s theology and practice may be the cause of the wounds and the ways today’s wounded may in fact be the Samaritan to the next. The deep experience of being loved by God in contrast to the experience of rejection and suspicion by the Catholic Church demonstrates a problem with current pastoral and theological approaches which fail to manifest the love of God to LGBTQ+ Catholics. This sense that God already loves me, the church is only just in a process of learning to love our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters is at once painful and hopeful. It recognizes that the Church and the people in the Church are learning and growing.

Additionally, it is quite powerful to consider the direct personal experience of God in prayer described. For Ken, rooted in Scripture, in deep identification with Mary Magdalene and Ruth: “Mary heard Jesus call her name and that was the moment of clarification and recognition. I imagine Jesus turns to me and calls my name ... **To hear that naming is important because God knows and loves you as you are.**” Unfailing hope and trust, rooted in revelation, of the love of God, a love that is deep, personal, and concrete
—Meghan Clark.

b. San Diego

“...out of those ashes of that destruction, though, came all of this friendship and the closeness and the bond.” —*Beginning Experience retreat facilitator.*

Background: This conversation was with members of [Beginning Experience](#), an international ministry for Catholics who are divorced and widowed. Jennifer Owens-Jofré met with members of the Orange County chapter before one of their monthly meetings in a

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

member's home. Most of the members of the group are middle- to upper-middle class, racially privileged women.

Note: Because of the need to protect the privacy of participants we have anonymized the citations. Theme: *Revelation and Joy*

"My son was definitely a miracle kid. And I wasn't supposed to be able to have children. So he's a big joy...and I told him that when my husband left me, "It was worth it because of you."

"Definitely accomplishments for my kids and grandkids, for that matter... Or when we get together, our social events, oh Lord, our social events that we have...we always have a good time."

"But just having children and being able to be married and being married in our parish...when I was married, it brought me so much joy in family life when my kids were growing up, and...out of those ashes of that destruction, though, came all of this friendship and the closeness and the bond."

"The birth of my children, marriage to my husband, I think. And then I have grandchildren. I just had a new grandbaby myself. And so here I am now, babysitting full time because the baby had some issues, and we can't take her to a daycare. So...one of the joys of my life now is really being of service to others."

"For me, it's the road to Emmaus. You know, because I always put myself as...the two disciples and how they were traumatized by what happened [in Jerusalem at the crucifixion]. They couldn't believe what happened. And Jesus was right there. And...that's how I kind of see my...road...out of grief and all that. He was right there. And I see Jesus working through all of the things that we do...and that...my eyes are opened in how they get to the place. And then he offers the bread, and their eyes are opened, and they now see things differently than...they had before."

Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness

"And when we're in this group, I know we're working towards trying to do something for someone else...who was like we were, I was in a very bad place when my husband died...and to try to bring them back to seeing that life can be lived and should be lived."

"One of the most painful for me because I was so much a part of the church, was my husband left me. And then my pastor told me never to talk to him again. And I had to leave the parish, where I've been for 30 years. That was my home, and I thought my family, and I never really heard from people. "How are you doing? Are you okay? What's going on?" Nothing. And I didn't know where I fit. I didn't fit anywhere. And I went to the Motherhouse for the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Orange for about a year and a half because I didn't feel safe anywhere. It was the most lonely feeling...like I love the sisters. But it wasn't the parish experience with all the families and generations and stuff. And everyone knows that, and I really missed that, and I missed going to church with my family, and suddenly I had no family, and holidays were horrible. And so and even my son, I'd always give him a preference, [saying], "Go be with your dad, his side of the family," because his grandparents needed him more. Because they weren't always going to be around and, so thank God for my siblings. They kind of took me in, but I felt like a fifth wheel."

Theme: Wisdom from the Margins

"And honestly, another source of joy is just doing pastoral ministry. It just seems to flow and to interact with people and see them growing and good things happening in their lives is just such a privilege."

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

“Plus the other thing it gives me joy...is actually facilitating on a weekend and seeing the difference in the people from Friday night when they walk in to Sunday afternoon at the closing mass. That gives me joy...I always go away smiling about that one.”

Lifting up the *sensus fidei*: Throughout his ministry, Francis has emphasized the necessity of encounter—with Jesus, with one another, with ourselves—and of not shying away from the reality of someone’s pain. In *Evangelii Gaudium* 91 and 92, he speaks to the dangers of isolation, as well as the challenge of being fully present to our relationships with God and with one another. He explains, “We need to help others to realize that the only way is to learn how to encounter others with the right attitude, which is to accept and esteem them as companions along the way, without interior resistance. Better yet, it means learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas. And learning to suffer in the embrace of the crucified Jesus whenever we are unjustly attacked or meet with ingratitude, never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity.” In the following paragraph, he writes that it is in that place that real healing can be found.

These women from Beginning Experience embody this ethos of Francis. Divorced or widowed, none of them anticipated that they would be in this place at this point in their adult lives. However, instead of isolating themselves from one another, they draw close to each other in community, sharing their burdens and their joys with God and one another. The ministry they share with others who have experienced similar challenges fills a gap in parish life. In many ways, the vulnerability they experienced when their marriages ended, whether by death or by divorce, opens their hearts anew to engage with others more tenderly. Even so, our parishes would do well not only to make more space for this peer ministry of which they are a part but also to make room for those who are divorced or widowed in parish life in other ways, as well. The ostracization many of them felt in their parish communities as those separations were just beginning needs to be engaged with compassion, so that others who are widowed and divorced might be spared similar experiences. - **Jennifer Owens-Jofre**

0. Leaving Clericalism Behind

a. Chicago

“If you live with the people, they’ll change you” (Efrain) Background: Efrain Martin came to the United States as a refugee fleeing government-sponsored violence in Guatemala in the 1980s. His Mayan community in Guatemala was served by Fr. William Woods, who developed a system of economic cooperatives for the community. Efrain was settled in the US by St. Giles Church in Oak Park, IL, where he remains an active member.

Keywords: refugee, miracles, Mayan, liberation, listening

Theme: Revelation and joy (on everyday miracles)

- “We were out with my dad planting rice in one part of our field. Then my mom stayed at home washing clothes and doing stuff near the house. And it was around 1:00 in the afternoon when the Army came into our village and started burning down houses and catching or killing people in our villages. Only God knows why my sister didn’t get killed that day because she was shot through her shirt. And with the baby on the back, you know, if we question ourselves, where’s the miracles of God? I think in every aspect of our life, it’s every day.”

Theme: Ecological conscience (on being an indigenous Catholic)

- “Being Guatemalan, you know, I pray to the Black Christ. I believe in the Black Christ, the miracle that he has done. Since I was little I always heard my mom

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

praying to the Black Christ. And that goes down through the generations of us. But at the same time, I don't forget that I am Mayan. I believe also in the holy world, in the land, where I got to ask permission to the land. I pray to God to give me permission to open this land up so I can eat from it."

Theme: Leaving clericalism behind (on priests listening to the people)

- "We really took Fr. William Woods' life... He was a Republican from Texas. A right wing Republican from Texas. Going to Guatemala. And in the change in his life, the need of the people makes you change the way you think. And the way you act. If you live with the people, they'll change you. You know a lot of the work that was done back in the eighties. The theology of liberation and all that. I think that's what we need to do now. If I see back in Guatemala now where there's hundreds of [Protestant] churches. Why? Why do we have a lot of churches in Guatemala? Because the ground is too fertile. Maybe we left a lot of open space, to come in and just do the work that the people need to be done."
- "I remember the scandals here, a couple of years ago about, you know, priests, the pedophiles and all that stuff. A lot of people left the church. I remember I told one or two, 'Your belief is too shallow, to stop coming to church.' Because you believe in God, you don't believe in the guy standing in front of you and talking about the Bible, he's just being used. He's an instrument of God to spread the word. I don't believe in him. I believe in what he's saying. The law will do its work. He's just standing there because he studied for it and worked for it. My belief is in God, in the Word of God and not in the guy who's standing in front."
- "The words of Pope Francis, is like a new breath of air coming through and making us feel okay, he's on our side. And speaking to your people, and listening too."

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*

Efrain has a keen sense of the omnipresence of God in the world. He interprets dramatic events as demonstrating the intervention of God, especially in fleeing the Guatemalan army and ending up with a receptive and loving church community in the US. As an indigenous Catholic, he also finds God in the mundane and non-miraculous aspects of everyday life, especially the land and the people. Efrain is grateful for the work that Fr. William Woods did in his community in Guatemala, but he is clear that it is the people who changed Fr. Woods, and not simply the other way around. Fr. Woods was evangelized by the Mayan people in his community, who led him to find God in their lives.

This attitude toward the relationship between the priest and the people has made Efrain's faith more, not less, resilient. He is able to remain a faithful parishioner through the clerical abuse scandals because he believes in God, not in the priest. God speaks through the people, not only through the priest, which is why Pope Francis insists on listening, not simply talking. The role of Fr. Woods as representative of Christ and the Church in the community was clearly important, but only because he let the people change him into a more Christ-like leader—**Bill Cavanaugh**.

b. New York

."And all that we ask is that we are included in our faith" (Christine)

Background: On May 5, 2022, Meghan Clark interviewed Christine at the Church of the Sacred Heart in South Plainfield. A 65-year-old transgender woman, who transitioned 8 years ago. Christine is an active lifelong Catholic with a deep prayer and sacramental life. She was married for 29 years, has two adult children, and one grandchild. She is a Eucharistic minister in her parish.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Keywords: LGBT, inclusion, vulnerability, sacraments, clergy, Pope Francis, child of God

Leaving Clericalism Behind:

- **“The average Catholic, regardless of what’s happened in recent times, look up to their priests and look up to the bishops and their clergy and their deacons. And so when a member of the clergy says something negatively or positively, it affects the people who are listening to them...they have a great amount of influence.”**
- On her reflection on her faith and coming to terms with being transgender,
 - **“As part of my transition, I knew I had to go to confession.** I was a parishioner for probably 20 to 25 yrs at the time and I knew walking into confession [with associate pastor] that my relationship with my god was strong....I told him I was transgender and the first thing he said was regarding sex, **and I said well this has absolutely nothing to do with sex. This has to do with who I am as a person**”
 - But nine months after coming out as transgender, her senior pastor asked if she wanted to become a Eucharistic minister: “I immediately cried and accepted...I’ve been so blessed. Again, I know others, who have not been so blessed.”
- On the sacraments:
 - “The sacraments are another way of receiving God’s grace, perhaps at a different level than just everyday grace that we receive through prayer.”
 - “Some clergy saying that transgender persons should be denied communion. They should be denied all sacraments, which is, its’s very hurtful...And that’s telling us we do not belong, that we are not Catholic enough.”

Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness: (in response to questions about prayer, grace, and her experience of being a Catholic transgender woman)

- “I regret that in my 29 yrs of marriage, I could never be as honest with my wife at the time about my gender identity. It’s something that I knew since I could speak and understand, I knew inside that I was different.”
- **“Sadly, lately, I hear from my church that the church doesn’t understand or doesn’t believe that I truly exist. And that hurts.”**
- On rejection in/by the Church of transgender persons, “Yet when the church condemns someone, whether gay or transgender, or denies them acceptance or entrance into a church or denies them sacraments. You are not only losing that one person, you’re losing a family. You’re losing friends. You could be losing dozens of people at a time when the church wants to keep people and bring people in. I think that’s overlooked sometimes when some within our church criticize or condemn individuals.
- “I’ve found no one who is more loving, beautiful, and kind than those Catholics who are part of the LGBTQ community. No one. **And all that we ask is that we are included in our faith, in our parish communities and active in those communities just like everyone else.**”

Theme: Revelation and Joy

- On a particular Scripture passage, (**Story of Jesus and the Woman Accused of**

Adultery) “slowly people move away and depart, leaving the woman alone with Jesus. And he says, go and sin no more. **If they’re not accusing you, I am not going to accuse you either.** And we see so much in our daily life where it’s easy for people to criticize someone else, particularly in today’s social media world without having to be identified.”

- When followed up – why this story – “she’s physically saved and she’s definitely emotionally saved as well, which is what God’s grace does for us, it helps us emotionally and gets us through our lives regardless of what is happening. **And I think that’s what most often we look for tangible things when we pray and don’t necessarily see the grace that we receive in trying to work through those things**”
- “Being a child of God, I think, means you respect life, you respect the dignity, no matter whether the person is in the womb or that person is 95yrs old or older throughout life” ... “We focus a lot on birth, which we must. But then as we get older, sometimes we forget that every person is also a child of God and deserves dignity and respect....to be a child of God is someone who respects all life. Every life. Every day.”
- On her relationships since transitioning: **“people have told me I’ve been a better person since I transitioned,” “I could no longer not transition,”** she recognizes that “change is scary. Uh, difference is scary.... opening your arms to someone that you don’t quite understand, that doesn’t fit I that little box is difficult.” She notes Jesus reached out to those on the margins that no one else wanted to engage.
- On Prayer: Specifically, to Jesus and to Mary: Mary: “Just because throughout the gospels, it was always mary that everyone went to talk to her son and try to influence her son...And so I often ask her, which like People of Jesus time did, to intercede for me and whoever I’m praying for”

Lifting up the Senses Fidei:

Focusing on Pope Francis’s own emphasis on reality over ideas, I wish to lift up Christine’s deep sense of her own dignity and insistence that she has a place in the Church. She has a profound understanding of grace and the sacraments, but she and the LGBT community are calling for recognition – they exist, they are here, they are not an ideology but children of God. For me, this calls to mind *Fratelli Tutti* – “Indeed, when we open our hearts to those who are different, this enables them, while continuing to be themselves, to develop in new ways.” (134) This is not merely a passage relevant for migration but for other ways we place boundaries and borders between peoples.

Christine, like many others, ask that the Church acknowledges they exist and that they are already part of the people of God. All aspects of her life are deeply sacramental, thus the role of the clergy matters. Her descriptions of going to confession before transitioning and of weeping when invited to serve in her parish as a Eucharistic Minister show the depths of her sacramental life. Moreover, she notes that, **“people have told me I’ve been a better person since I transitioned,”** is the Church prepared to truly consider her lived experience and let it inform the way pastoral care for transgender persons is structured? **-Meghan Clark**

- ii. **“What I say is: I believe in God. Religion is like...no, I don’t know how to explain it.” (Angelina)**

Background: On May 9, 2022, Meghan Clark, with John Gonzales (CCBQ) interviewing in Spanish, met with Angelina, a 58 year old Catholic woman living in Brooklyn who is also a home health aide and Mexican immigrant. (Quotations via translation).

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Keywords: migration, labor, clerical abuse, prayer, elderly, Guadeloupe, Blessed Sacrament

Theme: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- **"There are many old people who are alone, who have no one to take care of them. And yes, that also affects me... it does affect me. I feel that since it is part of my job, what I do, I take care of the elderly.** So I say, they have a person who is taking care of them, but not everybody always does. When I see on the news things that happen to the elderly, that they are attacked, and that does affect me. So I kind of mention them in my prayers."
- "I see God in things that happen that you don't expect, good things that happen that you don't expect."
- "My grandfather used to say, "there is the Blessed Sacrament, pray to Him, pray to Him, ask Him to help you with your problems and He will do it". So I always kept that in my mind, what my mother told me."

Theme: Wisdom from the Margins:

- On exploitation as a worker and joining worker cooperatives: "So I feel that it has to do partly with my faith because, as I said at the beginning, I didn't want to continue being. It was an exploitative type of work, the factory. I didn't want to be part of that group anymore. So, when they started talking to me about cooperatives, I saw here an opportunity to grow. And so it was. I started without knowing if I was going to be able to get a job in this cooperative. But I came. I put a lot of effort into it. I learned everything with all the training and I am one of those who have pushed this cooperative. And so far, thank God, we have enough work. So **I do feel that faith has a lot to do with it, because one believes in what one is doing.** And yes, it has changed my life a lot because, thanks to God, I have a good job, I have a fair salary and I don't know. I feel fulfilled when I have joined these groups, the cooperatives. **So, with these cooperatives, I feel that we are stopping a little bit the exploitation at work, because we are the ones who manage our businesses and we are the ones who decide what to do, what not to do, and our whole system is working.**"
- There's a passage that I've heard it several times in the...in church. I don't. I'm honest; **I don't read the Bible. I just come to church. But I've heard several times about the prodigal son and that kind of attracted me. I don't know...like a feeling...because I think every family has a prodigal son.**"

Theme: Leaving Clericalism Behind

- "I've heard how priests have abused children, especially boys, and that has really made me like...It hasn't made me lose my faith, because I don't put my faith in a priest. I put my faith in God. I know that priests are human and I'm not going to say that they are all the same. I am not going to say that they are all bad. But, part of the dark part of the Catholic religion, I could say that it is a dark part and I don't like it. But I have sisters who have changed religion. We never talk about religion, because for me religion is a very, yes, complicated subject."
- **We Mexicans believe a lot in the Virgin of Guadalupe and that is my faith. That is my belief and, and, and, and, and well no. I don't have much to say. What I say is: I believe in God. Religion is like...no, I don't know how to explain it.**

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

“What I say is: I believe in God. Religion is like...no, I don't know how to explain it.”

The ambivalence Angelina expressed about religion, meaning the Church, is a combination of raising the issue of clericalism and clerical sex abuse but also really a matter of listening to the wisdom from the margins. She is clearly a woman of deep faith in God, remains committed to the Catholic church – demonstrated by her connection to the Blessed Sacrament and articulating the way faith motivates her work for justice. Yet, the long term impact of clerical sex abuse leaves her with a deep ambivalence about the institution, as a woman who is committed to caring for the vulnerable. While she didn't say much on the matter in the interview, her attention to the vulnerability and care for the elderly is also lifting up a forgotten or “thrown away” community to which Pope Francis keeps drawing our attention. –**Meghan Clark.**

iii. God's got the whole puzzle & **“I'm fine with my little piece. I'm a corner piece.”**
(Survivors of Labor Trafficking)

Background: On June 6, 2022, Meghan Clark and Ana Tavares (Spanish assistance) visited a Lifeway Network Safe housing program. Lifeway Network, founded by Sr. Joan Dawber, SC, is one of only two programs in the New York metro area providing safe housing specifically for both domestic and foreign-born women survivors of human trafficking. We shared a meal with four women who have experienced forced labor, trafficking, and related situations. All three were newer to the program, experienced significant difficulties. After dinner: Laireb, a Muslim woman from Pakistan, Adrianna, from Mexico, and Melissa from Arizona agreed to a listening session.

Keywords: violence, abuse, Catholicism, fear, Islam, prayer, mental health, Theme 1: Wisdom from the Margins

- “I'm just going to be honest... I talk to God every day. And when I have girl problems, I ask to talk to Mary. That's how I think about that. So whenever I have like like for to, like when I remember when I was younger, I'd always ask Mary when I was going to get my period and my boys and stuff. And then I would just I talk to God every day, but I don't get on my knees and I talk to them in my head everyday, all day long. So I guess I pray all day long.” (Melissa)
- “I've been through so much. I mean, I've almost died, and I still like, he was still there with me. It had happened and I had to learn from it because pain builds strength. So I that's I don't think he ever leaves me. It's just if I'm going to count on the man going to ask him a question of him, he's never left me, no matter no matter what happened. **I may not understand. It may not make sense to me, but he's got the whole puzzle because I only have a piece I'm fine with my little piece. I'm a corner piece. I'm fine with that. I'm good with that.**” (Melissa)
- “I don't know. I mean the biggest source of joy is me I make myself ... I make myself happy. That's my biggest joy. I learned that. That I can count on myself and God is me. So he's talking through me.” (Melissa)
- “I read - **my street mom gave me a book and it told me that God cared like I care if you stub your toe or if you lost your keys. I was like wow, he cares** and my ex is really abusive and next month is just grabbing the Bible. It's going to roll back. It's like there's a big, big deal. When I realized that God did, no matter what I did, he was going to by me. It's a big deal.” (Melissa)

2: Dialogue and Encounter

(Reflections from young Muslim woman from Pakistan, now in NYC)

- “I'm praying five times a day and sometimes I was feeling bad and see something bad. So when I'm traveling and train is like 45 minutes more than so

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

I start with the name of the God on my Koran app. So because of I in the past, I see hard time. So I was that time promised to, my God, if you do something for me, I will never forget you. So that's why I am praying, because I don't want to break my promise and I don't want to face hard time again. Because if I break my promise, God, give me the tough times. " (Laireb)

- **"Know, God is with you.... If God give you the hard time, it doesn't mean He forgot you. He want to more close you. So that time I was like, No, he always did.** (Laireb)
- "It's my feeling when I see the hard time. We forget everything and we move to the God side. So they give us the happiness, the giver. If we give that he like a hard time, it's not like bad thing he want to more close so he love more." (Laireb)

Theme 3: Leaving Clericalism Behind

The two women who grew up Catholic had deep experiences of pain, alienation, and guilt tied to the Catholic church – which was for both of them “triggering” as a conversation topic.

- “I grew up Catholic, been Catholic my whole life. And it was just it was I struggled so much growing up even then when I left my mom and my pastor because I felt guilty all the time, all the time for everything I did, for having cake, for having food, for doing saying this work. And I refuse to do that anymore. I refused to. ... Maybe that's why I'm so adamant against not praying the specific words and I won't dress a certain way or going because. No, no, no.” (Melissa)
- Expanding on Catholicism: “It was pain. Oh, my God. Yes, yes. I tried killing myself. I used to my mom growing up and I used to say, oh, my God, I messed up here. But okay, if I do good here, will that count? Good for this like I used to. So bad it was Catholicism. No, I don't have any good experience its a trigger to me.” (Melissa)
- **“I thought God hated me my whole life.** I grew up and I thought he hated me. I was like, Oh, God hates me because all this bad stuff keeps happening to me and I'm like, God hates me. But then I switch my perspective because it's either your power or your prison. So I use it as my power and I look at it as he needs me to endure this pain because I can and it's going to give me strength to help somebody else.” (Melissa)
- On Experience of Catholic school and culture in home country, “I didn't like that it felt like it was obligated ...my family were very close minded because they were practicing Catholics.” (Adrianna)

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

Survivors of human trafficking, in all its complexities, is a particular locus of concern for Pope Francis. Often this leads to a call to aid survivors, which is important; however, through this listening session another aspect surfaced – what if one's experience of Catholicism is part of the problem, part of the harm and vulnerability experienced? **“I thought God hated me my whole life,”** Melissa shared. The spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional pain inflicted by those with spiritual authority (either priests/ministers or parents) over others. It is important to attend to negative experiences of Catholicism – of believing that God hates her and this contributing to her own vulnerability and suicidality. Yet, she has come to have a relationship with God that must remain independent of institutionalized religion. She noted that we don't see the whole picture because God's **“got the whole puzzle because I only have a piece I'm fine with my little**

piece. I'm a corner piece. I'm fine with that. I'm good with that." This is a powerful theological insight and even more remarkable given the alienation and weaponization of God and religion she described from her childhood –**Meghan Clark.**

c. San Diego/Los Angeles

1. Church should be a place where you feel welcome & secure, but often isn't. (Veronica)

Background: On May 17, 2022, Tom Landy interviewed Veronica, a 27 year old latina mother of 3 from Los Angeles at Homeboy Industries. According to Veronica, "Homeboy Industries is basically like a place for men and women that have been incarcerated, been on parole, probation, that want to change."

Keywords: church, belonging, comfort,

Theme 1: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- On always wearing a rosary: "To be honest, I wear it not only for protection or to keep me grounded or to let me know that He's with me, but it's also to let other people know that I'm not afraid to speak about Him. I'm not afraid to encourage somebody else to know about Him, because in reality, His real name is Jehovah, if you think about it. I learned that from my aunt, because she's a Jehovah Witness."
- Used to blame God when bad things happened: "Yeah, that's what I used to think, but no, I don't think like that anymore. I have a clearer head on my shoulder. I talk to a lot of people that believe in God, a lot of people that have good faith in Him, and I strongly believe in Him and have faith, because you don't just get those miracles like a day or two. That takes process, because you have to make yourself do the process. If a family member passes away, you just got to think, they're in a better place."
- "Church is supposed to, it's supposed to feel like a family. It's basically like a school, but not really. You're going to church to learn. You're not going to church to get told that you are doing this bad, or you're doing that. It's not supposed to be like that. You know?"

Theme 2: Hope and Trust

- At homeboy "feel safe, feel wanted....If a church had an environment like Homeboys it'd be a lot easier"
- "I want to talk about my life, I told this to someone yesterday, "If you could be in my shoes today, you'd probably hop right out." I say that, because I'm still going through a lot of stuff, but I'm trying to stay focused about it"
- "Seeing my kids smile, that's joy. Waking up every day, that's a joy. Being able to have shoes on your feet, clothes on your back, food in your mouth, that's a joy. It just doesn't necessarily mean like, "Oh, I got money. That's joy." That's not joy. Money's not happiness. It's not. It's what you want in life. It's how you make it in life. That's joy.

Theme 3: Leaving Clericalism behind

- Repeatedly mentioned - did not feel "comfort" or like "doing the right thing" sharing with a priest.
- "I do try and go to church, but there's just something about it that I just, I can't. Like you say about people, a lot of pastors and stuff, how they mistreat people, I hear a lot of things about that"

**DOING THEOLOGY
FROM THE EXISTENTIAL
PERIPHERIES
REPORT**

- Indicates not comfortable thinking she is safe and doesn't trust: "That's why another reason why I don't really go to church, because I don't want to feel like I'm safe in a zone,...I wouldn't want to go to a church to feel uncomfortable. I've been to many churches like that, where I go and I just feel uncomfortable. It's not like, oh, I don't like the church, how it looks. No, it's the energy, it's the surroundings, it's how people look at you. I don't go to church."

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

Veronica's faith experience and story indicate the importance of examining the role of a faith community as one of welcome or of judgment. Veronica and all the participants in the listening session from Homeboy shied away from deep recognition of right and wrong. However, a faith community that is focused on judgment does not present itself as a safe space for welcoming those whose lives have already been subject to judgment and are now seeking belonging and recognition. Veronica's repeated allusions questioning if church is or can be a "safe zone" versus Homeboy industries where she does feel safe, raises important questions as to where God is found and how the Veronicas of this world are inviting us to think of how people prevent the work of God or make God present in those non-judgement sites that offer people a unique encounter with God. **-Meghan Clark**

0. **Ecological Conscience**

a. New York

“we help to clean up the planet a little bit, in all the continents where there is a recycler, we help to clean the planet” (Josefa)

Background: On May 9th, 2022, Meghan Clark met with Josefa, a Mexican immigrant and canner/recycler at *Sure We Can* cooperative in Brooklyn. John Gonzales (CCBQ) facilitated the interview in Spanish. She has also been elected by her fellow canners/recyclers to represent them to the Global Alliance of Waste pickers, as they work on a statement trying to attain ILO recognition. (Quotations via translation).

Keywords: ecology, recycling, throwaway culture, hope, vulnerability, exclusion Theme 1: Ecological Conscience

- Where do you see God in the world: “What do I tell you? Well right now he’s punishing us a lot because we don’t listen, and we deviate...That is why all these storms are happening....like for example the tornadoes that are happening in California and other things happening to the world.”
- **“First of all, we don’t know how to respect our planet, we cut it down, we bleed it. And God does not want to see that”**
- “We recyclers...**we help to clean up the planet a little bit, in all the continents where there is a recycler, we help to clean the planet**, because if we did not exist who would collect the garbage from the streets? ...there are other kinds of recyclers....So many kinds of recyclers, yes I would like you to get to know this work”

Theme 2: Hope and Trust

- “I was raised by my parents, Catholics. I was baptized, confirmed, my first communion, and then my dad, especially my dad took us through the Catholic faith since we were little kids. He took us by the hand”
- **“God never discriminated against anyone...never pushed aside anyone who wanted to follow him. And so I say why would one who is an ordinary human being, why would one do that if God does not? That is my way of thinking.”**
- “I say a prayer before I leave the house – and when I walk out of the door I think God for one more day of life....to God and to my little Virgin of Guadeloupe as a Guadalupe that I am”
- Story of a miracle in her life: – where she did not have enough to pay rent, food, and buy Christmas presents for her three young sons. “I went to where I always did my route and I always knew how to go into the garbage to search...And there I found what I needed to sell and earn something the next day. At that moment when I was shaking out the garbage, a very big envelope fell on me...but I pushed it aside. And then I see if it was an important piece of paper...and opened that envelope, it was a lot of dollars and I said Oh thank you God. A lot of joy came to me and I cried for joy” (it was two months’ rent and enough money for Christmas presents.” “I think God you put that money in my hands”

Theme 3: Vulnerability and Tenderness

- **“Instead of uniting, uniting as a family, we disunite...We have to value people. You have to value people, it doesn’t matter if they have nothing, if you see them on the floor, pick them up because you don’t know what is really going**

on.”

- Prayer: **“and to the people who have marginalized us, I tell him to forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.”** – went on to explain, “I have been the victim of people who have done things to me in the street, yelled at me” and then last summer, “I was sitting down in the shade waiting...and I wasn’t hurting her because where I was going to go in was a little father. And the lady wanted me to move, to get out of the way...And when she saw that I didn’t move, she went upstairs climbed up to the roof and poured a bucket of water on me.” (00:04:25)
- Suffering: Identifies separation from family “we come here leaving our family there, our dad, our mom, our grandparents and thinking that there’s going to be a day when we’re going to respect each other and we’re going to find them alive and embrace them...but sometimes time passes...and one could not be with them at the moment they need it most.” (00:06:11)
- Church: “when one needs the most, one can approach, in my case, when I needed the most, I approached the churches, the priests...and the Church helped me a lot.” (00:19:49)

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei:

Josefa is the living embodiment of workers on the fringes of society treated as invisible – she is a canner, a recycler, a waste picker. She described the exclusion and mistreatment by others throughout her day, and yet, recyclers actively contribute to the common good. She sees her work within the context of cleaning up the earth and described ecological devastation as a place where we are justifiably suffering punishment from God. She had deep theological insights to a culture of encounter: **“God never discriminated against anyone...never pushed aside anyone who wanted to follow him. And so I say why would one who is an ordinary human being, why would one do that if God does not? That is my way of thinking.”** She demonstrates a profound sense of faith and reconciliation, sharing that she prays for the woman who yelled at her and threw a bucket of water off the roof onto her head. *Laudato Si’* invites us to see the connection between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, in Josefa, these come together in a woman who is advocating for the earth and for the dignity of waste pickers—**Meghan Clark**.

ii. A Zealous Advocate of Eco-Justice in a Poor Community (Dariella)

Background: On May 15, 2022, Dariella R, who is 41 years old and a disaffiliated Catholic works with Young People on Environmental Issues was interviewed by Bradford Hinze

Keywords: Leaving Clericalism and Patriarchy Behind, A Woman’s Perspective, Pope Francis as Comrade in work for Environmental Justice

Theme: Leaving Clericalism and Patriarchy Behind

- From a very young age, one of the biggest struggles was ... if God made everything, how did this happen? I want to understand it. ... Asking questions was always something ...not seen as good. I just couldn’t understand how I was expected to believe something that I couldn’t ask questions about. That was really difficult in my mind [and] caused a lot of problems for me. It pushed me away from the church.
- As a young girl, (I struggled with the fact that) my father (was) able to (be a deacon) and my friends ... to be altar boys and participate in things in the church and me being a little girl that was forced to go to church. I couldn’t be represented in the leadership of the church..., I had to sit quietly in the audience. That just didn’t

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

sit well with me.

- What I see around me is religion being used to oppress people. And I know that that's not the same thing as God at work, but when people are using God as the reason that they're doing these things and as the reason why things have to be a certain way...then that's really dangerous.

Theme: Ecological Conscience

- There is no solution to climate change that ... allows for capitalist systems and oppressive systems to continue. These are so connected that at this point we're so far gone in some of the ways that we've damaged not just our earth, but the way we are as a society, that it is impossible to fix those problems and to address those problems without being extremely brave, extremely creative, extremely brand new, and that we need to think of some solutions that we've never utilized before.
- Everything we do here in this place (where I work) is about youth leadership development, using art and culture to build power around environmental justice issues in our neighborhood. On a daily basis I'm asking myself the question: does this support the leadership of young people in my neighborhood? Does this address environmental injustices in my neighborhood, like air quality issues that are really bad in Hunts Point in the Bronx. We have the worst cases of asthma in the whole country.
- So I believe that there's a lot of alignment between what I see when I see the pope ... going out and meeting Muslims and going to places that are being actively oppressed and violently ... oppressed. I feel like I have a comrade in the pope, even if even if we don't necessarily have the same faith.... It gives me hope. It really does. This has been one of the things I've given me so much hope because I feel like, as someone that is in his position, can agree and see the reality of what needs to be happening and that if people can, you know, learn from him and follow that, then we can actually get somewhere.

Theme: Hope and Trust

- [During] my whole life I felt prayer was a tool to incapacitate us.
- Meditation changed that for me, recognizing the similarities between the goal of meditation, ... connecting with something greater that's around us and how powerful that is, especially when we do that together with other people with common intentions. I think that my version of prayer is meditation.
- I currently (have) in my home a little space where I have the pictures of family members and people that I care about, ...the little memory things from their funerals. And I light candles. That is a space for me to honor my ancestors and to have that tradition, (and) I channel it as meditation.

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei

Dariella is a very dynamic and energetic person who is deeply committed to people she works with in the South Bronx, especially young people, who are searching to find their way and to wrestle against patterns and structures of injustice, especially on environmental issues. Her parents are active Catholics, and her father is an ordained deacon. When she was a child growing up, she experienced Catholicism and other forms of Christian faith as not being open to questions about reality and about human sexuality and thus as controlling. However, she has had missionary zeal in reaching out to young people to promote their involvement in working for ecological justice and against unjust economic structures and practices that have contributed to pollution and health problems. As critical

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

as she was of her early exposure to a rigid understanding of faith and prayer, in her adulthood she has cultivated meditation alone and with others and has practiced rituals at home to honor and remain in contact with her ancestors and other people. Although she disagrees with her father on certain matters, she seems to be compassionate toward him and his understanding of the church. -**Bradford Hinz**

0. Christians in the Public Square

a. Chicago

“To be agents of social change, you need to cultivate a spiritual life.” (Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership)

Background: Jaime Waters interviewed a focus group of 5 members of the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership (CSPL) located in Maywood, IL on May 31, 2022. The CSPL focuses on community engagement and empowerment inspired by the Gospel.
1: Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez

2: Rita Cardoso

3: Michael Okinczyc-Cruz

1. Gabriel Lara
2. Sue Ross

Key words: Christians in the public sphere, economic and social justice, wisdom from the margins and insights on faith.

Theme: Public Sphere

- “To be agents of social change, you need to cultivate a spiritual life.” -Michael
- “We formed the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership...with the idea of not only co-forming grassroots leaders to be strategic, effective, communal, relational in public life but to be spiritually grounded and theologically informed.” – Michael
- “We teach the basic tools of community organizing and have found ways to add our own theological understanding. We use Ignatian contemplation and other tools of contemplation...It’s important that spiritual grounding prevents the burnout...It helps to sharpen people’s understanding of church and God.” -Joanna
- “What gives me hope is more leadership from women.” -Joanna Theme: Economic and Social Justice
- “I went to Catholic grade school in the 60s and early 70s and that was just post Vatican II, and there was just so much emphasis then on social justice. They taught us that a lot in grade school, and I took it very seriously. And then that sort of emphasis faded over the years.” -Sue
- “I feel like people like me, middle class people, white people in particular, are so afraid of being with the poor. Like they’re going to take something from us. That’s not the reality. I get so much joy [from them.]” -Sue
- In a discussion of loss of life due to gun violence: “I don’t need your thoughts and prayers. Forget it. I need politicians to change laws.” -Rita
- “People make excuses for not doing something to alleviate poverty.” -Sue
- “Communities that experience the most acute levels of violence were systemically fostered and created to be this way...We often talk about the crimes of young people rather than investing in opportunities for young people to thrive. For families

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

to thrive.” -Michael

- “We don’t talk about the crimes of generational white communities that took and pillaged from black and brown people. This is what we’re facing as the result of generations of crimes committed against human beings, human families, black people, brown people, indigenous people.” -Michael
- “To be fully human, you need community and relationships...you need to feel a sense of dignity and participation in your communal life. For so many people, the sense of powerlessness is so pervasive.” -Michael
- “We did a workshop on Catholic Social Teaching and economic justice and workers’ rights...One of the parishioners – and these are lifelong Catholics people who go to Church every Sunday—said, ‘Wait. We’re talking about two things that I’ve always been told we’re not supposed to talk about in church. Politics and the economy.’ That was so revelatory. This is what we’re called to talk about as Catholics, as followers of Jesus.” - Michael (audio only)
- “I think Catholic Social Teaching is not taught, not said in those words...There’s not enough of that teaching.” -Rita (audio only)

Theme: Wisdom from the Margins / Insights on Faith

- “Coming from a small village in Mexico, church always played a central role, not just in who I was as a person but everything I did.” -Gabriel
- “Faith has always been the center of our life in our family.” -Rita
- “I’ve experienced all sorts of discrimination and challenges in and out of the church. As a woman, I’ve been challenged many times. Given my inheritance from my parents, of having that inner strength, I feel comes from God’s spirit and Our Lady of Guadalupe’s spirit. It has ignited the fire in me to challenge some of the structures around us.” – Rita
- “I feel like our bishops and our priests in this United States should get out of their comfort zone more...getting to meet people in the shadows.” -Rita
- “I’m very moved by the work of the prophets of the Old Testament.” -Michael
- “There is such a deep hunger for formation in our churches. Frankly, more often than not, it is not being met.”-Michael
- “Pope Francis has said, ‘You have to get out of the building!’” -Rita

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*:

The focus group shared insights into the roots of their faith and the ways faith influences their community activism. They connect economic and social justice with living out their Catholic faith.

Most of the members were from Mexico or were first-generation Mexican Americans. Their heritage and experiences in Mexico and Chicago influence their commitment to justice.

The leaders in the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership galvanize communities to pray and contemplate Scripture and use it as a foundational tool and motivator to address injustice in their communities. They recognize that training community members and building coalitions and partnerships are essential actions for them to live out their faith and their commitment to social change. Their work is grounded on Catholic Social Teachings. It was notable that they spoke of teaching Catholic Social Teachings at a Catholic parish in Chicago, and members of the parish had never heard of it. Someone thought it was

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

inappropriate to connect faith with economic and political discussions. The group sees this as a major gap in how Church teachings are or are not reaching the faithful. They also noted that many priests avoid such conversations rather than connecting them to the Gospel.

Along with their community activism and training, the CSPL fosters spiritual growth and development through Scripture study, spiritual reflection, and contemplation. They are especially influenced by Ignatian spirituality. They have also offered workshops on the Historical Jesus and frequently highlight the Gospels as foundational texts that inform their work. Community engagement and communal prayer and activism were central themes that emerged during the focus group. **-Jaime Waters**

b. San Diego:

1. "When you have a heart that's ready for the work, God gives you the tools."

–Wendy (San Diego Organizing Project)

Background: Ana, Teresa, Wendy, and Eulalio are faith-based community organizers with [San Diego Organizing Project](#), which partners with communities of faith to advocate for change on local issues like immigration and human trafficking. This focus group took place at Mission San Luis Rey in Spanish, and these are distillations of their comments into English.

Theme: *Christians in the Public Sphere*

San Diego Organizing Project (SDOP) affirmed my gifts and abilities to be of service to our community. Working with this organization helped me become more courageous, especially as I learned how to give my testimony. It helped me believe in myself as an individual and in the possibilities we could envision for our community when we come together. –Ana

Through this work, I came to see that my voice is important, that our voices together can make change. There are a lot of us in the migrant community. Can you imagine what we might accomplish together if we are organized? –Teresa

SDOP sees the value in putting our faith in action. They gave me the tools to become a leader, to be a voice for the marginalized, to represent those people [who are pushed aside]. People are sometimes nervous about how much time this work requires, but that is always true of a vocation. We are called [to this work] as Christians, and we can't ignore that call. –Wendy

Getting to know the work of SDOP helped me understand my calling. The more I learned about Catholic social teaching and its connections to the work of SDOP, the more I felt called to share it with my community. That's why I started my studies at the Franciscan School of Theology. – Wendy

Getting involved with SDOP helped me grow in my understanding of my values, my rights, and my identity as a Christian. Bishop Bejarano's presence at our vigils and other gatherings means so much to me. He walks with us. –Eulalio.

Theme: *Hope & Trust*

One of my sources of joy is my children. I want to create a better world for them—so they have fewer reasons to cry, more reasons to share joy. –Wendy

I became very angry when I heard that one of my neighbors had been deported. Why doesn't anyone do anything to intervene? I thought. I wanted to do something to help, but I didn't know how. I looked for resources, and I talked with the parish priest about it. He sent me to our youth and young adult group. My involvement with [that group] helped me build

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

community, and I grew in my determination to confront these difficult situations. –Teresa

Work for social justice can be difficult in the world in general, but this is also true in the Catholic Church...because social justice is very much misunderstood among people of faith. Even so, why would we not want to live the Gospel? Why would we not want to conform our lives to God's will? –Wendy

Theme: Wisdom from the Margins

When you have a heart that's ready for the work, God gives you the tools. I have grown as a leader through my work with this organization, and I have grown in our faith. –Wendy.

Our God tells us that we have to love, no matter what. It can be very challenging to do that when so many political leaders look at our communities with fear and suspicion, but we are called to do that—to love, no matter what. Many members of our communities have taxes taken out of their paychecks, but they sometimes don't understand why. It is difficult to be the one to tell them that it's because they don't have documents. Our current political system, as it is, is a source of sadness and grief for many of our people. –Ana

[The point] is to empower each other. It's never about what I will do for you, but always, Let's show you how can do this for yourself and for the community. –Teresa

It's the sense that we're not in this alone, that there are also others who share these same goals, who want to make a difference in the world, to make life better. We can still make change that is rooted in truth—in society, in political life. If one person feels like they have no voice, they can join that one voice with others through SDOP. We organize to create change. We can fight for the dignity we all deserve, simply as human beings. –Wendy

Lifting up the *sensus fidei*: In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis writes, “Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (cf. *Mt* 25:40). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life” (no. 209). Whether they have spent time with this encyclical or not, the organizers from SDOP live into the mode of evangelization Francis describes. They see the myth of rugged individualism for what it is, and they know better—that we are called to love, no matter what; that we are stronger together than we are alone; that God does not will anyone to suffer the indignities of violence or poverty, especially in silence. Their perseverance in the face of an increasingly divided and at times dangerous political climate is a testament to their faith in our God and their commitments to the communities they serve and on whose behalf they advocate. They know their own stories well, and SDOP has provided them with opportunities for self-actualization and to work for justice with and for their communities. They foster a spirit of hospitality and of non-judgment, meeting each person as they are, where they are. These organizers live into a maxim common in the Black community in the US, “Each one teach one,” as they work to empower their neighbors by equipping them with tools to navigate the political system as it is and by working together to build a new system in its place, one that serves the needs of all and centers the gifts and needs of the most marginalized among us. Without naming it as such, they articulate a vision for the Kingdom of God in the here and now that is urgently necessary and rhymes with that of Saint Óscar Romero and Latin American liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez with whom he was in conversation. Each of them in their own ways gives a face to hope for what might be, should we live into the vocations to which we are called, prioritizing the gifts and needs of those on the margins as we do so.

–Jennifer Owens-Jofre

c. Toronto/Peterborough, Ontario

**1. “We are everywhere. We’re not the exception. We are everywhere.
And people don’t see us.” (Janet)**

Background:

On June 27, 2022 Darren Dias met with Janet Rodriguez, a disability educator and activist based in Toronto. She explained that disability is a social construct that marginalizes people by erecting physical, social, intellectual and “attitudinal” barriers for some people. The result of this process of “disablement” is that some people are considered less “valuable” and are excluded and isolated from wider networks of relations. Women, racialized persons and members of the LGBTQI community who are disabled experience the effects of disablement more severely than others. Disabilities may be visible (for example, someone who uses a wheelchair) or else invisible (for example, someone who experiences chronic depression).

Disabled people in Canada are a vulnerable population, not only due to the various barriers that make daily living difficult but also because of the social stigma attached to being disabled. Disabled people are seen as less valuable in society because they are unable to produce, to contribute to the economy. Further, disabled people experience “institutionalized poverty.” Unable to work, whether due to physical or cognitive difficulties and the barriers placed around them, disabled people are given a small amount of money by the state that keeps them in the cycle of poverty.

Keywords: disability, barriers, invisible, poverty, value, stigma.

1. Theme: Tenderness and Vulnerability

- “There’s such a strength required for someone to say, ..., first of all, [to] acknowledge yourself and the word disability could be highly stigmatizing. People don’t want to be associated with it. So in order to admit it to yourself, it’s required a lot of. Thinking and reflection and becoming vulnerable. And then to embrace that and say, yes, not only I am a disabled person, but I am going to advocate for people who live with a disability.”
- “...having to open the door to strangers and rely on their care and you have to become vulnerable. And once I went through that process, I understood how difficult it can be for others. So the logical next step for me was to find community and celebrate that vulnerability, celebrate tenderness, and celebrate that interdependence with each other. ... So that’s the main thing that spoke to me. There’s a lot of people with disabilities who hide their disability because they feel so vulnerable and they are in pain. They don’t want to say, I have a mental illness. They don’t want to say I have epilepsy or I live with, I don’t know, schizophrenia or learning disability because they don’t want to be excluded. Exclusion is very painful. Very painful.”

0. Theme: Christians in the Public Square

- If you’re a professional and you’re making more money, society regards you as, you know, more respectable, more worthy because of the wealth that you have. But if by no fault of your own, you can no longer work and you can no longer produce the same wealth you’re worth less, like literally in your bank account. But we internalize it as I am worth less in that process [of disablement].”
- “But in this capitalist society, a body is seen as something that needs to produce wealth for you or for somebody else. If you’re deaf or blind or you

cannot walk or move or think like everybody else, then what are you doing? You're not producing things. Right? So yeah, now society has to take care of you. But the society doesn't do that because the society doesn't have a human first value approach. They have a money first value approach."

- "He [a disabled person] had the community and the community that had him. So that to me is humanity."
- "There's always a role to imitate what Jesus did. He didn't see a blind person and say, 'Oh, sorry, you know you're on your own.' He went to them. He went to the blind person and said, 'Yeah, I can do something for you.' And maybe he didn't do that for every single blind person, but he saw a blind person and he did something about it. When he saw someone in need, when he saw someone who was even dead. Right. He didn't say, 'oops, sorry I'm late.' He said, 'Let let's do something.'"

0. Revelation and Joy

- "I had to start to learn that my real worth is being human like everybody else. Regardless of what you do or don't do, [you're] human, you're here to bring joy. You're here to be part of the community, and you don't need to do anything."

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

"We are everywhere. We're not the exception. We are everywhere. And people don't see us." Janet reminded us that Jesus saw those made invisible by society and went out to them, making them visible in engaging them, speaking to them, healing them, removing social and cultural barriers and stigma whether lepers or blind people. Everyone was valuable for who they were as a person, not for what they did or produced. Janet spoke about the importance of community as the measure of true humanity. Community is the context in which people are cared for and have their needs met and grow in joy. Disabled people experience exclusion and isolation. Such isolation and exclusion tell disabled people that they are not valuable. In Canada, there are even laws that make it possible for people who have disabilities to end their lives through medically assisted suicide because they do not measure up to normative standards of what it means to be human. Disabled people remind us that simply being is enough. -**Darren Dias**

- ii. **"I hope that there is messiness because we need it." (All Inclusive Ministries)**

Background: *All Inclusive Ministries* (AIM) is a "safe, Welcoming; and affirming Catholic community" that serves as a bridge between the LGBTQI persons, their families and friends and the church. AIM "envision[s] a time when all the children of God participate in all aspects of life with the Church and society." AIM meets at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and celebrates a Sunday liturgy once a month by inviting various priests to preside. However, the group is not a parish group and has its own organizational structure.

On June 3, 2022, a group of six members from AIM welcomed Darren Dias (interviewer) to a focus group for this project.

Keywords: accompaniment, precariousness, community, inclusion/exclusion.

1. Theme: Tenderness and Vulnerability

- "But one of the things that I keep hearing and I've experienced it myself, is how precarious it is being someone on the margins in the church."

- “Definitely community and a space that that community creates for guidance and support of learning and being able to fail at that...But then at its worst, I think of exclusion and judgment and abuse of power.”
- “I’m married to a woman. We have two kids. And when... growing up Catholic, I always thought about being married in Catholic terms, and then that wasn’t an option. So I looked at the Anglican Church and that didn’t work out. We ended up having a United [Church of Canada] priest marry us...I was kind of afloat for a little while. And then having a kid, I was like, you know, I want this kid to have some kind of basis, like some kind of religious basis. And so I started going back to church while I was pregnant and my spouse came with me. And then we’re like, okay, she’s born now, you know, baptize her. And I was like, okay, well, we have to go talk to the priest. And I remember walking to talk to the priest and feeling like I could be going to the gallows or it could be great, you know, like this could either be, I’m never going to mass ever again or this could be wonderful. And it turned out that he was amazing and we were lucky, but it was so precarious. And then he left and the new priest came and, you know, on the day my son was baptized, he couldn’t handle my spouse who is, you know, Jen has a masculine gender presentation. Like it was really upsetting to be standing there with this priest who was like kind of aggressively vibing my spouse when we were about to walk up to have our son baptized. It’s just too precarious. And sometimes it feels like, I understand that doing the work from the inside and like I used to feel like that. But now I ask myself, like, am I staying in an abusive relationship? Like, what is this? Why do I do this?”

0. Theme: Wisdom From the Margins

- “And I also was thinking the other day about Trudeau in the seventies when he said... the state has no business in the bedroom of the nation. And I was thinking in terms of sexuality, the church has no business. It’s such a screwed up mess. And we have a cast that’s celibate, that’s dictating the life of people who have to live that out...Now, I’m not saying the church has nothing to say. That’s not what I’m saying. But when the people who have to live that out have no input...”
- “But I feel like we are accompanying this priest and modeling [relationships] for him...But I feel like we are accompanying this guy who happens to be the pastor, the local leader of our church, inviting him into our lives so that he can see who we are, what we’re about... So, you know, it can be fraught, but I think there is accompaniment there, even as it does feel precarious. I think that’s the way forward because we’re ultimately talking about relationships.”

0. Theme: Hope and Faith

- “I feel like I’ve been witnessing the death of the church. It’s dying. And nobody wants to talk about why.”
- “I’m sorry, but it’s really for something I love so dearly [the church]. I just feel pretty powerless...Powerless isn’t the right word. I just feel like no one is listening. There’s no interest in listening. They don’t even know, they wouldn’t even know how to do that. I know it sounds dark, but I’m not hopeless.”

- “I hope that there is messiness because we need it.”

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

The members of AIM spoke about the varied experiences of being LGBTQI and Catholic. They expressed a deep love, appreciation, and even sense of belonging to the church in spite of experiences to the contrary. For example, since AIM is not the official diocesan ministry to the LGBTQI community, they are not allowed to advertise their events publicly. This forced invisibility is experienced as being put “back into the closet.” Members ask: how can one live as both gay and Catholic in such a situation? Another common experience is the feeling of precariousness, especially for members in relationships. They wonder whether they will be accepted by their parish community or their pastors if they reveal who they are. For example, every time they approach a new pastor it is fraught with a sense of precariousness.

Many members spoke about how they supported the ministries of their pastors by modelling Christian discipleship and service in the parish as well as in their same-sex relationships. This is a meaningful ministry for them, journeying with clergy, inviting them to get to know LGBTQI people as people. Many clergy have expressed gratitude for this mutual pastoral accompaniment of learning from the AIM members some models of accompaniment for the LGBTQI community. There is a deep love for the church and for its traditions and prayers (i.e. the liturgy). Members of AIM accept that journeying in the synodal way will not always be easy but that the messiness of the journey is necessary and even worthwhile. **-Darren Dias**

iii. “Christ was also the bridge” (Maria) Background:

On June 27, 2022 Darren Dias met with Maria Lucas, a biracial, Metis (Indigenous and white) woman. On her mother’s side she is descended from black loyalists from Nova Scotia and on her father’s side Treaty Nine Territory. Maria is a lawyer specializing in Aboriginal law and Indigenous legal traditions. At the time of the interview, she was working in the area of Indigenous-government relations. She is interested in Indigenous youth and is a board member of Inspire, a Catholic-Indigenous organization.

With the discovery of mass graves of indigenous children on the sites of Catholic run residential schools and the upcoming visit of Pope Francis to Canada to apologize for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the residential school’s system, Maria spoke about what reconciliation means, as much as from a legal perspective as well as a person of deep faith. Her own commitment to justice and reconciliation as a ministry and vocation is for her a participation in the mission of the Holy Spirit: “I’m counsel. And that’s what he [Holy Spirit] is. He’s a counsel. He’s an advocate too.”

Keywords: Indigenous, Metis, papal visit, colonization, reconciliation, abuse.

1. Theme: Faith and Hope

- “Like, it’s, it’s difficult because you do have to contend with the objective reality in what’s transpired, historically speaking [residential schools]. But at the same time, it’s that emphasis on personal relationship. And so while I don’t dismiss, I’m not at all dismissive, anyone who knows me knows that I’m not dismissive of the church’s failings, particularly in regards to indigenous peoples in Canada. But for me, I think because my relationship with Christ, my personal relationship with Christ, comes first. That’s what keeps me, I think, tethered to my faith. And I very much look to those, particularly in the context of residential schools, the survivors who have experienced some of the worst types of abuse and yet still hold fast to their faith. And I can only explain that through understanding them as having a

personal relationship with Christ himself, because they've encountered a person and not an institution that is the church, that's just... the mechanism that happens to facilitate their personal relationship with the creator."

- "I think it's always important to maintain hope. I'm hoping that for those who have really longed for the presence of the pope and to receive an apology from him, I know that he or she has stated that it happened on Canadian soil, but I even think the delegation to Rome a few months ago sort of was the stepping stone to this... This is the reciprocal visit on the part of Pope Francis coming here. So I'm hoping for those who have been longing to hear the words "I'm sorry," coming from the chief, so to speak.... will initiate a healing journey for many. That's my hope. But I also understand that the Holy Father's presence and whatever he says, it may not be received by everyone. It may not be accepted by everyone because I think no matter what the Pope does, he can't be all things to all people. And he can't be everything to everyone. But I'm hoping that those who can receive it and receive his presence and receive his words do. And I hope that it helps them in their journey towards healing."

Theme: Christians in the Public Sphere: New Paradigms

- "... we talk about reconciliation, right? And it's this buzz word that's often thrown around. And I think it has many different permutations and a lot of justifiable criticisms. But for me, as people [Metis], I was taught that we have a very special responsibility for reconciliation because we are of two nations (or in my case, three, because I'm also black) but we have two nations and so therefore we're that bridge between the two. And when I think about the parallel to that, in the sacred ..., Christ was also the bridge and it was through dying on the cross that he reconciled us to the Father. And that also really impressed upon me the fact that reconciliation is going to be painful and it's not going to be an easy ride. And anyone who thinks so is certainly misguided."
- "Because the work of reconciliation requires so much. We tend to indigenous peoples working within it. We tend to give so much that we sacrifice our health, sacrifice our family. They don't see us very often because we're just constantly invested in trying to support our communities. Jody Wilson-Raybould ... speaks about how indigenous peoples in particular were raised to have a very strong sense and responsibility for the collective for the other. First and foremost, and it's not to say that the individual doesn't matter, but the individual exists to support the collective. So I think particularly for Indigenous practicing Aboriginal law, they may not all term it, I term it as "vocation" because of my Catholic upbringing, but I think they would understand it as a calling as well."

Lifting up Sensus Fidei:

The deep wounds that resulted from the church's participation in the colonial policies of assimilation of Indigenous, Metis, and Inuit peoples of the Canadian government coupled with the abuse suffered at the hands of clergy and religious that ran the residential schools cannot be underestimated. Confronting this past and its ongoing legacy that affects these communities today represents, perhaps the single greatest challenge theologically and ecclesially.

The way forward for the "institutional church" will not be in proposing solutions, but first in listening to Indigenous voices, and especially residential schools' survivors with deep faith in the Creator. Further, the work of reconciliation must emerge from a relationship with Christ animated by the Holy Spirit if it not to become a form of social activism, but an authentic expression of Christian vocation. **-Darren Dias**

iv. “I think we respond to those needs, right, as best we can.” (Women elders, Peterborough, Ontario)

Background: The 3 interviewees represent a variety of backgrounds. One is a retired teacher who also spent a great deal of time as a lay missionary in North Canada. One is a retired elementary school teacher who is very active in many women’s groups, and other organizations within the Church. And one is a retired civil servant with extensive international experience. All are active, articulate and engaged. (Peterborough, Ontario)

Key Words: role of women, faith in the public square, Covid, Pope Francis Theme 1: Faith in the Public Square

- “But if it’s been not our own preaching, but it’s been a lived gospel...action, then I think we have to trust that God takes that where God will take it, and it could be...”

“He can fill the emptiness when I leave.”

“He’s filled a lot of emptiness in all our lives...”

- “So I just think we have to respond right to the person in front of us and that need and then we have to respond to that need the best way we can and then we see where that goes and if I’m still a part of that response to that need or someone else picks up that need. But if I respond, do my part and the person does their next part, then there should be God should be present in those actions if I am responding from a gospel POV, if I’m not doing my own preaching, but if I’m actually genuinely meeting that person’s needs at that time.
- “Sometimes, we hear and actually even, some would say, probably condemn and so we don’t really act on a need that we don’t see a spiritual need. So the need that they come to you with and voice, like you’re saying, may not have anything to do with ‘I want to come to church next week’, it may have to do with, ‘what do I do with the violence in my family?’ or ‘what do I do with the lack of food or money that I have right now?’ or ‘how do I deal with this teaching that’s in my life that seems to be in conflict with what I am able to do?’ That’s where they are right now, and that’s what they want the answer to before they will ever step inside, back inside the church...And I don’t think we do that well.”
- “So I think we respond to those needs, right, as best we can. If the person comes back, we respond again as best we can in His name, not our name, right? And then in faith and in hope and if you want to prove to the person afterwards or if it comes to mind, you do, but you don’t...it’s God’s work really...”

Theme 2: Role of Women

- “Women priests...”
- “To those who are...like who do feel called to that. And that’s where the listening still has to go, whether we want to or not, or whether we feel the door’s closed.”
- “I don’t understand, [M1]. We have to be open to those who are...?”
- “Those who are...well, [M2] says she has, and many...many women don’t have any aspiration to the priesthood. Right? But there are those who do feel called. So, are we listening to them?”
- “Yeah, you see, I’m a skeptic. I’m not sure whether they feel it’s a call or whether it’s because of their feelings of women’s rights, ‘I want to be equal’. I am not comfortable with that.
- “That’s to be discerned though...”

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- “It’s not like one ministry is better than another ministry, right? What’s central here is, ‘What is my faith in Christ? And to what fullness anybody is living the gospel?’ You know.
- So versus what ministering, what ministry I’m doing. You know whether that’s, whatever it happens to be...cleaning, priesthood, you know, but really the heart of the issue is, ‘How full a disciple am I?’ Like who...Ami I following Christ? And where that takes me? Or am I more concerned with the ministry and what position I have? The important thing is the salvation, not the position.”
- “The existential periphery of the feminine. I... the Church has never impeded me in my role as a woman. I mean, my role is to find my role in the Church and if I’ve...if I’ve felt that I needed a greater ear to listen then I would go, as with anything else, I will go and make that known. And when you think about how many women Saints over the centuries of the Church that there are and the Church is a response and rising to... I mean, look at Catherine of Siena... I mean, even bringing popes back from Antioch.. and...so now if we think that the Church has fallen back in supporting women, and then in part may have come from, you know, the 50’s and when the feminist movement came, and,,, to put the whole idea of women...and look at what we...look at what we have done to men. I mean, it’s now becoming apparent of what,, You know, I mean,,, I mean the whole thing is, you know, before us, and him, and the Church responds, and will respond. Our prayer and our words and our prayer on that behalf and making it known. The Church is there to listen, OK? And they do.

Theme 3: Speaking to Pope Francis

- “We have a responsibility to know our faith, to know the teachings of the Gospel in relation to some of the issues that are spoken against, in criticism of the Church, and look at what he has done with the family, the elderly, who else has written about the environment? Imagine an encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*, I mean, so to say to the Holy Father, you and your predecessors, we look at and we don’t compare, we’re not supposed to be comparing Christ’s vicar on earth as individuals, we look at...what I would say to you is that I pray for you as the Vicar of Christ and as our guardian of the faith.
- “I keep coming back to walking among the people, you know what I mean? Really being in the midst of the people, I don’t always listen to the encyclicals, which I’m sure are full of many...but I mean, I don’t even know many of those encyclicals myself, so how much of the really good teachings that are in there are actually coming down to people? Do the people even hear that goodness that is there? How many of us do? But really, I think walking in the midst of the people is what is required of Church leadership and of all of us... walking in the midst of the people as disciples of Christ.”
- “We need real... we need real dialogue, we need to not skirt around issues, we need to hit them face on and dialogue with them and work with the people, whatever that issue is with whatever group of people that is.”
- “And thanks for... well, basically, thanks for the efforts so far, right? Not just recently, but through the years, I mean, certainly there has been leadership through the years, so... or we wouldn’t have the people that we can... the models of faith that have been out there, starting with the disciples on. And certainly, there have been very good leaders in the Church... in the centuries, over the centuries.

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Theme 4: Covid-19

- “Yes, I think it took us a while... or myself, and I’m thinking the Catholic Women’s League (main Catholic women’s organization in Canada), to realize, ‘Oh my goodness, no we have loneliness, and we have to dialogue with these people. They are shut in and they are alone.’ We did come around to that, I don’t know that the Church encouraged that.”
- “Yes. But, in terms of... I think that’s where faith and hope comes in, in terms of the preservation or the continuation...sure, we will advance, things will change, things will be different, and... I think, if you look at the history of the Church, she moves and responds in terms of the time. So, I’m confident...”

Lifting Up the Sensus Fidei:

This was a wide-ranging interview with people who took their role of leaders very seriously. They felt that they have been listened to but saw the need for a sensible dialogue with people who might not feel as included. How do we deal with the majority of Catholics who have “gone silent and stopped practicing”?

They see their role of faith in the public square as a very hands-on accompaniment of the poor who are at their doorstep and the stranger at the door of the Church. How does the Church assist people like these women leaders in their desire to serve the least of the brethren? How does the Church form its people to adequately respond to the needs of the poor and to equip lay volunteers who desire to work directly with the poor? Though the Covid crisis exposed cracks and problems, the views of my conversation partners here were, like everyone else, that we had to scramble to try many things and then choose what worked. They saw Pope Francis as a hopeful figure who was ready in a very human way to reach out to the poor and to speak up on issues that are not popular in the public discourse.

- Thomas Lynch

0. **Results of an Additional Theme Specific to North America**

1. **Racism**

1. Chicago

1. **“We live the Gospel; we don’t preach it” (Be Church, After Church) (Parishioners of St. Agatha’s)**

Background: St. Agatha Catholic Parish in the West side of Chicago is a vibrant Christian community that serves a mainly African-American Catholic population. Anyone who enters the church will immediately be moved by a distinctive African-American liturgical art, painting and religious symbols on the walls, altar and everywhere. The stations of the Cross are so designed to tell the stories of the faith and cross of the African American community. The soul-searching liturgies in this church reflect an African-American spirituality and Gospel style of music that welcomes, engages, comforts and oftentimes challenges those gathered to a greater depth of faith, a stronger sense of hope and a greater call to love all of God’s people. It is a very welcoming community. We began our encounter with the celebration of Mass presided over by Fr Larry Dowling. The conversation was conducted by Meghan Clark, Stan Chu Ilo and Sergio Massironi. We carried out the conversation over dinner and this created a real family spirit mirroring for us also the experience of the Last Supper where Jesus sat with his friends, shared a meal and within the context of the meal, revealed eternal truths to them. The Gospel we heard here was a continuing narrative of the Act of the new Apostles of the Lord here at St Agatha. We shared in the experience of a community who has been shaped by oppression, but also strengthened by faith to create a safe space for love and inclusion, where everyone is saying, to use the words of the

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

African-American theologian, Bryan Massingale, “It is not for me, but because of me” that change occurs.

The conversation partners for the focus group from the parish were: Fr Larry, Cynthia, Jack, Deontay, DiMarkco, parish deacon, Stacey, Cortez, Janice, and Gloria

Key Words: Racism, White Supremacy, Resistance, love, welcoming, Dialogue/encounter

Theme 1: Revelation:

- “What I feel in this church is the ability to praise God without people looking at you with disgust as they do in some white churches”—**Cynthia**
- “Our approach here is simple: ‘come on into the room’ and God will reveal himself in that room of encounter. We celebrate the openness to people to come and become part of the environment of our spirituality and music”—**Gloria**
- “It has to do with how people who come to St. Agatha are made to feel; that’s how they encounter God”—**Gloria**.
- “For me God is revealed in our ritual experience particularly in places where Catholicism and blackness are married; Catholicism is blackness and that feeling has to be there for one to encounter God”—**Cortez**.

Theme 2: Racism

- “I don’t teach my children black and white; I don’t see colors”—**Stacey**.
- “I remember that in Mississippi you were not allowed in a Catholic Church as a black person”—**Gloria**
- “The Roman missal, the new ritual seems to be a whitewash. My faith as a black person is like a foundation of a house, no racism, nothing will change it”—**Janice**
- “Here at St Agatha, we live the Gospel as African-Americans; we don’t preach it”—**Gloria**
- “Racism tainted my belief in God not only because of the institutions like the Catholic Church, but also because white supremacy is synonymous with Christianity. This forced me to become an atheist for many years”—**Deontay**.
- “Because we are black Catholics, we wanna keep what we have. Some white parishioners left this church because we blacks joined the church. We want to keep what we have”— **Parish Deacon**
- “Black Catholics are a minority in the Catholic Church and a minority in the American society. The obstacle to evangelization is that the Catholic Church is still seen as a white church and until we embrace blacks as a Church, racism will not end. We must stop looking at the black community negatively, but as a gift to the Church” —**Fr Larry**

Theme 3: Pope Francis

- “Pope Francis is the epitome of mercy. He invites us to meet people where they are. So, here at St. Agatha we are not stopping at charity, but empowerment, but not simply individual empowerment, but mutual empowerment—lifting each other up”—**Fr Larry**.
- “If the Church is no longer like Pope Francis, I will not be part of the Church. We should not be racists, homophobic, sexist and all that...this is what Pope Francis is challenging us to resist. We need to go beyond resilience to

perseverance”—Cortez.

Lifting up the Sensus Fidei

At the heart of this parish is a shared sense of identity and a deep sense of community, nurtured in the certainty of the presence of God among them. It is from within this shared identity and community spirit that emerges an experience of faith that is so strong and real to members of this parish in their collective solidarity and resistance against racism and the social conditions that challenge most black communities in America.

What is God saying through this community as articulated in their own words and actions? First, is the centering of all things on God as source and destiny, where the institutional church and the wider societies center most things around the dominant white codes and white privilege. This centering on God, for this community, becomes a starting point for the reinvention of faith around the Eucharistic table—a constant symbol that came up in our encounter.

Second, is the creation of an inclusive and multicultural experience that expands the black experience of Catholicism as a gift that never stops giving and actually an opening of faith and ecclesial life to all people. As the parish deacon noted, “there is racism everywhere and, in every church, but we have to defend our faith about who we are and what we ought to do.” This movement of transgression against the current systems and institutional culture in this church is a sign of the liberative power of faith. It also revealed to us how a deeper encounter with God from the margins is capable of releasing the Christian faith from being hijacked for narrow cultural, racial and ideological and economic idols that empty the Gospel of its power.

Finally, one can see how the peripheries have become the center; the great reversal that we see in the *Magnificat* always brings to the surface the surprises of the Holy Spirit, where God lifts the poor and lowly and brings down the mighty and rich. Here, at St Agatha, parishioners see themselves as champions for the cause of the Gospel and disciples of the Lord and they are constantly equipping themselves with the right tools for witnessing to the dawn of the reign of God. They do the Gospel here as Cynthia and Jackie observed by a deep connection to God and to one another inspired by a faith that is woven through the entire being of parishioners like “an invisible string from my hair to God.”—**Stan Chu Ilo**

- ii. “We are a church that is supposed to be for the dignity of people, and we still have racism.”

Background: On May 24, 2022, Jaime Waters interviewed Dr. Kimberly Lymore, Pastoral Associate at St. Sabina Church, a Black Catholic community in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood of Chicago. St. Sabina offers a variety of resources and services to community members, including job training and educational services. This is a very active community of faith that engages the surrounding neighborhoods to respond to the needs of the world. The leaders focus especially on economic and social justice and Black Catholic expressions of faith.

Key words: racism, Black Catholic Spirituality, vulnerability and tenderness, social activism, Theme: Racism / Social Activism

- “A lot of times, the churches are silent on racism and violence.”
- “Sometimes you have to meet people where they are. You can’t always say, ‘Come to church, come to church.’ No, not necessarily because there’s still some hesitancy, especially in your Black communities about the Catholic Church. They think it’s a white church, and for the most part it is. But, we have pockets of Black Catholic Spirituality.”

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

- “Sorrow is that we are still fighting racism, even in the church.”
- “When you look at the history...a lot of your religious orders had slaves.”
- “We are a church that is supposed to be for the dignity of people, and we still have racism.”
- “Be honest that [racism] exists...Open up and have a dialogue.”
- “For so long we [Black Catholics] have been denied access to the church.”
- “When it comes to Black Catholics, we get criticized so much about the way we worship. That’s a sad state of affairs.”

Theme: Vulnerability and tenderness

- “We will march every Friday night...We might go to a hot spot where there’s some violence going on and just pray for the street. Pray for the people on the street. Talk to the neighbors...when we’re out there, they feel safe enough to come out.”
- “We have been responding to some of the issues here in Chicago like the violence, food scarcities, unemployment, especially in this urban area...in the south side of Chicago”
- “We consider the whole area our congregation.”
- “Violence is not the way. We have a lot of conflict going on now, and because of easy access to guns and no strong legislation on guns, we have the issues that we have today. We continue to try to confront them...in any way we can.” “A lot of young people don’t want to be connected with organized religion...But, we try to get the young people involved in wanting to worship God...Young people give us hope.”

Theme: Worship

- “The worship on Sunday is a little different. It’s not your typical Catholic church, but we like it. And it feeds us. Conservative Catholics get a little more upset with how we worship.”
- “We do the Roman Rite...We do an elongated opening rite. We do a lot of praise and worship in the beginning...We have liturgical dancers, full band, musicians, choir. It’s quite lively!”
- “After Vatican II, how they talked about incorporating your culture into the liturgy, we embrace that full force!”
- The Gospel is not supposed to make us comfortable. It’s supposed to make us move out into the streets.”

Lifting up the *Sensus Fidei*:

In this interview, it was clear that social activism is a core element of the faith community at St. Sabina. Dr. Lymore shared information about the many programs that support people, especially Black people on the south side of Chicago. St. Sabina offers help with education, employment preparation, food and rental support, and faith formation, among other services. They hold events and community walks to address gun violence in the city.

St. Sabina is a vibrant Black Catholic community that lives out the Gospel message to care for the needs of others. As Dr. Lymore notes, the Gospel “is supposed to make us move out into the streets.” Supporting the faith community and the larger Chicago community is

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

integral to living out the Gospel at St. Sabina.

One of the themes that was highlighted in this interview was persistence of racism in the church, with many leaders failing to recognize or acknowledge racism and its damaging effects on Black people and Black Catholics more specifically. Recognition and change are necessary in order to try to heal the many years of racism in the church.

One way that racist attitudes have impacted St. Sabina is in critiques of the worship style. Dr. Lymore discussed aspects of Black Catholic Spirituality and features of the worship services at St. Sabina. I attended a service after the interview and witnessed the energetic and engaging service. Visually there are images of Jesus as a Black man, and there is *kente* cloth on the altar. The call to discipleship is prominent in the signs throughout the church building. During the liturgy, music, dancing, and lighting were evocative and beautifully moving. Attendees were clearly affected by the service, and the Spirit's presence was certainly felt. The Black style of music and preaching that is so characteristic of St. Sabina has unfortunately been criticized. Yet, it was clear that Dr. Lymore and the larger St. Sabina community are unfazed and remain committed to worshipping in a way that is authentically Black and truly Catholic—**Jaime Waters**.

b. San Diego:

1. "How can we talk about racism within our own church?" –Evan

Background: Evan is a child of Cuban-American immigrants who was raised Catholic here in the United States. He is bilingual in Spanish and English and lives near Sacramento, California, with his wife. Evan works as a hospital social worker, providing different modalities of therapy for his clients. While he no longer practices and no longer identifies as Catholic (i.e. he is a deconvert), he sees the good that religion in general and Catholicism in particular does in the lives of his clients, especially when they are working through mental health challenges.

Theme: Racism

"Just part of it being raised by immigrant parents who had to endure quite a bit of racism, and growing up with that...my brother and I having immense struggles trying to adapt to a different home culture versus, this is the culture that we experienced in school and friends, and a certain level of code switching, you know, to adapt to a culture, having to conceal the culture and hide it. Living, living with a sense of shame when being othered. And then coming home and trying to still enjoy the dynamics of the situation that I was raised in."

"So, yeah, one of the biggest sources of pain for me is, well, you know, reflecting back on my childhood, I grew up being raised by immigrant parents who'd come from Cuba. I was actually born in the United States, but my first language was Spanish, and we lived in a town that was predominantly white and at that time not very kindly receptive to Latino folks. And I dealt with a lot of institutional racism between my teachers and by administrators and schools. And I dealt with a lot of social racism where I felt ashamed of speaking my language and my culture well to the point that I would conceal it and I wouldn't speak the native language and I would do everything that I could to conceal every aspect of my culture. And I would demand that my parents only speak in English and the French. You know, it was I was internalized racism that I've developed."

"[R]eflecting back on my childhood, I grew up being raised by immigrant parents who'd come from Cuba. I was actually born in the United States, but my first language was Spanish, and we lived in a town that was predominantly white and at that time not very kindly receptive to Latino folks. And I dealt with a lot of institutional racism between my teachers and by administrators and schools."

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

"[P]art of it was that...the parents of my friends who I would [overhear] saying things that were unkind. And there was a...pretty large neo-Nazi population in Southern California at that point. And unfortunately, I had some challenging run ins with them and I was assaulted a few times once I was stabbed actually in the face and had to go to the emergency room and had stitches on my forehead. So, you know, to deal with that...it is a source of sorrow."

Theme: Wisdom from the Margins

"And then later in life, having to try to find a way to reconcile that and take those injuries and recognize that there's a beauty in the culture. I love the culture. Hmm. So trying to square those things and. Deal with kind of a new level of guilt. Making allowances to express my culture. Speak my language. Mm hmm. There was a while when I was a child that hearing people speak Spanish would actually cause me to feel that shame or discomfort because I disliked it. Now I speak with probably whoever is in the periphery. I don't have to worry about their insecurities, about hearing somebody speaking English."

"It also is very informing in the sense that it allows me to understand other people's pain, at least have out to the lines, because I would never profess to have a universal understanding of racism or hate. But I would like to refer to this like kind of peeking through the blinds and seeing maybe what other people are experiencing experience."

"And my belief is that Jesus was a simple man and he lived a very simple life and a very simple community. And, you know, driving into work and seeing increasing tents of homeless people, you know, the unhoused. Seeing people desperate. Seeing people do what they can to go to a psychiatric facility, then sleep on the streets, which I can't...blame them for that. That is something that I would do personally. So. It does impact my view of religion because it makes me wonder why the coffers aren't being opened for the for those struggling the most. I imagine that the coffers are getting a little bit thinner and less abundant because there's a lot of participating in religion. And maybe some people have become a bit kind of jaded for the same reasons that I have, like individually jaded again or persistently reflect back that I think that religion is a beautiful thing, but it makes it hard for me to have a personal belief when I see these issues not being addressed."

"[I wish someone had said,] How can we help you? How can we reach out to you? How can we talk about racism within our own church? How do we reach out to the Latino community? You know, people like myself who dealt with institutional racism my whole life, that wore a literal scar, you know, visible scar on my face. And nobody's asking about this. And I don't need it to be I don't need it to be about me, you know, in the sense that I'm not. It doesn't make me sad necessarily that I wasn't asked, how did you get that scar? But symbolically, as Latinos, as African-Americans, as Asian Pacific Islanders, as basically others than the dominant culture in our society. Was there ever a conversation about what are you going through? Reaching out and saying, How is the church serving you?"

Theme: Ecological Conscience

"The disconnection with society are the factors that actually contribute to sorrow, actually, give me a deep sadness... we...speak to certain types of justice, but we never really talk about how economic justice is crucial to any form of justice and how economic justice is tied into to ecology and keeping the planet safe and sustainable. Knowing that the most oppressed people in the world will be threatened by climate change... We don't focus on economic strife. We don't focus on ecological conditions, challenging work. It is. It causes a deep sense of sorrow and disconnection for me [that is p]ersistent...[p]ersistent."

Lifting up the *sensus fidei*: In many ways, Evan embodies the characteristics of the social poets to whom Francis speaks during his annual Forum for Popular Movements, and some of his most deeply held political convictions rhyme with the tenets of Catholic social

teaching. He is deeply self-reflective and understands himself well in relationship to others in his life, as well as society writ large, especially its members who are in some way marginalized. As an adult, Evan looks back on his own experiences of racism not as justified, but as wounds that can be transformed into ways to connect to others who have experienced similar pain. In this way, he is Christ-like.

The reasons he no longer practices Catholicism are tied up with his experiences of racism, especially in Catholic schools, and his sense of the disconnect between what church leaders say and what they do, especially on political issues like economic and ecological justice and internal ones like clerical abuse. Much of his interview spoke to a desire for dialogue and encounter he did not experience in Catholic communities when he was young. That he no longer identifies as Catholic speaks to what pastoral ministers in Catholic parishes and schools could do, with proper training—to appreciate and affirm the culture from which he comes; to understand and engage his identity as a second-generation immigrant; to work for justice in the world as Catholic social teaching encourages, especially in terms of economic and ecological justice; and to practice transparency within church structures. **-Jennifer Owens-Jofre**

0. Don Sergio Massironi's Visit: "Surprised by what I saw"

Don Sergio Massironi was in Chicago to visit the region from 16-20 May, 2022. The account here is a summary of the encounters we had and some significant insights gained from the sites. All the sites reported here were not recorded, but the encounters were memorable.

1. *Visit to the Regional House of the Daughters of Divine Love sisters:* This congregation founded in Nigeria has been working in the U.S for the last 30 years. They were invited by the late Cardinal Bernardine of Chicago "to augment the religious presence" of the diocese. The sisters reported that they feel generally welcomed, but they also report that they sometimes feel that they are at the peripheries because the diocesan authorities treat them as strangers. Sr Mary Paul said, for instance, with regard to the relationship between this Congregation and the diocese, "we are now working on our own. It is draining us. The diocese charges us high rent to live in diocesan property. Why should the sisters pay rent while working for the diocese?" However, there was a general feeling of satisfaction among the sisters especially from the people they serve like the elderly. Sr Pamela had this to say about joy in the ministry, "the life of those we serve inspire us to service because we see Christ in them." The words of wisdom that came from the regional superior, Sr Olivia is quite powerful, "Pope Francis should help missionaries like us to do our work so that sisters can focus on their work of evangelization and not focus on finding how to maintain themselves."
2. *Visit to DePaul University Students:* Don Sergio, Meghan Clark, Stan Chu Ilo, Bill Cavanaugh, and Jamie Waters spent one hour with DePaul Students following a communal celebration of Mass. In the conversation with the students and the pastoral agents at the University Catholic ministry, what came out clearly was that the university students feel that the church does not offer them a safe space to be themselves. Emmanuel Ojeifo, a doctoral student at the University of Notre Dame who was assisting the working group on this day reflects on what happened during this encounter: "Most of the students admitted that they knew little about Pope Francis, except that he is the first Argentine, the first Jesuit, and the first South American to be Pope in the Church's history, as well as the first Pope to go by the name "Francis." Beyond these "firsts" of Francis, the students had nothing to say about the Pope's background. When it came to the writings and teachings of Pope Francis that they knew, it was basically the same situation – nothing much! But on the third question about what they would like to tell the Pope, they had so much to

say. They shared their concerns, anxieties, frustrations, and challenges about being Catholic and staying Catholic in the contemporary church that appears to have no place for the young people. They noted that on many issues, they found the church to be exclusionary. They complained about church leaders being ideologues and politicians in today's culture wars rather than being "pastors." They felt that women and LGBTQ+ people do not find the church welcoming but rather "harmful" and "hurtful." They expressed sadness at seeing their own Catholic peers leave the church to go elsewhere in search of love, compassion, and acceptance – values which they feel are lacking in their own spiritual home. They raised concerns about the way the faith is imparted today, the Church's approach to the religious and spiritual formation of young people, and the challenges of finding deep spiritual roots in a contemporary world where faith and secular culture seem to be at odds with each other. On these and several other issues, the young students wanted Pope Francis to "say something" and to "do something." They expressed their dreams and aspirations for a church that is humble, welcoming, compassionate, inclusive, and attentive to the needs of all, especially those on the margins. They wanted a Church that is relevant in their lives and in their journey of faith."

3. *Encounter with a selection of Chicago Catholics*: This was the final evening of Sergio's visit and we had dinner at St Celestine Church with Meghan Clark, our working group consultant, Bill Cavanaugh and his wife Tracy, Fr Paul Cio and ten other Chicago Catholics drawn from three different parishes. Three insights emerged from the encounter. First, there is a deep admiration for what Pope Francis is doing in the church; second, Catholics want their priests and bishops to be closer to them and to be available to serve them in all the circumstances of life. Finally, many Catholics are hurting because of the pandemic, the tensions in the world and the division in their churches and they want to see a church that speaks to Gospel of love, acceptance, and hope to these complex and often complicated situations. Justin Lombardo, the Head of the Chicago Archdiocesan Covid Task force captures this so clearly in these words: "the critical part of our messaging is the faith component where we invited people in our communication to know that our responsibility is not just to ourselves, but to the weakest and the most vulnerable and our moral obligation to mitigate and to protect others"

At the end of Don Sergio's visit, I asked him what was his impression of the work that has been done and the sites that we visited together, he simply said: "Surprised!!" and I ask him, "why?" He responded "I am surprised by what I have seen. This was not what I expected to see." Isn't that what happens when we have a true encounter? As Pope Francis will say to the world: "The Lord never ceases to surprise us."

(https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2017/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20170508_god-of-surprises.html)

8. Final Theological Reflection: Encounter—listen—Discern—Learn—Humble Accompaniment

My experience of participating in this project has taught me the following lessons. First, is the importance of being an eyewitness to the life and reality of people. Theology should be an eyewitness account because the theologian should always be with God's people as a travelling companion, and a participant in the drama of salvation. Being present to the other is a starting point for doing theology from the existential peripheries.

Second, is the culture of encounter that has been emphasized in many of the papal teachings of Pope Francis. Pope Francis applies the culture of encounter as a way of seeing the other (*a revelatory moment*) as well as a way being- with the other (*an ethics of community*) in the world— *each of us is fully a person when we are part of a people* (FT, 182). This is a paradigm shift that invites people to move away from a single narrative of culture and identity (FT, 12) to a more expansive embrace of the connections between all things—humans, God, and nature (FT, 34, 66, 50). The culture of encounter is a social ethics capable of dismantling the walls of exclusion constructed socially and historically by structures, systems, and institutional practices which created divisive social hierarchies between peoples, cultures, and religions (FT 195). The culture of encounter inspires a new ethical vision and momentum that is capable of moving people to transcend themselves and die to the enslavement to self, race, nation, and other forms of identities in order to enter into the ever-expansive encounter with *otherness* and a deeper dialogue with the *other especially those at the existential peripheries* (FT 111).

Developing the methodology for the culture of encounter seems to me to be an essential task for theology today. The complex nature of society and the complexity of new forms and channels of communication, makes expedient the need to create spaces and sites for deep inter-subjective and intra-communal encounters capable of opening up the spaces for God and for one another. There is also within this dynamic, the mutuality that is required in any genuine encounter, the loss of the self in the presence of another and the vulnerability that is mutually shared as an act of love, self- sacrifice, and self-surrender. This mutual vulnerability becomes an entry point into the life of the other and enables the common movement in this mutual exchange into a deeper experience of God.

Thirdly, there is the need for silence and humility. The desire to give answers to human problems and to thematize and name what we see in the world is essential to the theological craft, but this is a second movement. We need to correctly name what we see and what we have heard. However, in our encounters, there are moments when the only thing that was audible to me was the gift of silence, sobs, and tears. We experienced some moments when words were not enough and the only thing that made sense was nothing other than silence. Pastoral accompaniment and pastoral program and design often flounder before the complexity of human problems because it loses the capacity to feel the pain of the other or to hear the silence. In the face of the human tragedy often hidden in the dominant narratives of being and belonging, one must be silent in order to hear our neighbor and to hear God. One is challenged again and again to return to something that has always been an essential dimension of theology, the mystical moment of silence and the liberality of the spirit that is nourished by faith to seek wisdom in the unfamiliar places and the unseemly sites.

Finally, in terms of recommendation for the church, there is a deeper realization gained from this project that theological and pastoral leadership is not going to succeed in our times when theologians are always on the front row, giving lectures, teaching and elucidating the truths of our faith and offering the rational foundation for our beliefs and practices. The same approach should also be applied to pastoral accompaniment which should not simply be developed in seminaries, chanceries, convents, and rectories through

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

manuals that have to be followed by rote. There are some elements of surprises and metaxy that one experiences from the peripheries. This transformative reversal, for me, was the experience I had most powerfully when I visited the Cook County jail. Some prisoners voluntarily lined up for confession. In one unforgettable moment, one prisoner told me that he wanted to hear the voice of encouragement and not that of condemnation and that it was this desire that brought him to me. But in that moment of exchange, I asked myself how often have I made judgments of condemnation or even thought of the prisoners as condemned.

Perhaps, it's all about language or more an attitude, but whatever one may call it, the best way of leading as a theologian or a pastoral agent must begin and end with a humble encounter, self-surrender, and a non-judgmental openness to a transformative reversal that becomes a moment of listening, learning, and discerning what God is saying and doing in our midst. This moment is not a solipsistic moment otherwise it cannot be Trinitarian and ecclesial; it is a moment that we co-inhabit with others. However, when that *other* is someone at the peripheries, it can offer us a truly unique experience of touching the margins of heaven, where God becomes so present to us than we are to ourselves and we can follow that light with a humble heart in accompanying each other through a vulnerable mission to that future which God alone knows—**Stan Chu Ilo**.

In what follows, some members of the working group give their own personal theological reflections on what they saw and heard from the listening sessions and make some recommendations for doing theology from the existential peripheries and pastoral accompaniment:

The Call to Accompany as God Accompanies: “When he visited the United Nations, Pope Francis spoke of the moral imperative to allow people to be “dignified agents of their own destiny.” Throughout this project, I encountered scores of individuals in the New York City area and in El Paso / Ciudad Juárez. I met individuals who had deep experiences of exclusion, many experienced profound violence, and yet, they demanded to be respected as *dignified agents*. Carlos, a Catholic farmworker organizer, explained, “what migration represents today is an act of resistance of people who refuse to disappear, refuse to be what Pope Francis calls the disposable created by this system.” Whether migrants trying to get to the United States, women in minoritized communities, families affected by gang violence, or LGBTQ+ Catholics, all were actively resisting systems of exclusion. Their strength came from an absolute conviction that God accompanies them on their journey - even when others do not. Throughout my interviews, even with those who felt abandoned by their fellow Christians or excluded by the Catholic Church, they did not feel abandoned by God. “When you have faith, anything is possible” noted a young mother from Guatemala. In Ciudad Juarez, I met migrant women from many places who all euphemistically referred to “*difficulties*” to emphasize the ubiquitous violence experienced on their journey. And yet, they reiterated, “God hasn’t abandoned us because we are here” or “I see God putting good people in our path. As Pope Francis teaches in *Fratelli Tutti* (11), “Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day,” urges *Pope Francis* (FT 11). This truth was operative at *Mujer Obrera* where the women urged that they were “creating a community against destruction” lamenting that they “do not know how you can be a person of faith and not care about protecting children and the environment.” In *La Frontera*, Chicago, and New York, I learned more deeply that *doing theology from the existential peripheries* involves a renewed call to accompany as God accompanies, without exception.”—**Meghan Clark**

People wish to be seen, listened to, recognized, and valued

I interviewed a refugee from war-torn Guatemala, an African-American woman who had served Catholic parishes on the West Side of Chicago, and a group of African-American men who had been incarcerated. All were from marginalized areas that had experienced a lot of violence.

The first thing I learned is how appreciative people were to be asked to speak about their experiences and listened to. People reacted very positively when told that someone in a position of authority—the pope—wants to know about them and hear what they have to say. Much of what people want from leadership is to be seen and recognized, to be acknowledged and valued.

The same is what people want from God as well. All the people I interviewed, though unimportant in society's eyes, felt that they were important in God's eyes. Each spoke of a deep relationship with God—and a capability to be honest with God—even or especially in the hard times that they had gone through. Theodicy is the attempt to explain the existence of God despite the existence of suffering, but here theodicy seems to be reversed: it is not the people who have suffered who need a rationalization for the existence of God. Each of the interviews made clear that—at least in some cases—God is experienced as immediately present to those who suffer.

Each of the interviewees discussed what the church does and doesn't do well. The church for them is a point of contact with God; God is mediated especially through their fellow worshippers. The church is at its best when it helps them to organize against injustice and poverty. The church is a place to put their lives into an eternal frame, to feel in communion with God and with others. What the church often does not do well is to recognize the leadership of laypeople and to distribute its own resources equitably. The church is at its worst when it is clerical and inward looking, and when it tolerates vast wealth inequality among different parishes in close proximity to one another.

I don't know what concrete steps will come from this project, but I am hopeful that this is not a one-time exercise. For too long, the hierarchy of the church has understood itself to be *ecclesia docens*, while the laity are *ecclesia audiens*. By way of contrast, this exercise points to the entire church—including the hierarchy—being *ecclesia audiens*, listening especially to the voices of those marginalized in the church and in society. The best teachers are the ones who know how to listen—**William Cavanaugh**.

Doing theology at the Sites of active lives of faith in the midst of suffering and rejection

From every group and every individual person that was interviewed I saw and heard people who were filled with a sense of being cared for by God. Moreover, each individual person had a sense of mission and purpose in their lives, even for the man who was in prison for 15 years who expressed no explicit form of faith in God, and for the woman who no longer practices Catholicism, even though she was raised in this tradition. Every single person in the total count of the more than thirty people interviewed expressed being at peace with God or the divine mystery regardless of how they addressed this reality. They expressed a gratefulness for the love and mercy of God in their lives, even though some of them struggle with various forms of poverty, and hostility they have had in their lives and in numerous cases also currently experience.

I have also seen and heard from a significant percentage of those individuals interviewed a

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

great deal of suffering based on their experiences in the Catholic Church. The most moving testimonies came from Black Catholics who have remained very active in their life of prayer, in communal worship, in service, and in forms of leadership within their community of faith and in civic society but have experienced among some priests, those in positions of ecclesial authority, and those in the broader faith community a failure to stand up and speak out against racist behaviors in the Catholic community and in the broader society. These faithful Catholics have perceived a disrespect of the cultural expressions of Black Catholics in their worship through song, and dance, and homiletic styles. They have felt disrespected and unacknowledged for their dignity and their charisms by some seminarians, priests, and bishops, and those in lay leadership structures for the missionary discipleship of Black Catholics in the Church and world. As difficult as the struggles these people have had, they offer abundant evidence of an active life of faith and a deep sense of direction and mission in their life.

Where are these findings leading us? Based on this initial experience I am convinced that this new theological method should be further explored and fine-tuned and integrated into every synodal process, including in the development of regular (every 3 to 5 years) parish assemblies, diocesan synods, national processes developed by episcopal conferences, and by the synod of bishops. To clarify, in every conciliar and synodal expression of the church there should be efforts to include the full and active participation of those at the existential peripheries of the church in the regular collective processes utilized by councils and synods, whether they are active in the church or in some way marginalized. But in addition to incorporating the presence and participation of these people from the margins into these established ecclesial synodal processes, those in authority in the church at every level need to commitment the church and dedicate themselves to cultivating this particular new method of conducting sacred conversations with selected groups and individuals at the peripheries to incarnate the preferential option of the church to the poor and marginalized. To incorporate this new method of engaging those at the existential peripheries into the renewed and expanded synodal methods provides a valuable development not only of doctrine in realizing the church's dedication to care for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized, but it would also habituate this pastoral praxis supporting these convictions— **Bradford Hinze**

Doing theology through cultural humility, careful attention to power dynamics, in order to develop right and just relationship

Participating in this project has reaffirmed my vocation as a Catholic theologian because of the methods we were asked to use, as well as what we learned from those to whom we listened. We were asked to go to those who occupy the margins of the church, to nurture our relationships with them, to listen to their experiences, and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit along the way. I met with faith-filled people who have been divorced or widowed; with a seeker who endured racism at the hands of those in whose care he had been entrusted; with young gay men who love the church and seek to be loved fully in return; with lay ecclesial ministers who serve marginalized communities and work toward building a society where all have what they need not only to survive, but to thrive. I was humbled by their candor and their generosity. To listen to those who sometimes are left behind by the institutional church has been a true privilege.

A consistent theme in our conversations was having experienced something unexpected and challenging that became a life-giving point of connection with others. These dialogue partners consistently transformed those experiences in liberating ways that informed concrete action, often practicing accompaniment. They do so by walking with others experiencing similar struggles, shedding light on one another's paths, embodying what

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

Francis has described as encounter with the other and, in turn, with our God.

Doing theology in ways that make listening essential resonates with how liberation theologians and practical theologians throughout the Americas have undertaken such work for at least three generations, and such opportunities to build meaningful relationship across boundaries of difference are much needed in the church and in the world. These methods encourage cultural humility and careful attention to power dynamics, emphasizing right and just relationship. Further, doing theology at the peripheries invites those who are regularly asked to speak not only to listen closely to those whose voices often go unheard, but also to prayerfully consider how their experiences might inform theological construction—**Jennifer Owens-Jofré**.

Doing theolog by engaging people where they are

Usually, we think of theology as engaging with the sources of the past or else engaging a body of scholarly literature. Instead, this project conceived of theology as *engaging people* where they are, in the concrete circumstances and experiences of their lives, especially at the margins of church and society. Our task as researchers was to listen and assist in naming what is theological about the present situation, the lived experience of so many. I experienced it as a process of mutual enrichment: Those interviewed were transformed by the fact that their stories were affirmed and valued and that they were at the center of a narrative. As a conversation partner, I was transformed by their powerful witness and profound sense of grace active in their midst. In this project, theology emerged from a conversation that sent the “center” to the “margins” and privileged the “margins”—**Darren Dias**

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule:

We've distilled the questions from the dicastery in the following way, given in an order designed to start by eliciting people's deepest spiritual experiences and most significant joys and struggles, and then to build up from there.

1. How do you pray, and where? Who do you pray to? God the Father? Jesus? Mary? a saint?

What's most attractive to you about [Father, Jesus, Mary, or whoever they chose]? Are there times you have trouble praying?

2. What have been the biggest sources of joy in your life? What have been the biggest sources of pain and sorrow?
3. Where do you see God at work? or not? Perhaps start in relation to the joys and sorrows you named, but feel free to step beyond that. Is there a story or event in the bible that stands out particularly to you, given your life?
4. How has Catholicism helped you, or hindered you, in your life, perhaps particularly in reference to the pains and sorrows you named? Is there a way you think the Church could have better helped you?
5. Have COVID, gender inequality, poverty, racism, clerical abuse or environmental degradation made you think differently about God? about Catholicism? How do you grapple with that?
6. How has Pope Francis's teaching and ministry helped you, if it has? What do you think he stands for?

**DOING THEOLOGY
FROM THE EXISTENTIAL
PERIPHERIES
REPORT**

Appendix 2: Credits and Acknowledgements by City

Chicago:

Working with Jaime Waters:

With gratitude to all individual and focus group participants, and special thanks to those who recommended participants and coordinated interviews: Dr. Avis Clendenen (Mercy Circle), Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez (Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership), Fr. Francis Li (St. Therese Chinese Catholic Church), and Colleen Curry (St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center).

Working with Stan Chu Ilo

Gratitude to Fr Paul Cao and Fr Moises Navarro, Mother Guerin Parish, Elmwood Park; Sr Mumbi Kigutha, Precious Blood Sisters, Chicago; Justin Lombardo, Director, Chicago Archdiocesan COVID-19 Task Force; Sr Marianne Race, Congregation of Sisters of St Joseph.

Working with Bill Cavanaugh:

Thanks to all who participated in interviews and focus groups, and special thanks to Ed Siderewicz, Fr. David Kelly, and Sr. Mumbi Kigutha for helping me to set up the interviews.

El Paso/Ciudad Juárez:

Dylan Corbett, Executive Director, Hope Border Institute / Vatican Migrant & Refugee Section

J. Omar Ríos, Humanitarian Support Coordinator, Hope Border Institute Vanessa Sánchez, Chief of Staff, Hope Border Institute

Fr. Marcus McFadin, Pastor St. Patrick's Cathedral

Pbro. Alejandro Martinez and Parroquia San Vincente de Paul for coordinating the meeting with not only the Ramamurri but members of eight indigenous peoples.

With Gratitude as well to Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, and Bishop Jose Guadalupe Torres Campos of Juárez for their support of our visit to La Frontera.

New York:

Working with Brad Hinze:

Trena Yonkers-Talz interviewed in Spanish, edited translation into English

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Pastoral Leader with Latina Women's Group

Leonel Guardado, Assistant Professor of Theology, Fordham University, Interviewed Mexican Latina Healer living in Bronx

Working with Meghan Clark:

John Gonzales from Catholic Charities Brooklyn Queens, interviewed in Spanish Angelina and Josefa

Gonzalo Carreon and Jerry Rodriguez at Don Bosco Workers, Don Bosco Community Center. Ana Tavares, Spanish teacher, aided with simultaneous translation with Lifeway participants and aided in Spanish transcription/translation to English.

Marion Kendall and Twanna Warren for support and coordination at Lifeway Network.

*With gratitude for funding for travel support throughout the project from St. John's

**DOING THEOLOGY
FROM THE EXISTENTIAL
PERIPHERIES
REPORT**

University. Many thanks, in particular, to Deans Teresa Delgado and Gina Florio.

San Diego:

Working with Jennifer Owens Jofré:

Teresa Perez of the San Diego Organizing Project, who served as the principal organizer of the focus group with local leaders from the organization.

*With gratitude to Jeffrey Burns of the Center for Catholic Thought and Culture for funding to support local travel and book space at Mission San Luis Rey and to Licette Owens, who provided hospitality for the focus group there.

Working with Tom Landy:

With gratitude to Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ and Mabel Gastelum of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles

Toronto:

Working with Darren Dias:

Mary Ellen Chown principal organizer of the session with Catholic Network for Women's Equality.

Carl O'Byrne and David Peryera from All inclusive Ministries.

Working with Thomas Lynch:

With thanks to Catherine Ward, Registrar, Sacred Heart College Jacob Sullivan, Director of Evangelization, Sacred Heart College Rev. Peter Lukow

Appendix 3: Ethics Research Committee IRB Approval of Exemption from St. John's University (see last page)

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

3/15/22, 11:57 AM

Mail - Meghan Clark - Outlook

IRB-FY2022-260 - Initial: Initial - Exempt - St. John's

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Tue 3/15/2022 9:56 AM

To: Meghan Clark <clarkm1@stjohns.edu>

* External Email *



Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Mar 15, 2022 9:56:07 AM EDT

PI: Meghan Clark

CO-PI:

Dept: SJC Theology & Religious Stud

Re: Initial - IRB-FY2022-260 *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries (Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, North American Working Group)*

Dear Meghan Clark:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries (Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, North American Working Group)*.

Decision: Exempt

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/inbox/id/AAMkADkwMmE1N2kLWY3N2hNDU2NS05YTMzLWPhYzZkOTRlODAyYQBGAAAAAAszTOEP8UwTLzQlYm4...> 1/2