Opinion
Letters to the Editor



by NCR Staff

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In a column for Religion News Service, Phyllis Zagano said, "Without doubt, the best line to emanate from the synod on synodality is 'Excuse me, Your Eminence, she has not finished speaking.' That sums up the synod and the state of the Catholic Church's attitude toward change." Following are NCR reader responses to this column with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

In my Connecticut parish, where there has been a precipitous drop in Mass attendance, there was not a peep, not a whisper, nor even a prayer about the month-long Synod. Many parishioners were entirely unaware of its occurrence. This should not be a surprise. Since 2013, every effort by Pope Francis to solicit feedback from lay men and women through his questionnaires went without mention. To give my feedback, I had to go out of the diocese and state entirely! Synodality should not be this difficult to achieve! It seems to me that the U.S. bishops are entirely disinterested in listening to the Holy Spirit unless they like what is being said.

J. E. OFFNER
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Thanks for Phyllis Zagano's great analysis about the needs of women being rejected or ignored within the faith community. While Phyllis was writing more specifically about her disappointment over hierarchical foot dragging on a decision on women deacons, there were other nuances to her narrative that warrant discussion.

Whether it's within marriage or the church, there invariably comes a time when an ignored woman will declare, "Why am I even trying?" And when that happens, the woman departs. Whereas, within the beauty of loving, listening, synodal-type relationships, a reset can take place and the original bond is stronger and changed for the better.

This dynamic is especially useful in parish councils where, even if women are included, the "tyranny of the articulate" may prevail and the outcome is predicated upon the ideology of the strongest member. This is where a wise, skilled pastor, bishop or deacon can selectively create an even balance of ideologies within the council and facilitate it so that even the most timid council member is prayerfully listened to and is a valued voice. The tools of the synod — discussions in the round, prayer for discernment and three minute listening exercises — are invaluable for changing a spiritually dead (and possibly womanless) parish into a vibrant, holy one.

NANCY MCGUNAGLE
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The philosophy behind synodality appears to value the ideas and voices of people who heretofore were largely ignored. This describes the pre-conciliar church as I remember it. The faithful would rarely speak candidly to clergy since there was an unwritten rule of providing deference to them regardless of their arguments.

Society has evolved since then. One can argue that the preconciliar days were as reflective of culture then as synodality is reflective of our more open and candid society today. These changes need to be understood by the clergy.

I have attended meetings where facilitators managed the conversations so all voices were heard. It appears the Synod was one such meeting and the remarks by Zagano seem to highlight that arrangement. Unfortunately, as Zagano alludes, most of our ecclesial leaders need facilitators when they attend meetings with the faithful. Reliance upon manners, whether in public forums or parish meetings, may not prove sufficient to allow all voices to be heard as Pope Francis envisions.

CHARLES A. LEGUERN
Granger, Indiana

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Great article. One can imagine the righteous anger Zagano felt as she tapped this out on her computer keys. Zagano is correct, synodality began and ended for the most part at the Vatican.

While prophetic reformer Pope Francis has evolved as a man and minister, many of his colleagues have no intention of moving from their comfort zones. Why? It's hard work. Many clerics have never been challenged or challenged themselves.

It takes a particular type of person to enter, remain in and prosper in a church job ... not a vocation or a calling. The author is correct that the Holy Mother Church is dying. Your Eminence will be out of a job — not a ministry.

Zagano unapologetically wrote the truth. It needs to be written again and again. More importantly it needs to be asked of the bishops. People today don't think or act like people of the 1950s. Having lived through them, I know the ages past had troubles of their own. Nothing glamorous or godly about life's harsh realities. The world has changed but the church hasn't.

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