

# Tradition and Adaptation

Interjurisdictional Perspectives  
on Inclusive Catholicism  
in 2022

Edited by  
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## Preface

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

If Heraclitus was correct, no person can step into the same river twice: The river you stepped into only moments ago has since changed, the waters have moved, and you're stepping into entirely new waters! Like a river filled with tremendous movement, the phenomenon or "movement" of Inclusive Catholicism here in the United States is also very fluid, ever changing before our eyes—and our perspectives on it continue to change as well.

A perfect example of this lies in the very nomenclature for the movement of which we're part. Three years ago, before our first interjurisdictional gathering here in the U.S., I was quite comfortable to brand myself and our branch of the Independent Sacramental Movement (ISM) as "Independent Catholic." After that encounter, though, in an attempt to respect those who self-identify as "Old Catholic," I started referring to our movement as "Old/Independent Catholic." Hearing so many complaints about both adjectives—"old" and "independent"—I conceived of us for a brief time as "Autocephalous Catholics." The general confusion about that word, though, led in November 2021 to my preferred use of the term "Inclusive Catholic" to describe those of us within the ISM who are attempting to birth more inclusive expressions of Jesus' discipleship of equals within the context of Western Catholicism. The "river" and our perceptions of it keep changing!

Because of the paucity of historical documents, we will never be able to fully reconstruct the evolution of Inclusive Catholicism in this nation. In a movement where the majority of works are written and published by individuals, we find even fewer traces of *collective* wisdom—of expressions of thought that were agreed on by many.

An attempt to bring together "convergent streams" of wisdom from within the contemporary Inclusive Catholic movement in the United States, the present work was in part inspired by the work of Bishop David Oliver Kling, who, in the first 100 episodes of his "Sacramental Whine" podcast, interviewed 59 individuals to highlight their perspectives on the larger ISM of which Inclusive Catholicism is part. As I poured some 400 hours of my life into editing the first volume of his work, *Sacramental Whine: Chronicling the*

*Independent Sacramental Movement*, I was particularly struck by the very negative portrayal of our movement—with one bishop referring to ISM clergy as “nuts and flakes” and “the Island of Misfit Toys,” and with Bishop Kling himself referring to various ISM clergy as “train wrecks.” I was intrigued by Bishop Kling’s omission, likely due to oversight, of our nation’s largest eucharistic communities, as well as of the Philippine Independent Church, the world’s largest expression within the ISM. Instead, his first 100 episodes bring light to some extremely fringe voices within our movement who speak on such topics as Gnosticism, esotericism, Buddhism, Druidry, Wicca and candle magic—none of which finds expression in the largest Inclusive Catholic communities in our nation. If the Pareto Principle holds, it might be assumed that some 80% or more of his guests represent the views of some 20% or less of the persons within our movement. Because I firmly believe in the value of collective wisdom, though, I was most struck by the unchallenged, individual voices which continue to (mis)characterize the larger movement of which Inclusive Catholicism is part.

Hence, in the summer of 2021, we piloted our Inclusive Catholic “Hive Mind” Think Tanks, a series of conversations where attendees wrapped their minds around various issues and challenged the words and assumptions of one another. We spread word of this series through an eblast to over 900 ISM clergy and through our “Extraordinary Catholics” Facebook group, which included over 700 people. 76 individuals—largely ISM clergy—participated in 24 conversations, often in “hive mind” agreement, sometimes strongly disagreeing, but never being disagreeable, disrespectful, or severing the bond of love which continued to bring us together.

I sincerely thank all who participated in this project. I also express my gratitude to my very able executive assistant, Carlos Alonso, for shepherding this work to completion.

Due to its interjurisdictional nature, this work might be said to contain the best collective thinking on Inclusive Catholicism at this moment in history. To paraphrase Father Michael Nicosia, it is our attempt to collectively reflect on our tradition—and our adaptations of that tradition. May this work serve as a historical document for future clergy, researchers and lay leaders who look back and wonder how people in 2021 and 2022 understood the rich, diverse movement of Inclusive Catholicism in our nation and in our world!

## Whom and What Independent Catholics Celebrate

*Because Independent Catholic clergy and laity do not have a fixed, universal ordo of saints and liturgical feasts, the question naturally arises: Whom and what do we celebrate as Old/Independent Catholics? For our first encounter, we came together around this “softball” question as we began to build relationships with one another. As with all conversations, the following transcript contains all comments that were shared after the opening “check-in,” an opportunity to hear all voices and to share about ourselves, our ministries, and important news in our lives.*

Mathias: Let’s reflect on who and what we celebrate within our Old/Independent Catholic communities and jurisdictions. Whom and what do *you* celebrate? How do you determine what you will celebrate? What *ordo*, if any, do you follow? Here at Holy Family Catholic Church in Austin, Texas, we self-identify as solidly within the Catholic tradition, and we recognize that we are heirs of the traditions of the Western Church. We largely follow the *ordo* of the Roman church, supplementing it with voices from our Old/Independent Catholic tradition. During our weekly Sunday announcements, we’ll often talk about the “Extraordinary Catholics” of our Old/Independent Catholic tradition. We focus on making each Sunday extraordinary, so we enjoy lifting up the saints of the Church as mentors and models for Christian living. When we were part of the American Catholic Church in the U.S. for six years, we began celebrating such saints as Martin Luther, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero and Cesar Chavez. We are admittedly less familiar with saints of the Eastern Church, and there are various saints of the Western Church

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that we don’t celebrate—largely due to the manner in which they were named saints, or because we judge them less worthy of imitation by mature Catholics. There are certain feast days that we don’t celebrate—like the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary—due to the ties of such celebrations to claims of purported

papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome. Cass: When I entered the Independent Sacramental Movement in 1981, I was part of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America. In name, we were Western rite, but too many of us liked the “glitz and glam” of Eastern worship. I was very attached to Eastern mysticism and stayed with it for many years—until I ultimately became a Schema monk. I like to joke that I did so because I liked wearing a veil! I was fascinated by the desert fathers and mothers—and I brought a lot of Eastern Christian thought

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*In our families, we say,  
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and why not?*

with me when I transitioned into European Old Catholicism. I find the Eastern manner of recognizing saints much more palatable. They don't have the whole rigmarole of proving a person is a “saint.” I prefer to

focus on the sanctification of the ordinary—like good mothers and fathers. In our families, we say, “My grandmother was a saint” — and why not? In the Progressive Catholic Church, we follow the Roman calendar as a matter of convenience, and we are familiar with many of their saints. There are also certain things that we don't celebrate—like the Immaculate Conception. I'm always embarrassed that it was the Franciscans who forced that doctrine on the Church! Instead of celebrating the Assumption, we celebrate the Glorification of the Blessed Mother: We imagine the magnificent moment when she transitioned from this life and was before her Son again! We find it important to revive the Irish, Scottish and Gaelic saints, who are so often overlooked. They have some wonderful stories and a very lovely Celtic liturgy. Many of us enjoy the *Novus Ordo*. Even with some of its permutations, we find it to be a Spirit-driven liturgy with a conciliar spirit. We have a problem with some of the traditional saints of Western Catholicism, so we step



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aside from some. Here at Little Portion Friary, we celebrate many of our Franciscan saints—and there are a few Franciscan saints whom we don’t celebrate. People who have beaten others have been declared “saints” by the Roman Catholic Church—so there has to be some other criterion than the Roman Catholic Church declaring someone a “saint.” Many of the saints were like us—and aren’t we all saints?

Bellino: I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, so I tend to gravitate that way. I went to the University of Notre Dame—which, contrary to what most people think, is not a Roman school—so I have a Holy Cross background. We talk about what we’re going to celebrate, and we decide what we’re going to do. Our bishop—Bishop Michael Beckett of the Unified Old Catholic Church—is a loving guy and gives us great freedom in how we celebrate, so long as it’s not way

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out of line. I tend to talk to parishioners and get input from the laity. Ultimately, we’re here for the laity. We’re here to lead people to Jesus—so I give them more say than most priests do.

Carter: One thing I really liked about the Sophia Divinity School program, which I believe is a program that Alan Kemp helped shape—something I believe was also carried over to his own Ascension Theological College—was the insistence that all candidates for the priesthood and the transitional

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diaconate study the available lectionary and liturgical resources to formulate rites, lectionaries and calendars for their own ministry. In my recent studies with our Old Catholic brothers

and sisters in Utrecht, I was reminded of their ecclesiological focus on the local church. For them, the heart of the Church is in a sense the local church, bottom-up, with less top-down emphasis on hierarchy and apostolic succession, which are there but are seen as forms or structures of service. In many Independent Catholic churches, we focus on the local church as well, which is pastorally significant for who and what we celebrate. Like the early Church, we are all part of the “One

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Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church,” and yet we focus on the local church, the needs of the local community. We look at what’s available to us through the Roman Church, the Episcopal Church, and

other liturgical sources. We have the freedom as local churches to focus on certain saints—and potential saints—and to lift them up and learn from them. At the Pilgrim Chapel of Contemplative Conscience, we strongly focus on the spiritual things that interest those we serve: pilgrimage, contemplation, the mystical aspects of Christian tradition, and the divine gift of the individual conscience. So, for example, we, as Independent Catholics, might look at someone like Mychal Judge, the “first victim” of 9/11, who worked within the Roman tradition, was homosexual, and addressed his own issues of substance abuse. Depending on the local community you serve, he might be a particularly helpful example for some people.

Kemp: I like to say that every day is the holiest day of the year. This moment, today, is the only moment we have to transform this moment in time. Putting that aside, we use the Roman *ordo* for the most part, because it’s convenient, standard,

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proof-edited, printed, clean and easy to use. In the tradition of the Church, any person who is universally loved and thought of as a good person can be accepted as a saint. It doesn’t require a formal process to recognize a saint. There are many saints out

there—even in our Independent Movement. We often think that certain people are saints, and then we find out differently—but being a saint has nothing to do with particular behaviors, or whether you do good things or bad things.

D'Arrigo: We have a new bishop in our communion, who formally begins his letters, "To the saints of..." The Sicilian Roman Catholic in me screams, but everything else about me goes, "Yes!" I've heard Alan say before that all the believers are saints, that we are the saints of church. I also echo the notion that the kingdom of heaven is here and now, and that this moment is the holiest moment that you're ever going to experience, if you allow yourself to experience it. Interestingly, our jurisdiction just created "Eastern Connexions." We now have Eastern-rite Catholics in our jurisdiction, and they're educating us on a whole bunch of new and very interesting saints! Some of us use the Roman calendar. I am intrinsically in love with the new Revised Common Lectionary. As a community, we have written our first Book of Prayer, and we're starting to put together our own lectionary-based calendar. If that happens, we'll likely

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develop our own list of saints from the Roman and Eastern rites. I like the notion that we are all saints. We need to remind our communities that they are the Church—that they are saints! Growing up as a Sicilian Roman Catholic, I believed that priests were above the laity, that priests were perfect, and that laity were not. As

Independent Catholics, we can say, "We're all saints. We're all in this together—and there are very few things that separate me from you." I'm hearing that many of us use the Roman calendar because it's convenient. It's easy, and we can just take out the stuff we don't like. Wouldn't it be cool if we, as a "hive mind," came up with our own calendar as a body of believers, as Old/Independent Catholics? That would be awesome!

Buffone: Of the 50 or so communities of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, our community at Holy Spirit tends to be more "left," so we introduce a lot of mysticism, Eastern philosophies and Celtic Christianity into our liturgies. Out of convenience, we celebrate with the Roman Catholic lectionary and calendar. We celebrate most of the saints. Our

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name is Holy Spirit, so we, too, are primarily led by the Holy Spirit. We "mix it up," particularly during the summer. We stray from the lectionary. We throw in Matthew Fox, Richard Rohr, Joan Chittister, and we

have an open dialogue. I start with a few thoughts for reflection, breaking open a couple of ideas from the scriptures, and then I invite the Spirit to talk through the baptized. What I love about our communion is that it's an "umbrella," with many different liturgical expressions. Most of us follow the Roman rite, but we also have two or three Anglican-rite communities.

Furr: We celebrate the goodness of all life, the goodness of humans, the goodness of the web or circle of life. Out of convenience, because most of the people in our community are from a Roman background, we follow the Roman format for the liturgy, but I often rewrite the prayers. We don't tell people, "You're bad!" We don't say, "Lord, I'm not worthy to receive you." To the Lord, we *are* worthy! That's the philosophy of our community. When we gather around the table, we celebrate who we truly are: We are the reality of the

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Divine, the kingdom of God! We don't do politics. We don't do hierarchy. When our community formed, and I was asked to be the pastor, I said, "I will be the sacramental

minister, but this is *your* parish—and I’m not running it.” As a result, I have a very empowered parish. I have no idea how much money we have. We have maybe 25 people, and that number dropped during COVID to a core of five or six people. Now that we’re emerging from this pandemic, we have eight or nine. We have conservative members, but I’m very left-leaning, and we celebrate the goodness of God’s creation. It’s a great bunch of people, and our liturgy is online at [www.olota.net](http://www.olota.net). We don’t single out saints on Sundays—and I’m not sure I would want to start singling out people. What is sainthood?

There’s a Roman fixation on particular people, many with made-up stories. Instead, let’s celebrate who we are as beautiful people on a beautiful planet in the midst of a beautiful creation by a beautiful God!

*What is sainthood?  
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Robison: The Old Catholic Church in the United States (TOCCUSA) doesn’t have its own calendar. We’re not organized well enough for that. A sack of angry, wet cats might describe us fairly well! So, I find myself doing my own thing. I tend to follow the Episcopal Church’s calendar. I was not raised Roman Catholic; I was raised “Catholic-adjacent.” My father’s family is Irish Catholic: They don’t celebrate their faith, they mourn it! I was raised Presbyterian and became an Episcopalian, so I tend to follow the Episcopal Church’s calendar. I also engage with the Carmelite stream of spirituality, and that means a whole other calendar of saints, who are sometimes peculiar. Elijah the prophet has his own saint’s day in the *ordo*: He founded the order, and you’re not allowed to argue with

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us about that! I spend a lot of time melding the two. I don't understand how some Carmelite saints—like St. Thérèse of Lisieux's parents—ended up on the calendar. I have been comparing calendars and trying to come up with something more definitive. Certain celebrations that aren't common in one tradition will speak to people of other traditions—like Candlemass and Candlemass processions. When I introduced that into a parish I served, people really liked taking blessed candles to burn at home, and they found it very meaningful to process with lit candles around the church. My liturgy tends to be Anglican, since I'm use to that, so I tend to be alone. I have a congregation of two on a good Sunday. COVID really did us in.

Cass: I had the great privilege, honor and blessing of consecrating Michael Beckett—so I feel I'm Father Bellino's old grandmother here! I've known Michael and his dear husband for many years, and I have seen them suffer from bigotry and hatred. They've been run out of places because they stand up for their faith and for who they are. They don't retaliate. They respond; they never react. They treat people with dignity, even when people treat them viciously. I find that saintly. When I see the homeless here in Greenville share their food with another homeless person—if I could get their names, I'd put them in the calendar of saints in a heartbeat! It's easy to canonize Mychal Judge. I have a relic of Mychal here: a part of his cord. It's not so easy to accept canonizing the flawed and the broken. Why aren't they on our calendars? We have another bishop here in town who made a radical move two weeks ago: We have stopped using the Pauline letters, since we're not exactly sure of what Paul meant or what his intentions were toward women and other

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people. We will not read texts that may harm individuals in our community! We have to take responsibility for that. Instead, we're supplementing our liturgies with texts from non-canonical gospels and other beautiful things. The Independent Sacramental Movement is like the early Church, with a variety of forms of worship

and of what we consider sacred, and of what we want to recognize. Christ said that he makes all things new (Rev. 21:5), so we live and walk in Eden again! It's a shame: We're trying to kill the planet, and the traditional Western church can't embrace that. Because Christ makes all things new, we can embrace these letters as something of value. We have to ask ourselves: Can we accept all sorts of different liturgies, and how far can we stretch?

D'Arrigo: You're onto something. Independent Catholicism offers a very clear view of what the pre-imperial Church looked, felt and smelled like. We embrace things that are scripturally relevant and actually exist in scripture. For a month now, I've been teaching a course called "Revealing Revelation," and I am consistently blown away by the things that my highly-educated, adult, lifelong-Christian students believe are in the book of Revelation—things that appear nowhere in the canon of scripture! In Old/Independent Catholicism, in our "hive mind" of "recovering Catholics," we have so

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many choices, and we literally are the pre-Roman Church—before an imperial ideology was attached to a Western religion and things started to fall apart. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think to myself, "I'd really like

to canonize Ram Dass or Alan Watts, or Aldous Huxley for his perennial philosophy. He should definitely be a saint in the Church! If you can't get through his work, you probably shouldn't put a clerical collar on.

Mathias: That sounds like a good segue into whom we celebrate. Here in Austin, our parish was part of the American Catholic Church in the United States for over six years. When we joined the ACCUS in 2012, they celebrated St. Martin Luther. They celebrated St. Oscar Romero long before the Roman Church did. They celebrated St. Martin Luther King, Jr. and St. César Chávez. I continue to speak of them as saints and, as I prefer to call them, "Extraordinary Catholics." So I lift up the example of Jan Hus and all who were tortured and

burned at the stake by the Roman Church. They had the courage to stand up for their beliefs. They did not bow when they were bullied. We've heard some examples of people who might serve as models and mentors—like Mychal

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Judge, Ram Dass, Alan Watts and Aldous Huxley. Are there others who might be lifted up in our communities as examples of lives well lived?

Furr: I use the example of the hundreds of men and women on the southern border who dedicate their lives—some by premeditated decree, and others by happenstance—to helping the refugees on the southern border. Every day, they walk into situations of which our larger national community is unaware, and each one is a saint! In our prayers every Sunday, we pray for those who are working on behalf of refugees—the mothers and fathers who are fleeing Central America and walking with their children for hundreds of miles. They are saints. They struggle to make a difference in the lives of their children and families. We run into problems

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when we pick and choose who we're going to elevate as saints: We elevate one, and another is not elevated. It's time for a new concept of canonical sainthood. I didn't enter the Roman Church until I was 27,

and I left when I was 60. We need to eradicate paradigms of hierarchy and adopt paradigms of oneness. It's a struggle. It has taken our faith community seven years to realize that I am not in a hierarchical position as pastor: I am one *among* my community, with a specific ministry. Canonization is part of the hierarchy, and it needs to be addressed at some point if we are to move to a paradigm of oneness, where there is no hierarchy.



Kemp: We really need to think of bishops as servants of the servants of God. Being a bishop is not a position of authority or power. It's a position of service.

Cass: When I consecrate bishops, I hand them a pitcher, bowl and towel, so that they do not forget that they are deacons, and that their ministry is one of footwashing. "You are not greater than the Master" (Jn. 15:20)!

Carter: I agree. We need to "flatten the hierarchy" when it comes to differentiating some of us as being more special than others—and yet I also like the traditional Catholic approach of identifying people as inspirations for one reason or another. I find it interesting that Dr. Julie Byrne began her book, *The Other Catholics*, from an academic point of view, asking: How do we define what is Catholic or what it means to be Catholic without being Roman Catholic? She notes that we self-identify as Catholic and value the Sacraments. We identify with apostolic succession—that we're attached to the significance of tradition and the passing of it from person to person in a line that goes from the past into the future. And finally, part of her definition of being Catholic is our appreciation, to some degree, for the saints. We can define the saints in many ways. We are all created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27), and some have moved on to that great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1). Some are holy and spiritually inspiring in particular ways. I wonder to what extent Independent Catholicism might inherently involve that idea from Dr. Byrne's definition, that to be Catholic is to honor and appreciate the saints, however we define them.

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that they are not so much into Mary  
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Incidentally, in terms of those definitions, many of us have an affinity for the Old Catholic Church, but I have recently heard folks in Utrecht remind us that they are not so much into Mary in the same way that many Roman Catholics and some Independent Catholics are.

D'Arrigo: My problem with all this saint stuff is twofold. First is the general misunderstanding of the general world about Catholics and saints: The nearly-universal

misunderstanding exists that Catholics pray *to* saints, as though the saints were God. We pray *through* the saints in the same way that I ask Scott to pray for me. The second challenge stems from the fact that “saint” and “sanctification” are so closely related: Sanctification is a process! As Catholics, we recognize that the most orthodox approach to Jesus’ teachings is to recognize them as universal, and to recognize that Jesus taught a lifestyle, not a religion. Sanctification is a long process. It’s not a snap of the fingers, where we can come to the altar, say the magic words, and be saved for life. As a “hive mind,” one the most difficult pieces of the problem is asking how we universally view sanctification. I look to Mary, the “ever-virgin,” who might best be considered a proto-Christian or a proto-saint, and I say she is sitting at the left hand of God because she said, more than any of us, “God, this makes absolutely no sense to me! This is completely unreasonable and unacceptable – but I trust you in this process, and I’m going to go with it.” If I could be half the believer that Mary was, then I’d be doing great! I’m good with that notion of sainthood. I’m not good with asking, “Has the body decomposed in the grave?” There is a lot of really kooky stuff involved in the Roman

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notion of sainthood! I absolutely think that Gene Robinson, a bishop in the Episcopal Church, should totally be named a saint, because he just lives the gospel in the truest sense. I think that John Shelby Spong should be named a saint. They’re not necessarily great

people all the time, but when you look at the collective experience of their lives and how they served Christ, they are saints. I’m reminded of the fact every rubric states that the celebrant’s lifestyle or sins don’t matter in the celebration of the Eucharist. He or she is unblemished, and nothing can tarnish the eucharistic meal. If that’s true for the Eucharist,

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then that has to be true in any version of sainthood. If we can agree that we’re all in the process of sanctification, by which all saints are made, then the only difference is the sausage versus the meatball.

Furr: I'll throw something out for consideration. Sometimes we think of saints as being martyrs, so why don't we canonize the Amazon rainforest? Or the strip mine on Black Mesa, in the Navajo Nation? Does our "universal" church only include humans—or are we a truly universal church? If all creation is good (Gen. 1), we must love the world! Let's acknowledge the Rhine River, which struggles to survive.

Carter: They are martyrs of the natural world!

Furr: You nailed it! Ten years ago, I reflected with a group on the significance of natural and non-natural disasters, like the Gulf Coast oil spill and devastating earthquake in Chile in 2010, and the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. We concluded in an almost-Gandhian way that we are in a time of immense change where the Earth herself is in agreement that she will take on whatever we would throw at her, so that we can see and learn that what we're doing is not okay—and that our hearts might be turned and we ourselves might decide to change and to once again be in union with all of creation. This would continue the process of healing, not only for ourselves, but also of the planet. We're starting to see the seeds of that in the world today, with Greta Thornburg. I wonder: Who will be the saints of the future?

Ellis: Such cosmic reconciliation very nicely echoes Paul, when he says "the entirety of creation is groaning, waiting for the new creation" (Rom. 8:19-23). I want to thank Michael Angelo for the insight that Mary had more occasion than any of us to go to God and say, "This absolutely makes no sense to me, but I'm going to go with it." That's a great example of *lectio divina*, and I'll never read the infancy narrative—or any other text with Mary in it—in the same way again! I'm hearing a natural, visceral, Spirit-like instinct to be generous in our orthodoxy about the saints. There's a great Anglican hymn:

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visceral, Spirit-like instinct  
to be generous in our  
orthodoxy about...  
"the saints of God,  
patient & brave & true."*

"I sing a song of the saints of God, patient and brave and true." I'm a hospice chaplain, and I recently went in to see a patient and, bless his heart, he had fecal matter on his hands. I looked at him and asked, "Do you need help?" And he said, "Yes." I went into the hall, to an LNA named Rosie, and she went right in and

helped him in that very personal, vulnerable place that he was in. That woman is a saint, and I see her three times a week. We don't have to look hard to see people who are doing the work of shouldering what it means to be human, in the margins and most vulnerable, and I'm so glad that they are around us, because I need as many saints in my life as I can get!

Furr: Who's to say, Mike, that you were not just as saintly, getting in touch with your own humanity and being compassionate enough to seek help for that man? She was the hands, but you were the heart!

Leary: Sometimes we want to declare people saints—and their halos are a little tarnished. I participated in the election of one bishop: What he told us, and what he ended up doing were quite different! I also had the misfortune to being the senior warden who had to remove a rector and lead the congregation through the replacement process while he was dealing with some human issues. I bore the brunt of trying to hold together a community that was torn apart by acts of sexual assault by the previous senior warden against children. Sitting in “the cheap seats,” I've seen many flawed saints. The things they had the ability to do were fantastic, but they were definitely flawed saints. I grew up with Fulton Sheen, and I've watched the games that the Roman Church has played with him and his sainthood. He was on the edge, “pushing the envelope” and making others in the hierarchy uncomfortable. He helped common people understand Christianity and how Christlike we are as members of the

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Mystical Body of Christ. He should be a saint—but the issue is caught up in the politics of Rome. We are all flawed in our own ways, but there's something to lift up in each person. Christ had a reason to bring all of us together, and we won't find out the plan until the end.

Robison: Canonization is a lot like comedy: Comedy is tragedy plus time, and canonization is sanctity plus time. We can jump on bandwagons very quickly. In my lifetime, I can think of at least three example of the Roman Church quickly jumping onto bandwagons only to find out that they were mistakes.

John Paul II is the biggest example of that. Most churches have a rule of waiting 30 to 50 years after a person dies to begin a conversation on canonization. Every time we skip that rule, it bites us in the butt. I do not possess a generally positive view of human history; I don't see it as inevitable progress. So I'm careful about adopting another person as a mascot. In some churches, the saints are less an example and more our mascots.

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Mathias: I appreciate this conversation, and I'm a big believer in collective wisdom. I love seeing how the Spirit works when all of us gather together! What final words might we share on this subject?

Kemp: One of the problems—and I don't mean to "cast stones" at the Roman Church—is that too many things have been institutionalized. We're Independent Catholics. We don't have to institutionalize things, so let's move based upon the Spirit!

Leary: We always have to remember that the saints were flawed humans. We don't celebrate their flaws, but those aspects of them that are worth imitating. We're all saints, and, though we're flawed humans, there's something good that we can celebrate in every person.

Cass: As I do this thing that we call Church, I am going to yield to the voice of the Holy Spirit, as that Spirit speaks through the community. It's one thing for the Spirit to "whisper in my ear"; it's another to hear the Spirit speaking through the voices of community. I yield to that Spirit. We are not Rome, Constantinople, Augsburg or Canterbury. We are ambassadors of Jesus Christ, and we just happen to enjoy the great wonder of apostolic succession. What a privilege that we have that connection—but it's not a privilege for us; it's a privilege for all the people we serve. So let's yield to the Spirit of God!

Furr: What really "paddles my canoe" is this kind of exploration, chipping away at the "eggshell" of perception. I absolutely love this group spirit and all perspectives.

Kemp: I believe in the communion of the saints.

Furr: And here we are!

Marsh: I just want to thank everyone for their wisdom and words. I'm younger and definitely less experienced here, but my ears, spirit and mind are present to learn more.

Bellino: I came into the Independent Movement four years ago, and, like Father Michelangelo, I was structured to see the Church as a Sicilian Roman Catholic. I'm seeing that, as a collective

*As a collective body of believers in the Independent Movement, we don't have to say, "This is the way it is— and this is the only way it is!"* In my secular background of law enforcement, we say that conversations like this put more "tools" in our "toolbox." I've enjoyed collecting various "tools" today from Sister Aryn and Father Scott and Father John—"tools" that I'll be using in my ministry!

Duhon: When I think about the saints, I think that the best that's in the best of us is in all of us—and the worst that's in the worst of us is in all of us. We have to remember that there's a "saint" in each person, and we need to treat everybody in a saintly way!

Ellis: This conversation takes me back to my divinity school days at Duke; the only thing missing was the beer and the basketball! I'm reminded of a cartoon where a guy at a bowling alley is looking frustrated and says, "I don't seem to be able to get a strike to save my soul--but fortunately the salvation of my soul does not depend upon my getting a strike!"

D'Arrigo: Whenever I speak with y'all, I feel energized and revitalized. I feel such a stirring of the Spirit in our community. I feel that spirit of "where two or more gather in my name, I'll be there with you" (Mt. 18:20). The more I get to know each of you individually, the more I'm like, "Where have you been all of my life?"

Carter: There's not one comment that I heard today that I can't incorporate and learn something from. As Independent Catholics, we have a natural tendency and ability to benefit from the appreciation for the tradition of the saints, but we

have greater flexibility in how we do it. I really admire the approach that Jayme has taken with his community, constantly writing about and posting and proposing people we can learn and benefit from, rather than just the archetypal “sanctified” people others put their stamp on for all time as being closer to God than any of the rest of us.

Mathias: Sixteen years ago, the Roman Catholic bishop here in Austin named me president of his high school, San Juan Diego Catholic College Preparatory School. The school’s mascots were the Saints, so, for 16 years now, I’ve been fond of saying, with a Texas twang, “Y’all are saints!” When I see your smiling faces, I thank God for you more than you know. Let’s continue to strive to be like the saints who’ve gone before us, inspiring others to grow in their relationship with God and with all of God’s wondrous creation!

## How Independent Catholic Clergy Dress

*Old/Independent Catholic clergy and religious dress in a variety of ways. Some are like Saint Francis of Assisi, who tried to “blend in” with the poor of his day. Others are a bit more anachronistic in their choice of clerical garb. Still others have given detractors the impression that many Old/Independent Catholic bishops “dress up and play Mass.” The question naturally arises: How do Old/Independent Catholic clergy dress – and what does this say about us as individuals and as a movement?*

Mathias: Let’s reflect on how we present ourselves as Old/Independent clergy. Images on social media show Old/Independent Catholic clergy in all manners of dress. Some look like the folks to whom they minister; others wear a clerical collar, so that people can identify them as clergy. Many wear liturgical vestments that resemble those of post-Vatican II Roman Catholic parishes, while a handful dress in long lace, birettas, white gloves and outsized rings. How do you dress, how do you perceive the dress of other Old/Independent Catholic clergy, and how is the way we dress a symbol of who we are and what we believe?

Bellino: In my secular career, I’m a policeman, so I wear a uniform all day, every day. When I get off work, I get into the most comfortable clothes I have – usually a T-shirt and shorts. In my ministry, I wear dark navy clerical shirts. I’m a member of the Order of Preachers, so I also wear my alb and mass vestments over my Dominican habit.

Kemp: I have a brand-new Hawaiian clerical shirt. I’ll wear it on Saturday for a wedding for some people who are pretty secular. I have simple tastes in clerical attire. I have vestments of all liturgical colors from Autom, for \$39.95 each, and I have gorgeous Mexican stoles that I can throw in the washing machine with cold water, so they add a bit of finesse to my \$39.95 chasubles. I usually wear clerical attire for weddings: a simple cassock and surplice. Pointy hats, jewel-encrusted slippers and white gloves don’t do anything for me!

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Cass: When I was 17, we founded the Congregation of the Servants Minor, and our bishop approved a habit that I designed. I wanted to be a Franciscan Sister of the Poor: They put up with me in their chapel every single day, and Sister Bernardine put up with me until the day she died, so I designed our habit with a blazon of the Sisters on the front of the capuche.

Furr: We had a traditional habit, and our scapula had a bright red cross. You could see us coming a mile away!

Cass: When our congregation grew to some 15 members, we had a Chapter of Mats, and I suggested that we abandon our habits for jeans, white shirts, tau crosses and sandals – and I was almost removed as the superior! I didn't realize how attached people were to that habit. It was as though their whole identity was wrapped up in it! I wonder whether our habits are necessary. Does Christ shine through me any

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The answer, of course, is no.*

differently, any more powerfully when I'm in a habit or vestments? I've come to the conclusion that some people need to see the habit and the vestments. But if I'm delivering water to the homeless camp under the bridge, I don't need to drag around my habit, cord, rosary,

capuche and scapular! I wonder: Do those things make us more "Catholic," more legitimate? The answer, of course, is no. Then, when we do wear them, our detractors say we're "dressing up and playing mass"! You can't win for losing. I say: Whatever you're comfortable in, as moved by the Holy Spirit, wear that! Wear what best minister to the people you're ministering to in any given moment. When the bishops of our movement get together, with different colored vestments, we often look like a bunch of crayons in a box! I feel I need to go toward, embrace and celebrate the simple.

Furr: I was a nun for almost 30 years in the Roman Church, and I never got into the habit for a couple of reasons. Two weeks into my pre-novitiate, I was visiting our sisters in

New York, and they were going to take some Italian sisters on a three-hour boat ride around Manhattan Island. They said, "Take a veil, and they'll let you in free!" That was a real turn-off for me, but I'll wear a clerical collar in my role as a sacramental minister. I recently celebrated a funeral in an alb, stole and chasuble—for a largely Roman Catholic family. It was hard enough for them to adjust to a woman presiding, much less clothed as a Roman Catholic presider! There's value in wearing a collar, but I don't wear much more than that at this point in my life. It's not about what we're wearing—and I'm much more effective without the barrier of a clerical collar. Why would I want to erect such

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a barrier? Joan Chittister once stood on a stage in Milwaukee, dressed in a stole, and said: "If the symbol divides, change the symbol!" Former Roman Catholics look at clerical attire through the lens of authority, as creating a difference. We have all pulled "the priest card." I worked as a social worker most of my religious life, and, when I walked into the courtroom with a domestic violence survivor, our habit, with its bright red cross, could be beneficial. I also absolutely appreciate the value of regalia in my healing work: It helps me to step into that role.

D'Arrigo: When I went through seminary, I came from an extremely high-church, Anglo-Catholic-Episcopal parish that had far nicer vestments than any Roman Catholic parish. I loved the prayers for vesting: for putting on the amice and tying the knots. I got caught up in that glorious, ancient ritual of girding one's self. When I left the Anglican Church and did homeless outreach for two years in a very punk rock part of Atlanta, I went from a cassock and collar, to all-black with a collar, to blue jeans with a collar, to a T-shirt. After working with a non-denominational church, I went back to all that glorious ritual, and one of the reasons I later left them was that they decided to no longer feed the poor or provide financial assistance to them during the holidays because "they kept coming back year after year, and they weren't learning to be self-sufficient." That was when I found the Independent Sacramental Movement. I own the

\$79.99 Autom rainbow of vestments that actually have some stitching on them—and they have a Gothic neckline that doesn't require an amice. But I wear them less and less. When I do, I wear a cassock and alb with the chasuble. More often, I wear a stole with a collar—but I've also been known to celebrate Mass in a tie-dye T-shirt. I believe that the Holy Spirit will always make it really clear to me how I need to dress for any given situation. There are some

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people who absolutely need to see "Father Michelangelo"—they need to see Jesus in me and in my beautiful 1970s wool chasubles stitched by virgin nun hands. Others need to see me in tie-dye. I don't ever want whatever I'm wearing to prevent them from seeing Jesus because of the acts of

abuse committed by clergy to whom I link myself by my way of dressing. If it were up to me, I'd walk around all the time in my clerical shirt and blue jeans, with my chain wallet and my Birkenstocks. If you meet me out in the world, or if I come visit your parish, chances are that's probably what I'll be wearing. We get so caught up in what we're wearing, that we forget why we wear it. The stole is a pre-Christian symbol of church leadership. The stole is older than Jesus! We shouldn't get hung up on what we wear, especially if it keeps us from spreading the Good News, but we also have to recognize that there's a reason we wear what we wear. Whenever I get on an airplane, unless it's for a family vacation, I always wear my collar, and there will undoubtedly be two or three people who approach me between the time that I walk to the gate and the time that we land, who say, "Would you hear my confession?" or "I really need someone to talk to" or "It's such a blessing to have a priest on this flight" or "I hate flying, but your presence here makes me feel better." There is a reason we wear these things, but we have to wear them out of humility and not out of obligation.

Robison: I buy shirts and outdoor wear that can be modified to have a collar. I'm immune-compromised and can't get overheated, so I modify a lot of clothing.

Jones: I burn up with sweat during mass, too. So, I wear an ice vest during mass. It's a vest with little ice packs, and it really helps!

Robison: I'll tell a story. When I was on the staff of a local convention in Baltimore, I was in collar, with khaki shorts and tennis shoes. I heard a little voice behind me: "Who's that?" I turned around to see a couple with a four-year-old boy, who asked again, "Who's that guy in that weird collar?" I engaged them in conversation. They were Jewish, and their son, Levi, had only ever seen people dressed in collars on TV. As I told them about the history of the collar, others stopped to listen, and it opened the door for me to talk about Old Catholicism and the Independent Sacramental Movement. I've found that my collar is an invitation to conversation. People don't expect to see a collar at a convention, so they ask me all sorts of questions. I celebrate convention masses in my \$39.99 Autom vestments. Some of my friends have added a bit of ribbon to them, to make them more upscale. The act of putting on vestments before mass helps center me and reminds me to get out of Christ's way. I wear a clerical shirt—a modified, regular shirt—with jeans and tennis shoes all the time. When I really want to dress up, I wear a cassock with a gown over it, with a

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tippet and square hat—and I really look official! I also wear the habit of an independent Carmelite Third Order. I enjoy conversations on habits. Saint Francis wore the habit of a canonically-recognized beggar—that's the basis of the Franciscan habit—but when I see Franciscan habits now, I think we're somewhat missing the target.

Janzen: I'm reminded of the opening of "The Da Vinci Code," when Professor Langdon shares a lecture on the ambiguity of symbols. Every symbol speaks within a context, so a symbol can mean totally different things in different contexts. The pentagram, for instance, can be a symbol of the divine feminine—or of the satanic. Our garb says something without us having to say anything. I work in healthcare, and, when I wear clerical garb, I don't have to say, "I'm the chaplain." I appreciate the habit of my

Franciscan tradition: I can walk barefoot, and I can wear it over shorts! Depending on the situation, the way we dress can be a help or a hindrance. In my ministry, I don't wear any clerical garb—except my sandals. I've begun looking for a more "official" look for funerals. I have found that a suit and tie can be as distancing as a habit—but it can also provide a sense of comfort. Our way of dressing will always be ambiguous and depend on the situation and what resonates with people. Symbols are, by their very

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nature, ambiguous and need to be put into context. When people see us in garb, they need to experience us as nice people—and not as people who make their lives harder than they already are.

Carter: In our movement, we are always trying to balance questions of legitimacy with our drive for inclusiveness and openness. We want to be as flexible as possible, to reach people, but we also want to indicate that we value traditions that are worth preserving. When I was in seminary, I told my bishops and the folks in the seminary,

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"I don't want to wear the collar." I thought it was distancing and risked separating me from people. I thought the collar might put some people off or lead them to judgments about my perception of my own superiority. They might also presume by my collar that I am part of the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Church or some other form of Christianity that didn't work for them or that perhaps traumatized

them. I was told: "That's not an option. When you are working, you *will* wear a collar." They kindly told me, "Try it, and see." When I started wearing the collar in public, I noticed that people identified and approached me. They will have judgments about me—positive and negative—

but the collar makes it possible for them to approach me, so that I can serve them. It's not about me. I wear an alb, stole and chasuble for sacramental purposes, but I also recognize that what we wear doesn't always seem appropriate for the folks we serve in any situation. My ministry isn't built around a typical Sunday eucharist with a congregation that regularly meets in the same place. As a "pilgrim chapel," with no building, I go wherever people need me. That could be a trail, a vineyard, or in a building, so I wear what is sacramentally-appropriate in each space. I recently spoke with my presiding bishop about options for dressing for masses on public trails, in the mud and snow. I wondered: Are there appropriate options? He responded, "When you celebrate the eucharist, we really need you in appropriate garb."

Marsh: As a seminarian, I have a question for female clergy: What reactions have you received from "John Q. Public" outside of your congregation when you are dress in clerical attire? Have you received negative comments? If so, how did you address the negativity?

Cheasty: I was ordained as a United Methodist pastor in 1991, and, as a local church pastor, I consistently wore clerical garb, and I found that some people are put off by it—especially people from very conservative backgrounds where the idea of women clergy is not particularly embraced. I found that wearing a collar was an automatic entrée wherever I

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went. It signified very clearly who I am. I've had multiple experiences where the collar opened a door and allowed me to do more effective ministry. The other issue is how we're judged as women for our appearance. People judge us by what we wear—our dress, our slacks, our blouse—more than they judge men. By wearing something neutral, we don't raise any eyebrows, but we also don't have the experience of people

saying, "That's an awesome clergy shirt you're wearing!" We don't get that. What we get is, "Oh, you're a pastor." I was recently wearing my collar on the streets of Durham when a construction worker approached me and asked, "Preacher, will you pray with me?" As we prayed, the tears

came down his face. After the prayer, he thanked me, and we both went on with our day. That wouldn't have happened if I was wearing a Durham Bulls T-shirt, so clerical dress does provide us opportunities—particularly for women. Whenever I'm working, I wear a clergy collar because of what it symbolizes and how people respond to it. I also find that the clerical collar takes race out of any situation: We're seen as clergy first, and, in many cultures, there's a lot of respect for clergy. The collar helps us minister to communities of color, where the fact that we're White might otherwise play a larger role. In my experience, race takes a backseat when you put on a clerical collar, and the collar opens doors to us that otherwise wouldn't be opened to us as women.

Furr: As a Roman nun, I found that a cross on a simple chain was

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just as influential—but I wear a clerical collar when I'm representing our faith community. I like the idea of wearing clerical dress on airplanes: When I was a sister, I don't know how many times I lost circulation in my hand because people were hanging on to me so tightly

when we were taking off and landing. I absolutely relate to that! Guys can get away with fluctuating with their attire, far more than women. A guy can get away with wearing a clerical collar with blue jeans. I'm a jeans and T-shirt fanatic, but I won't wear jeans with a clerical collar. There are fewer options for women. I just googled Hawaiian clerical shirts: There are all sorts of options, but none of them are for women! If a clerical collar helps you in your ministry, wear it. If it doesn't, don't. Purple is my favorite color, so I have a purple clerical blouse. Once a person came up to me and said, "Are you trying to be a bishop? Only bishops wear that color!" Many people are unaware of Independent Catholics. They think we're all Roman Catholics. They come from a world where women priests don't exist. It's a hurdle. They think it's inappropriate for

women to wear clerical collars. They say, "She has no business thinking she's a priest!" What other people think doesn't bother me. I'm fine if they think I'm a "wanna-be

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priest." What's important is that the people I'm with in the moment are comfortable with what I have on—and that we're comfortable with what we're wearing. Don't get caught up in how

you look; get caught up in the person you're ministering to.

Furr: The question becomes: Do you want to be part of the larger community, or do you want to be seen as something different? What are we saying by what we wear? And why are we saying it? A lot of young women like the idea of vestments and habits, which make them feel like they're members of the "tribe." For them, the habit is a sign: "Yes, I am special, because I'm in this group!"

D'Arrigo: "I'm set apart. I'm part of a community, a tribe!"

Furr: At Vatican I, there was a tremendous backlash against the women, mainly in European countries, who were rising up to address the poverty that the Industrial Revolution was creating. Women's organizations directly addressed that poverty. Vatican I put a squelch on that, insisting that women live in monasteries and wear oppressive habits. Many of our old sisters had flawed hearing and weak peripheral eye muscles as a result of those habits crushing against them!

Cass: And we wore breast suppressors. It was totally horrible!

Furr: I don't know why I would want to wear a habit. We had a lot of nurses in our community, and, back in "the old days," we had two habits: One for everyday use, and one for Sundays. You're being wheeled into a surgical suite for an appendectomy—and here comes a nun who's been in



the same habit all week! That was imposed by the First Vatican Council. The men could come home and take off their cassocks or clerical collars and relax. The women could not. They were in those habits from five minutes after they got up, until 15 minutes before they went to bed. It invites the question: Is that what we want to be about?

Cheasty: I'm left thinking about the differences for women and men. Women are viewed differently in collars, and even experience a sort of bullying—but we also know that collars open doors and allow us to do effective ministry. It's a challenge for us to move away from the "little lady"

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attitude toward women in the South. All clergy are subjected to a standard, but, in my experience, women are held to a higher standard and are challenged to be as gender-neutral as we can be, so as to focus on our ministry and not draw

attention to ourselves. I have a feeling the issue is a little different for men.

Božek: When we prepare our seminarians for ordination—male and female—I tell them: "We are not ordained for our own sake. We don't dress up for our own sake either. It's important that how we dress is customized to the needs of the people we serve. I serve a congregation that has been around for over 130 years, sixteen of which are after "excommunication," so the way I dress and preach at the church is different from how I dress and preach at our summer camp down by the river. It's extremely important that we be sensitive to the needs of our "audience." A fellow Missourian, Mark Twain, said, "The clothes make the man." In a way, they do—which is why our male and female seminarians receive black cassocks in an investiture ceremony. They wear them proudly, and I encourage them to get French cuffs and to look fancy twice a year, for Easter and Christmas. But today, we just finished six weeks of summer camp, and we're in an African-American neighborhood where 80% of the kids at camp are not

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Catholic and are not White, so I'll talk with them in a shirt and jeans. As I prepare our people to serve, I tell them to discover the customs and expectations of the people to whom they'll minister. In a way, we are not allowed to impose our preferences—our likes and dislikes—on the people to whom we're sent. I

work in a high-church setting, but I can also fit the guitar-and-kumbaya style of other churches. I don't minister for my own sake. I don't dress up for my own sake. What matters is that people see Christ—regardless of whether we're wearing a cassock, French cuffs or jeans. You can wear all kinds of jewelry and be Christ's witness, and you can wear jeans and be Christ's witness. That is what matters.

von Folmar: In the Independent Sacramental Movement, folks are obsessed with how they look. There are so many Independent Catholic discussion groups, where people say, "Look at how this person is dressed!" "Look at that vestment!" "Why is he wearing a pallium?" I have found that most people don't care. Most of the people who come through our doors accept without question what we wear. The ones who give us the biggest grief are those wearing collars and writing their blogs in other states, saying how unhappy they are with how we dress in our communities. We need to address that as a movement. In the meantime, I really love focusing on the "why" and on the context, on what these vestments mean, why we're wearing them, and whether they're appropriate for our churches, our

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communities, and the settings where we find ourselves. Let's focus less on what we're wearing and more on the fruit of our ministry. Your garb is not the fruit. To be blunt, there's a lot

of clericalism in the Independent Sacramental Movement.

We have a lot of people who really love the dress-up part, who think their garb is a sign of their importance, and that people must address them as “Father” or “Bishop.” As leaders in the movement, we must model the way. We’ll never get past the people who are LARPing [live-action role-playing]. There’s nothing I can do about that, and it doesn’t impact my ministry any more than what the Roman Catholics are doing down the street. I remind our seminarians, deacons and priests to focus on our mission and what we need to be doing, not on what we’re wearing.

Leary: What bothers me is the correct wearing of vestments. If you’re going to wear a miter, wear it correctly! Like Father Frank, I spent almost 35 years in law enforcement, and my uniform made the introduction and did the talking. We’re treated differently, based on how we’re dressed. When I get on a plane dressed in a jacket and tie, I’m treated differently than when I show up in flip-flops, cut-offs and a T-shirt. The uniform matters, which is why I wear an alb, stole and chasuble for mass, or a cassock with a surplice and stole for weddings. I say the “magic words,” and everybody is happy. The couple who can’t even remember the last time they went to church doesn’t care who’s standing there; they just need someone “official” enough to make it happen. When I look on social media, I understand why some people don’t take us seriously in the Independent Catholic movement. When I see the white gloves and the big, honkin’ rings, I wonder: “Who are you

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trying to impress?” That’s when we’re not taken seriously and are accused of playing dress-up. Those of us who love ministry and are Spirit-driven pay the penalty. Anyone can buy anything: As Father Frank will attest, people play “dress-up cop,” too—with lights and sirens! We need to think about how

people see us. The habit doesn’t make the monk, and the uniform doesn’t make the police officer. It’s about the person inside. When we enter into conversation with a

person and break down the barriers that were there, the collar doesn't mean as much to them as the non-judgmental, Spirit-driven person who is listening to them. Maybe we need to get into the habit—so to speak—of calling people out for how they dress: “Who are you? What are you trying to represent? Are you doing an injustice to other people who happen to see you? Are you Christocentric? If not, maybe it's time to stop dressing up on Facebook and find something else to do!” We have to be very careful: We're all ambassadors of Christ and of each other, and we need to be appropriately dressed for whatever we're doing, so that it doesn't detract from our ministry to people.

Bellino: We all come from different backgrounds and from different elements of Catholicism, Episcopalianism and Protestantism, but, if we represent Christ, it really doesn't matter what we wear. Let's all convey the same message: It's all about Jesus!

Furr: The Holy Spirit within us conveys Christ regardless of how we dress. I totally see the value of liturgical vestments, but I'm not into bling and competing for clerical stuff on eBay. I was a nun for 28 years, and I outgrew that early on. Wear what's comfortable. Don't focus on what you're wearing, but on the people you're serving!

Robison: It's about comfort and context, but I also say: If you're going to adopt a rite, stick with it, and adopt its complete logic. When we dress in half-Western, half-Eastern vestments, with a Coptic processional cross as a walking stick, that's when we're accused of “playing church”!

D'Arrigo: In our communion, I teach a course on how and why we vest. I teach the history behind the vestments. Karen's

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words challenge me to think about how Jesus told his disciples to dress: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals, but not an extra shirt” (Mk. 6:8-9). Jesus didn't give us a clear path on what we're supposed to wear as we spread

the Good News. It seems he's telling us to dress comfortably and to have faith in the Holy Spirit and in the communities we serve to clothe us the rest of the way. Father Marek is right: Our "audience"—our congregations—will dictate what we do or don't wear to serve them. We balance our congregations with the stirrings of the Holy Spirit and our role as the Vicars of Christ—and Jesus says, "Be comfy!"

Mathias: He also says: Focus on the inside of the cup (Mt. 23:26). I'm sure there's a lot that we might learn from scriptures in this respect.

von Folmar: Focus less on what you're wearing, and more on your ministry. Stop worrying about what other ministers are wearing, and focus on the needs of your community. We're not called to be the "liturgical police"!

Kemp: Serve the group you're with, and focus on their needs. As Father Marek said: It isn't about us. Also, vesting prayers are underrated: They call to mind the function of each vestment, and they're a nice way to prepare ourselves in that liminal space before the liturgy.

Božek: I love what's been said: that dressing up as a police officer doesn't make you a police officer—and dressing up as the pope doesn't make you the pope. We're not meant to "dress up and play church." Instead, let's be vicars of Christ, and radiate Christ!

Carter: I want to represent Christ, and I want people to approach me—and I obviously want to do that in a way that works for the people I'm trying to serve!

Mathias: When I was in the seminary some 25 years ago, I was very influenced by the theology of symbol. We recall that the English word "symbol" comes from the Greek word, *symbolon*, which means "elbow." In the same way that the elbow connects the upper arm to the lower arm, what we wear connects us and others to metaphysical realities. Let's be conscious of how the way in which we dress helps or hinders those we serve as we attempt to fulfill the ancient priestly role of connecting the people of God with the God we all serve!

## The Future of Independent Catholicism

*What is the future of the Independent Catholic movement? Where will the Independent Catholic movement be in 10, 20 or 50 years, and what do we need to do today to ensure the long-term success of the marvelous gift that we've been given? What is our vision for Independent Catholicism, and, "working backward," what do we need to do today to help realize that vision?*

Mathias: Some who were present for our last conversation later spoke of the need for us to think about our future—at the local level and as a movement. None of us is getting any younger. In fact, it seems many of us are getting greyer! So, how are we thinking about the future of our ministries and of our movement? Is there a way for us to rise above the local level and to think collectively about the future of our movement, so that we might work together and help to ensure the best possible future for all?

Cheasty: I think a lot about how we might move forward. We have no structure, and we're not a cohesive unit—which can be our strength, but is also our Achilles heel. We have a lot of

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bishops, many of whom are bishops only of their own living rooms. Other bishops lead larger Independent Catholic groups. Perhaps we need a council of bishops—or a council of clergy, since it's the clergy who are the motivating force in Independent Catholicism.

Mathias: How intriguing that, of all of us here, we have no bishops among us!

Cheasty: Maybe we need a council of laity as well. We need to focus on what we have in common, what draws us together as a unit, and not on that which separates us. It's great that we have all sorts of little churches and ministries in so

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many places, but how will we ensure our future? God forbid, if Father Jayme gets hit by a truck tomorrow, that would be a huge problem for Holy Family and for the Independent Catholic movement. We need to foster and enable healthy continuity! I also

think about the education of our children. As Father Jayme pointed out, our hair has gone from one color to another – or is gone! We’re missing the mark if we’re not training the next generation. Stanley Hauerwas noted that the Church is always one generation away from extinction. We need to tell our story and educate our children!

Božek: I could not agree with you more. The Council of Constance deposed three popes at once. One challenge of Independent Catholicism in this country is that we have

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too many bishops. As much as I respect many of them, it's ridiculous to think that we need hundreds or thousands of bishops! To exist, the Church doesn't need bishops. The Church doesn't even need clergy. When I was in the seminary in Poland, my first missionary assignment took

me to Ukraine for two months in 1994, where a newly-ordained priest and I reestablished parishes that existed prior to World War II. We thought we would be starting from scratch. We were not. The old *babushkas* baptized their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and taught them what Catholicism is all about. They thrived for 50 years without a single bishop or priest! So, we don't need hundreds of bishops to exist as a church. Two things need to be addressed if we are going to have a coherent Independent Catholic movement in this country: We need to have own "Council of Constance," and we need to educate our youngsters, the next generation.

Mathias: I was just saying earlier today in an email conversation with two priests that we need less bishops in our movement and more theologians!

D'Arrigo: I agree 100%. We have too many bishops and too little educational programming for children. I am reminded of St. John Chrysostom, who said that the road to hell is paved with bishops' skulls! As a "hive mind," it doesn't

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surprise me that we're in agreement, that we're coming from "the same place." The UN issued a report this week on climate change, stating that if we don't do something, we're

going to be screwed. I'm guessing that 85% of our ministries are one generation away from shutting down. In my jurisdiction, we're lucky: I'm the third-eldest member chronologically, and most of our folks are in their 20s and 30s, so they have a good 40 years of ministry in them. I'd like to think that, if we continue to recruit and bring in new people, we'll continue to grow—but there are no guarantees. I had a similar experience to Father Marek: In 1993, I was in Saint Petersburg with an organization called Student Vote, and we talked about basic democratic ideas in the newly-freed former Soviet Union. I didn't expect to see a large Catholic or Orthodox presence—but it was as if they had been hiding in the basements for 50 years: They were still worshiping without the help of clergy! When the clergy came, the people were like, "Great to see you! Let's get right back to it!" We are a unique group: We can agree on stuff and be good with the stuff we disagree on. What I have found in the ISM is that we can't come together

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around universal ISM ideas, programs, plans or councils. We need a basic Independent Catholicism 101 for kids. We need to create a basic catechism we can all agree on and universally teach in all parishes in the country. It would be beautiful to be more-or-less "on the same page"!

Cheasty: Are you willing to work with me to create it?

D'Arrigo: I would be. My experience in the Independent Anglican movement was "We're independent of you, and we don't want to become interdependent with you—so we'll never accept this thing that you're

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offering us for free, with no strings attached.” I’m interested in this—and my wife would be, too: She has tried for years to teach Independent Catholic catechism to kids at church. But there’s no easy blueprint. This “hive mind” could end up doing it—and still the ISM is filled with too many bishops who think that everyone else is doing it wrong. They are the only ones who can do it right. We can’t get discouraged when people react to what I think is good “Jesus work.”

Cheasty: We can’t let them keep us from moving forward. We can’t let them keep us from joining together into some council of

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That’s what it means  
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ISM clergy and laity. We can’t allow others to hold us back: There’s work to be done, and the clock is ticking! There will always be bishops who like to “play dress-up” and who don’t “play well with others.” God bless them. We’re trying to bring together a group of people. We’re trying to bring unity—or some semblance of unity—to these separate pieces. That’s what it means to be the Body of Christ: You may be the hand, I’m

the foot, and someone else is the earlobe. That’s okay. We all need to come together, with our differences, to form one body. We don’t have to throw out our independence, but instead we focus on what unites us, rather than what differentiates us!

Strong: As a bishop, I need to say: I’ve been in this movement for 30 years, and bishops are problems—but so are the priests who want to be independent, even when they’re in “communion”! We need to unite around our idea of ministry—which we don’t always agree on. I believe that parishes are the primary way we evangelize, grow and catechize people. We have plenty of proof among us—with Father Marek, Father Jayme and Father Lawman—that you can do effective ministry without a bishop. We need to gather the folks who are ready to move forward!

Cheasty: There's nothing we can do with those who aren't willing to move forward.

D'Arrigo: We can leave the door open and say, "Here it is—when you're ready."

Cheasty: There's a great prayer in *The Guerrillas of Grace*, titled "Pry Me Off Dead Center." We're at the point where we need to be pried off dead center. We need to be like the tornado or dust storm that comes in and blows away all the things that were standing!

Strong: Father Marek is right on target about reaching youth and young folks. It's key that we have a coherent way of evangelizing, an invitational—and not proselytizing—evangelization. In our jurisdiction, I'm talking about sustainability—not only in terms of money, but also in terms of leadership. That's why I appreciated our 2020 summer school. What are we doing to offer leadership opportunities to sustain people—not only for clergy, but also for lay people—to keep our movement going?

Cheasty: We can't marginalize the laity. They have to be included. We need to ask ourselves what steps we need to take, to move forward. Like church planting: How many of us know how to start church?

Strong: You're right about church planting. I took a course in church planting from the Center for Progressive Renewal, a United Church of Christ group. There are ways that we can do church planting, that fit our model. We need to claim that in our inclusive, sacramental way.

Robison: I'm attempting to do church planting, and it's really hard when no one knows what you are. If you say you're Old or Independent Catholic, people look at you funny. We also have very limited resources—in terms of money and educational materials. It's difficult to do church planting when you don't have the tools to water your plant, or the

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pot to put it in! Independent Catholicism is an incredibly coastal and urban phenomenon, with many inwardly-looking jurisdictions, so it's difficult for me to refer the people I meet to communities near them. If I meet

someone from Austin, I can tell them where to go, but, if I meet someone from the middle of Nebraska, I don't know what to tell them. We have a ton of bishops—all in the same places and all administering dioceses thousands of miles wide. A large part of our problem is that we have not

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deployed our episcopacy properly. Our bishops are all in the same place, and, when you put them in the same room, they fight! I belong to a jurisdiction that started when the Archbishop of Utrecht told the Episcopal Church to straighten out the situation of Independent Catholicism in the U.S. We've "spun our wheels" because we don't know how to talk about

being an institution. We're used to doing "our own thing." There's a lot of talk about individual priests "hanging out their shingle" and being entrepreneurial. I don't care for that language, and I don't believe that we're called to be small business owners. Instead, we should be about community organizing.

Božek: Both Utrecht and the Episcopal Church have tried more than once or thrice to convene a council of bishops—and every time it goes downhill. I wish good luck to anyone who attempts to do this. Trying to build a church from the top down has been tried more than once, and it fails every

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single time. Focusing on bishops and clergy is a recipe for disaster. As the saying goes, we can't do the same thing over and over again, and expect different results. It has to be bottom-up. As Bishop David says, we have to start at the parish level, with vibrant congregations that feed the people and offer Sunday school classes and visit hospitals. Then, once we have parish life at the most basic level, we need to let the lay people lead us in the organization process. We have failed more than once;

it's time to let lay people organize us! With all due respect to priests, building a church doesn't begin with building individual priests; it begins with building parish life at the most basic level. Let's not repeat the mistakes that Utrecht and the Episcopal Church have tried multiple times.

Carter: I'm reminded of the line from Yeat's "Second Coming": "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." I know a number of Independent Catholic priests who would make excellent bishops but are

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reluctant to serve in that role; on the other hand, some bishops are not suited for episcopal service or were insufficiently prepared. I am very optimistic about the future of our movement, but I'm also a very realistic person. Rather than say that we have too many bishops, I might say that we have too few parishes or too few ministries in need of

episcopal oversight, or that we have too many unprepared or improperly motivated bishops while excellent candidates remain priests. I don't think that the number of bishops is the problem. That said, I don't think that the ratio between bishops and those they serve is a good thing. We can be top-heavy in particular places and in particular groups—and I don't love that. I love what Father Marek says about working from the bottom up. If you have a parish or congregation of people, community is essential. I've noticed that there's a tendency for successful, thriving Independent Catholic or ISM churches to resemble Roman Catholic parishes, on a smaller scale, and that there's a tendency for working models to emerge from groups of people who have a prior connection to each other, often an ethnic connection or an intense local connection. They have an existing community. I'm in an unusual position: The church that ordained me no longer uses a diocesan model or structure; instead, we have some traditional church congregations, but we also have individual local ministries similar to what religious orders have historically offered. Some of our ministries are "beachheads" like mine, open

to growing but currently more of an outpost of Independent Catholicism than a typical, large-scale congregation. Theologically, we lean heavily on the idea that we each have a charism, we each have a charism that is different from the charism of the Episcopal Church or the Old Catholic Church. We are part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and our individual priests and their chartered ministries have individual charisms. Rather than force a parish structure on them, the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch allows them to serve people more effectively, in a more inspired way. Our Sophia Divinity School trains Antioch priests and others to discern their own spiritual gifts and develop their own ministry in a way that will make sense wherever they are. I'm in the perhaps unusual position of not being in a diocesan structure, or with a fixed location. My ministry is the Pilgrim Chapel of Contemplative Conscience. I serve individuals who desperately need me, whether they're in the chapel of a local hospital, or on the side of a trail, or in a vineyard for an outdoor eucharistic service. I'm not in a building that I own. I'm not in the same place week after week. I have promised to be open and to listen to and discern with the folks around me. Pre-COVID, I had people say, "I want a place to come regularly on a Sunday," so, until recently, I was hosting eucharistic services in a rented space where people could find me on a regular schedule. I'll do that again, if necessary, but I'm not trying to force that on people. I have a very small group of people looking for a traditional, large church community, and someone is constantly pulling on my sleeve for help outside of that structure. Down the road, I won't refuse to do it if this tiny community supports it and something as beautiful as Holy Family or St. Stanislaus emerges. I love Reverend Patrice's drive toward unity. I will attend the upcoming meeting of the Independent Catholic Bishops Forum as the ecumenical and interreligious affairs officer of the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch. I'm not a bishop, but I love going because they're doing what Patrice is talking about: they have expressed overlapping interests, and they're trying to maximize our togetherness, our options, the things we can agree on. They're trying to explore and push boundaries as much as possible, and see

where it breaks down and where we end up. I might worry about the survival of individual congregations, but I don't worry about the long-term survival of the Independent Catholic movement. We are and will always be part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church led by Jesus Christ, and even though we might disagree about what we might call our movement—the larger the group we get together, the more likely it is that we'll disagree about something—we are all legitimate, and we represent autocephalous churches that have the traditional markers of being Catholic: sacraments, apostolic succession, and the saints. We're fine with being autocephalous—self-headed. We don't want to become Episcopalians, which is what the Old Catholics would like for us to become, and we don't want to become Roman Catholics—unless the

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Roman Catholic Church changes more than a little bit. So, I'm happy with where we are, so long as we're moving in the direction of unity. I'm happy with the Independent Catholic Bishops Forum and similar groups that bring us together to

see where we can agree. I'm interested in formal agreements that might allow us to celebrate Mass together and to confidently send people back and forth.

Cheasty: We need to keep in mind that we're not competitors. We're part of the same movement, even if we do things a little differently.

Strong: One of the issues I have face is building a jurisdiction that was focused on church planting and evangelism. Everyone wants to specialize, and that's really wonderful, but we could do more with an established institution. We have to figure out how to build faith communities—even if they don't meet in a building at a certain hour each week. We need to create community with lay people. We need to create leadership and potential vocations. I don't want to

discredit or discount specialized ministries, but if we're going to think about communion or unity, we need to build faith communities. Some say it was different for Father Jayme or Father Marek, because they were Roman Catholic priests. There may be some truth to that. They are calling people into community – just as we're doing here. We need to be about community organizing!

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community organizing!*

Božek: I, too, would never want to discount individual and specialized ministries, but we do need to think about what our future will depend on. God willing, God will continue to call individual priests to individual ministries for the next thousands of years, but I'm not sure that we can count

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on growth from that. It's hard to grow a church with dedicated individual priests. Since our excommunication in 2005, we have grown our own local, "organic" vocations. This happens because we gather people at 9:00 a.m. every Sunday. We are consistent, and people can

come and ask themselves, "Is God calling me as well?" They can be part of RCIA or teach Sunday school. They can have a consistent religious experience, and our growth depends on that. I cannot employ all five of my priests full-time, so I encourage them to define individual, specialized ministries and to do church planting. The locus for the future is the community. Each one of us decided to become a priest because of our faith community – because of the church! We found God in the community! Communities lift up our vocations and build up the Church. In the Ukraine, the community survived without clergy for fifty-plus years. Our future lies in community, from which spring many wonderful, specialized ministries!

D'Arrigo: So many of us found our calling in our local community. That's 100% stupefyingly true for me. If it were not for the my church community in Atlanta in the early 2000s, there is no way on heaven or earth that I ever would have thought that the priesthood was a possibility for me. I was

raised a Sicilian Roman Catholic, and I played rock-and-roll music for a living for many years. But I was embraced by a church that saw past my sin, to who I was meant to be. They formed me for service at the altar and prepared me for ministry. I imagine that's true for many of us. Many of our clergy don't share that experience: of being lifted up as a leader in a congregation. Do those of us with that traditional background romanticize our own experience and how others come to the priesthood? For us, parochial life makes so much sense: Our parishes raised us up and chose us to lead. Our parishes helped pay for seminary and books. Part of the allure of the ISM for others is: "I feel a spiritual calling, I'm in my 30s, I've always been a good Christian, I have a good educational background, and I've encountered this bishop"—and now they're priests or bishops themselves! There's nothing wrong with that, but that may help to explain why we have such a hard time growing parishes in the ISM. If we don't come as individuals from leadership in parishes, we really don't know how to re-create something we never had. Parishes model the liturgical life in a place, for everyone around them—so that even people who are completely non-liturgical get used to seeing Father Ronny riding down the street on his bicycle, heading to Saint Joe's. I wonder if part of the disconnect in our movement is due to the fact that some of us come from a church community, a parish life, and a certain percentage of us don't. Some don't have that formation that's etched into our souls.

Carter: The Church is the *ekklesia*, the assembly, and we are promised that when we gather, Christ is present among us (Mt. 18:20). That's the Church! I was

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raised Roman Catholic and spent many years in parish life, and I probably would not have found the Independent Catholic movement appealing if it weren't for my own history. What Father Michael Angelo describes is true of me: I wasn't called within an existing parish, and yet I now find myself with this calling in this place. The Church has models for both: Early on, there were groups of firmly-planted believers, and other



apostles went out to form new communities. We are called to have that breadth!

Ellis: As Independent Catholics, we sometimes function more as traditional religious, than as parish priests. We're dispersed and doing all kinds of things. We are

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We are contemplatives in action,  
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wherever we are planted.*

contemplatives in action, doing what we do wherever we are planted. Those with the charism of church planting are planting churches. Others work in more contextualized ministries, with deep roots to what is going on in people's lives and in the streets and on the margins. Saint Paul tells us to be ambassadors for Christ (2Cor.

5:20). I experience the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America as an output of the kingdom of God, and I think of all of us as manning "embassies." We are decidedly in the majority, by design if not by commission, and there's nothing wrong with that. It's a different charism that the Lord has entrusted us, and there is value for us remaining and doing what we do, perennially small and seemingly insignificant, like the mustard seed (Mt. 17:20, Lk. 17:5-6, Mt. 13:31-32, Mk. 4:30-32, Lk. 13:18-19). It might be nice to go into a huge church with a secretary, but I'm surfing a huge wave of grace in my life and I have no complaints!

Robison: We have to recognize that churches can also be obstacles to vocations. I was lifted up by people who didn't necessarily come from parish experiences. In fact, a lot of church people said, "We don't think you'll fit in here." One priest told me flat-out: "We don't want you in the ordination process, because none of us wants you as a colleague."

Marsh: Funnily enough, I was told that by the Episcopal Church, too.

Robison: "You may have a vocation to the priesthood – but none of us wants you doing that around here!" It stung at the time, but I also believe there's a reason why I am where I am now. My most active ministry is in a place where I was told that there would never be a need for ministry. It's not parochial, and I don't have the skill set to be a church

planter. I've tried planting a church, but there's no guidance for it—other than books written by evangelical types. It's easier for me to exist as a member of the clergy in a situation where I believe I was always supposed to have been. Presbyterian and Episcopal churches focus on parochial ministry as the only “real” ministry, so I was never given the tools to express where I'm supposed to be. It was through a book that led me to the realization: These are my people, and I am their minister in an out-of-the-box situation. It would be nice, though, to have a local parish community on a Sunday.

D'Arrigo: Thank you, Father, John, for being extremely honest with us. I have known those bishops and those priests, and I have watched the Episcopal Church do that to a number of really good friends. There's a guy in our church with three master's degrees—an M.Div. and degrees in library science and Christian history—but they won't ordain him because he doesn't have the personality that they think would work in a parish setting. He's really intelligent. Your ministry, Father John, as a chaplain at sci fi conventions, is incredible. Nowhere is the presence of Christ needed more than on a Saturday night at 3:00 a.m. between the two main

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hotels of Dragon Con, when a girl who didn't realize she was in someone else's room and is trying to find her way back to her room, sees you with a collar and says, “Father help!” Everything about your ministry is 100% legitimate! The thing that I have learned in my years of ministry, both in parish settings with

huge budgets and in parishes with negative budgets, is that my timing is never on time with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has an entirely separate plan that, for whatever reason, the Spirit refuses to completely explain to any of us! It could be that you'll be at a local convention when a group of folks comes to you and you'll find out that five of them live within 20 minutes of you, and that they all want to get together and worship on Sunday mornings, and that one is a web designer, and that another owns a bunch of properties, and another has a trust fund with unlimited

ability to help a church. I may be exaggerating, but I can't tell you how many times I've watched churches come to be as a result of a couple of people meeting in a living room for bible study, and all of a sudden they're renting the old Big Lots, and then they're buying an old UCC church. The Holy Spirit has a plan. The Holy Spirit has you and is utilizing you—and all of us. We simply need to trust that it will eventually become clear. What you do as a priest, Father John, is 100% "Priest of the Year." It's awesome and completely legit, and it's so extremely necessary to the people who simply see your presence in that place. It could change somebody's decision between life and death!

Marsh: Communities are often built from small groups of people with gifts. Like pyramids, they're built from the bottom-up. I was overlooked by the Episcopal Church, which had me "spinning my wheels" on a hamster track, but I was lucky enough to be considered by an Independent Catholic community. And it's an amazing journey! Where God plants you is where you need to grow!

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Bozek: We have been observing for the last 10 or 15 years how Catholicism is dying in Western Europe. The Episcopalians in the U.S. are dying as well. There is no question that they got many things right—but they also got some things wrong. Perhaps we can learn from their positive examples and not repeat the same mistakes. We can learn from established structures—and we can also learn what not to do.

Robison: Large, mainline mega-denominations will soon start shaking themselves apart. There are so many forces pulling within them. Episcopal and United Methodist churches are living on borrowed time. We need to be ready when people, individually and collectively, come to us for the Word of Life and the Sacraments. As Father Marek says, we need to avoid repeating their mistakes. We're going to make our own mistakes, but we need to keep going forward, helping people find their new homes.

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Marsh: I would love to see us as a more unified movement, but, as Father Marek points out, we've tried it several times and haven't exactly gotten it right. We'll need to try a new approach. Trying the same things and expecting different results is just not going to work.

Ellis: I think the Holy Spirit is creating mischief. And I am excited at the prospect of that!

D'Arrigo: I am surely enjoying where the Holy Spirit is leading. I encourage us to "stay in the now"!

Carter: The Holy Spirit is alive in the Independent Catholic movement and will continue to express Herself through all of us doing what we do!

## The Role of Independent Catholic Bishops

*Because the Independent Catholic movement includes a number of bishops who have been consecrated without an abundance of formation and education, the role of bishops within our movement has not always been clear, and a number of validly-consecrated bishops might even be likened to “sheepless shepherds.” In this conversation, we discuss the role of the bishop in Independent Catholicism.*

Mathias: Let’s reflect on the role of bishops in Independent Catholicism. Some of us come from traditions where the role of the bishop is more clearly defined—and where we more easily understand the role of the bishop in those traditions. I was trained by the Roman Church, which possesses a theology of the episcopate and its threefold *munus* or office of governing, teaching and sanctifying God’s people. Its theology often emphasizes the role of the bishop as the *episkopos*, the “overseer,” of the local community. In contrast with the Independent Catholic tradition, which has no standards or expectations for its bishops, the Roman Church even has a “finishing school” in Rome, which is required for all its bishops-elect! Let’s kick off our conversation with Archbishop Alan Kemp, who edited and published the book, *On Being a Bishop*.

Kemp: I published the work of Bishop Robert Burns, who was ordained by Herman Adrian Spruit. It’s a delightful book that takes some of the authority out of traditional notions of the episcopate, and puts humanity into the office of bishop. He says, in essence, that a bishop should be a teacher, a pastor, a liberator and a facilitator. There’s nothing in there about being an “overseer,” or of telling people what to do. In the early Church, the bishop was the pastor of a local community, not of a large jurisdiction—as bishops are in the Roman Church today. In the early days, every local, Christian church had a bishop, and, according to Bishop Burns, the bishop was a teacher, pastor, liberator and facilitator.

Lynch: It’s sometimes difficult to approach the subject of bishops. There are very few Independent Catholics who are born into our movement, and many of us come from previous denominations, so we come with perspectives that are

driven by our experiences in other denominations. I come from the Episcopal Church, where I had an extremely negative experience with a bishop: I served on the Executive

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Council, and I questioned the propriety of the church loaning the bishop \$650,000 to help finance his million-dollar home. I felt it was not an appropriate use of church funds. After that, he became very adversarial, and, unsurprisingly, it certainly killed any chance I ever had to be ordained in the Episcopal

Church. Because of that experience, you might think that I would be totally down on bishops. I am not. My bishop in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion is Armando Leyva, and I can't say enough good things about him. He's been very supportive of me, my wife, Deacon Sharon, and our community. He has been out here several times and is always a delightful individual—very dedicated to the work of building the kingdom. It's important that we not "tar and feather" all bishops based on our negative experiences in other denominations. When bishops first came into being, they served local congregations. Then they started ordaining presbyters for nearby communities, since they couldn't be everywhere at the same time. We do well to consider the history of the episcopate and its functions—not whether a denomination has "too many bishops." It's also important to approach the issue with charity. We can say that an individual shouldn't be a bishop because no one elected them or because they are the bishop only of their own apartment. It's not productive to criticize or judge their situation. It's more appropriate to help them. It's important that we err on the side of charity and helping people, rather than criticizing or judging them.

Nicosia: In the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), our Constitution honors the ancient practice of the Church by allowing for the calling of a bishop in any region with at least three communities. In this way, our bishops actually know their flock, and it minimizes the risk of having a bishop without a flock. We don't have a "finishing school" for bishops in the ECC—but we are very fortunate to have

ecumenical partners here in Colorado. As a way to deepen our ecumenical relationship, Bishop Jim Gonia of the Rocky Mountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church has graciously offered an office space in their synod office for our newly-elected bishop, Kae Madden, though she has never used it due to the pandemic. If she does so after the pandemic, she'll enjoy some mentoring from another bishop—at least from the Lutheran perspective. That collaboration is a blessing for us.

Leary: In my 60-plus years of dealing with churches, I'm not aware of any "finishing schools" for bishops—nor have I seen the

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byproduct of such "schools." I figured that the bishops that I've had the misfortune of dealing with simply followed the examples they knew. They often continued to stumble and to get their hands get slapped. They didn't learn. Perhaps such "finishing schools" are a deep, dark secret, and you have to be part of the "club" to know about them! When I was confirmed in the sixth grade, I remember the bishop

saying, "To hell with the red roses! Where is the Four Roses [whiskey]?" His nickname was "Money," and he showed up in a limousine. I have two pet peeves of bishops. If you're going to be a bishop, please learn how to correctly wear your miter: Don't push it to the back of your head! And if you're going to wear gloves, with a big, honking ring outside the glove, remember that, after six o'clock at night, the gloves need to come up to your elbows, so that you're properly attired!

D'Arrigo: I'm not a bishop, but I advise our bishops in the Convergent Christian Communion, so I have a unique perspective. Many of our jurisdictions likely have a blurb on bishops. This is our official blurb: "The bishops of the Church are collectively called the episcopacy. Although evident in the earliest forms of the Church, the role of bishop has evolved as the Church has grown and matured. This growth and maturity resulted in the unique sacramental role of the bishop being the successor of the apostles. A bishop is an overseer of the flock

and, as such, is called to propagate, to teach and to uphold and defend the faith and order of the Church willingly, and, as God leads, bishops are consecrated for the whole Church and as successors of the apostles, through the grace of the Holy Spirit given to them. They are chief missionaries and chief pastors, guardians and teachers of doctrine, and administrators of godly discipline and governance.” That’s in our crafty prayer book!

Hash: In reality, the bishop who consecrates another bishop is responsible for the “finishing” of that bishop. It would be

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awesome if we could go off to Hawaii for “finishing school,” but that doesn’t happen in the Independent world. Many groups are fast to make bishops, but not fast to train them. It’s a downfall of many jurisdictions. There are also some amazingly-trained bishops. In my 27 years with the Independent Movement, I’ve met bishops who have no clue of what it

means to be a bishop, or how to ordain, or how to wear a miter. My other favorite pet peeve is when bishops wear everything: cassock, alb, stole, dalmatic, chasuble, cope, miter, gloves and crozier—because you should die of heatstroke when you’re a bishop! Don Pratt was just consecrated a bishop in March, and we still have a lot to teach him. Eventually, we’ll have him ordain someone. It’s up to me to make sure that he knows what he’s doing. Bishop Carl has been consecrated for a year longer than me, so he can help. We also have friends out there, so I can say, “Don, go hang out with that bishop for a while!” It’s a group effort, a family effort!

Noble: When I was a Franciscan novice, my novice mistress said I’d never make it, even to sacristan. She said, “Maybe you’ll end up as a sister porter—but you’ll never hold office.” It was a humbling experience—and now I’m our presiding bishop! I wouldn’t give up those eight years in a contemplative Franciscan community, though, because those eight years taught me about the importance of religious decorum. My



priests say, "You don't want Mother Doreen to dope-slap you." I raised three teenage boys, so I have the experience of handling things by dope-slapping, and there are times as a bishop when I say, "I'm not going to put up with this B.S." I try to establish my own "measuring stick" by talking to other bishops. One of my mentors, Bishop William Cavins, is here, and I often call him or Bishop Jim Sherlock for advice. Being a bishop is definitely a hard way to walk, and it's definitely not my choice. I'm glad my deacon once pushed my miter forward a little bit—I was vain, and I wanted my curls to stick out—so now I know how to properly wear my miter! Because I use the title "Most Reverend Mother," I try to be a mother to my flock. I always ask, "What would a mother do in this situation?" I conclude with the words of Pope Francis, who told his bishops that they should "smell like their sheep." That's very

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important to me. We need to "smell like our sheep." We need to be there with the "sheep," moving with them and guiding and herding them along. And when a "sheep" needs a

kick in the pants, we need to be willing to do it without necessarily being an "overseer."

Kemp: In my jurisdiction, we don't have dioceses. We have ordinariates, which are based on the personal charisms of our bishops. We like our bishops to be "servants of the servants of God," not "overseers" or people telling others what to do. We often say that the key is apostolic succession:

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passing on apostolic succession from generation to generation. I like to focus instead on "apostolic success." We ought to be like the drone bee that impregnates the queen, and then dies. We need to get out of the way! Give people the freedom to be what they need to be. Be a supporter, a mentor, a

teacher, a pastor. Support the people who are doing the work. Like Mother Doreen says: We want to "smell like the

flock"! The Independent Movement and our parishes are too small to emphasize pomp and circumstance, with pointy hats and jewel-encrusted slippers—which is why I much prefer apostolic success to apostolic succession. I'm not concerned with how many ordinations you've performed, or where you come from, or what your lineage is. We all get our lineage from Christ. In the Independent Movement, many people emphasize our independence and suffer from "imposter syndrome." They feel the need to prove their authenticity to others, particularly to those in big churches. I see the Independent Movement as the new early Church, the new primitive Church. We get down to the basics and not take ourselves too seriously. I don't mean to criticize anybody—as the Holy Father says, "Who am I to judge?"—but a lot of ego gets involved, a lot of people like to "play the role" of bishop, and so many times small groups and jurisdictions start nitpicking and arguing over the stupidest things.

Lynch: Too often we see ourselves as competitors. We are all laborers in the Lord's vineyard! We all have a common purpose of spreading the good news and building up the kingdom of God. That should go before politics and finances. Fundamentally, we're here to bring the good news to people, and to take care of people. I tend to be critical of other people's liturgies. It's one of my faults. I need to temper that by reminding myself that we are all servants of God's people. We're not here to aggrandize ourselves. We are here

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to serve others, that "all may be one" (Jn. 17:21). We should never lose sight of the fact that we are all part of one Church, that our chief pastor is Jesus, and that we're all here to serve Jesus!

D'Arrigo: Everybody's liturgical form is different, but we are all corporate members of the Body of Christ. You may be the pinky toe or the big toe, or the thumb, or the left nostril, or the eyebrow—but we're all part of the same body! I'm reminded of a bishop who wanted to join our community many years ago: He wore a wall crucifix as a pectoral cross that had no business hanging around his neck! Things like that—or layers of vestments—genuinely drive me crazy. We

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Božek: From a New Testament perspective, Paul established congregations, and, before he left town, he selected leaders for each congregation. Paul and the people laid hands on and prayed for these leaders. The congregation came before the leader. In Old Catholic history, Utrecht existed for years without bishops, and it took them a while to find a courageous bishop to consecrate a new bishop. During that interregnum, the Church continued to exist and grow in the Dutch Republic. The churches of the former Soviet Union survived for decades without any priest or bishop whatsoever. Which came first: the chicken or the egg? Does the Church define and call the bishop, or does the bishop define and call his or her church? We lose our theological

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Kemp: You raise an incredibly embarrassing question for the Independent Movement!

Luft: The larger question regards our theological heritage, our theological understanding of the sacrament of Orders, and the threefold ministry. Unfortunately, in the Independent Catholic world, we have folks who have created a completely new tradition altogether. It begs the question: Theologically, do we remain Catholic? If so, what kind of catholicity do we hang on to? If you can create anything you want in the Independent Catholic movement, what does that say about the governance of other churches? The considerations are twofold: ecclesial and pastoral. Having a

local ordinary is important in terms of growing a community and helping establish identity. Our small parish here in Dallas-Fort Worth has been around for several years. We get hundreds of people who say, “We didn’t know you exist!

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The problem starts at the top, as well as at the bottom. Ordinaries can’t simply be administrators; they need to be accountable to a body or council that includes lay representatives. Bishops must always be in balance, in check, both sacramentally and spiritually, with the people

who are affected by their ministry. It comes down to our theological heritage: How do we remain true to the identity that we choose for ourselves? For us, formation is a really big deal. Formation rounds off our ego and “growing edges” and helps us grow in humility. Without formation, how can we be prepared to deal with others on any level?

Kemp: In my estimation, my mentor and friend, Archbishop Richard Gundry from Santa Fe, New Mexico, is one of the

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most kind, generous, warm, loving people on the planet. I often see people in our movement trying to reproduce Rome or Canterbury or Utrecht—but I wonder what’s happening to those big jurisdictions, and how many people are not in their pews anymore. Do we look to them for a model of what we’re trying to create? Personally, I struggle with that.

Nicosia: Over the past year, because I was a candidate for our local election, I’ve given a lot of thought to the role of the bishop. It’s important to identify that a primary role of the bishop is the preservation of the tradition—which means that we need to know what that tradition is. The Spirit gifts us and empowers us for ministry—but consecration does not mean that a bishop knows everything. There’s a dimension of

being “in the flock” and listening to the Spirit moving within the community that is essential for authentic leadership. When I was in the Roman Catholic tradition, I was very uncomfortable with the thought of a college of bishops who

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knew everything. They lost the sense of the Church's teaching magisterium being comprised not only of bishops, but also of theologians. With that in mind, I encouraged our council of bishops in the ECC to form a theological advisory board, to help us engage these questions and to help us listen

to how the Spirit is moving within the communities today. Going back to ego, none of us has all the answers. We have to have an open heart, a listening ear, and holy conversation, to discern how the Spirit is moving among us.

D'Arrigo: It seems we're definitely “on the same page” here, which is encouraging—but it also makes it difficult to gauge what's going on in the broader ISM.

Hash: I'm not a perfect bishop by any means, nor is our jurisdiction perfect, but we've always allowed clergy to hang out with us, to see if they fit in. If they don't fit in, we try to get them to a place where they might fit. It's gratifying to see that Michelangelo, who first looked at us, has found a place where he truly fits. That's pretty awesome!

Buffone: I'm very happy with the Ecumenical Catholic Communion and our episcopal council and with the bishops who are part of our communion. We'll soon have our third female bishop, and I'm over the top with that. There have always been so many men in our movement, and I understand that—and it's time for women to catch up! What I have found to be really precious in our communion is that, as each region forms itself into an organized diocese, the people and clergy come together to talk about what they want in a bishop. They hear all voices, they wordsmith those documents line-by-line, praying over them. We might look to the documents of other traditions as a guideline, but I challenge us to put together something for ourselves. I'm a cradle Catholic, so I am proud to hear that our bishops are different from what we've

experienced in the Roman Catholic Church. I want to thank all bishops in our movement for their presence and witness and for all the good work they're doing for their flocks!

Kemp: I really like the idea of a "hive mind." The more we "buzz around" and talk with one another, the more we become self-organizing in a non-institutional, non-bureaucratic way that doesn't imitate other religious organizations. We don't have

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an Independent Catholic organization that everyone belongs to. We're not coded with the "hive mind" of bees. Rather, we fall into the "original sin" of wanting to be our own gods: We want to do our own thing and be our own people! One of our

greatest sins is our excessive individualism. I've been an Independent Catholic for more than 25 years, and I've never seen this level of people talking to one another from different jurisdictions and learning from one another. We won't always agree—but let's not create bureaucratic institutions that reproduce the rigid bureaucracies that we've seen.

Ellis: We want to be gentle with ourselves as well. Through this conversation, we put ourselves under the microscope—and that is a sign of psychospiritual maturity and of grace. I'm not sure that other institutions are doing that with such readiness, certainly not in the Roman Catholic Church, which has been pulled, kicking and screaming, to accountability. In the ISM, we fulfill a different niche of ministry, a ministry on the margins, and that has value. When we decided to follow Jesus in this way, we stepped aboard a "moving train," and we don't look back to the institutions of which we were part. That's not what the Spirit is about. That's not our mandate. We follow Jesus in this way, and we have yet to realize, "Oh, the places you'll go!"

Lynch: I enjoy the works of Eastern Orthodox scholar John Zizioulas, who speaks of the episcopate and the relationship between bishops and the Church. One of his books is called *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, and another is *Being As Communion*. In the east, bishops function as brothers – unfortunately they don't have any sister bishops yet – and they get together to resolve weighty questions. Our Independent Catholic

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jurisdictions tend to have synods for a single jurisdiction. Perhaps we might think about a pan-ISM synod of multiple jurisdictions, so that we can get to know one another, cross-pollinate with an

empowered laity, and deal with important theological and ecclesiological questions. The Eastern Orthodox don't do well at empowering women. I commend my own community, the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, for now having three female bishops. The episcopate is extremely important as a vehicle for empowering women. Women bring unique and precious gifts to ordained ministry, and it's important that we promote female bishops!

Strong: I've been a bishop for more than 25 years, and I shouldn't have been consecrated a bishop when I was – so I've spent most of my time growing into the role. I studied how bishops govern and lead differently than in the Roman model I came from. I focus on relationship and staying connected to our clergy. I have found that those who run to us saying, "Your Excellency! Your Grace!" are often the first to call us, "You, S.O.B." when we don't do what they want us to do! I preach on that book, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, and I see my primary

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role as a bishop as leading people in communion with each other in Christ. I wear a miter three times a year, and I focus on relationships!

Pratt: I came here fraught with anxiety. So often, bishops come together and talk about wanting to build community—and soon they begin talking about hierarchy and councils and canons, or they find themselves divided on issues like women clergy and gay priests. Those who aren't part of these conversations may have very different views. There's a tremendous amount of diversity in our movement. I've seen jurisdictions where every parish has a bishop. I've had jurisdictions tell me, "Come, join us, and you'll be a bishop before the month's end!" In New York City, we used to have

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monthly dinners for ISM clergy, to get to know one another. We built relationships—and that's perhaps the most important role of the bishop!

Leary: When Christ started the Church, he grabbed twelve people from different backgrounds and places. He mentored them and shared the Holy Spirit with them. How did we go so

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wrong after Nicaea, with all the pomp and circumstance surrounding bishops? It seems we need to remove all those complications and ask ourselves about the intent of the early Church—and we need to go back to the idea of bishops building relationships with priest and lay people!

Bellino: I've been under two bishops, who were "night and day." We call ourselves Independent Catholics, and none of us wants to give up our independence. I like that Father Jayme brands us as "Extraordinary Catholics." We're not ordinary Catholics—and that expresses itself in our views on bishops, too!

Kemp: I've been having conversations with other bishops lately, and it strikes me that Jesus practiced open-table fellowship. Everybody was welcomed at the table! Jesus didn't have any rules about going to confession before attending mass and receiving communion. He didn't have an emphasis on rules, and he was often criticized by the religious authorities of his day for breaking rules. I wonder: If Jesus were alive today,



would he subscribe to our creeds? What would he think of our councils? Let's get back to basics. Jesus wasn't into bureaucracy, or rules about communion. Jesus was about love. Jesus was about the kingdom of God. Jesus was about

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relationship. Sometimes I think to myself, "F\*ck the goddamn rules! Let's get real. Let's be about love. Let's do more good than harm. Let's have a good relationship with God and with our fellow human beings!

D'Arrigo: We need to remove the empire from our imperial religion.

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At the end of the day, we should be about the "Three R's": reconciliation, restoration and redemption. We should be about relationship over religion. I wonder: How are we bringing the kingdom of heaven here—because that's ultimately our job. And if we're not, then we're all just wasting time!

Božek: In the space of the past 2,000 years, the titles and the models of how church functions have changed, and they will continue to change and evolve. So, whether we see ourselves as feudal lords and lieges, or as servants of the servants of

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God, what is important is relationship. I'm not a bishop, but I'm imagining the defining relationship for any bishop is his or her relationship with God and his or her people!

Noble: I second Father David Justin's idea about getting together as a synod. We don't need something so formal; we just need opportunities to get together and learn from one another—and to build relationships with one another, so that we're not afraid to tell one another when we screw up!

Luft: The episcopal office should always be pastoral. That certainly drives what I do in Fort Worth. We need to look for continuity and build something not for today, but for tomorrow—something that outlasts us. And we need to be

as authentic as we can be. In the ISM, the folks who make things go or stop are at the episcopal level, so we need more conversations between ecclesial heads—especially with

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those who are more problematic—  
and find ways to be in communion  
with one another, without being so  
close that we have to endorse  
everything that one another says!

Lynch: The primary role of any bishop is to be a pastor to the clergy. Credibility, integrity and compassion are important!

Leary: Women had an important role in the early Church, which

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Marsh: I'm just a seminarian, but you all give me a lot to think about with respect to the importance of building and maintaining relationships!

Hash: I've been in this movement for 25 years, and, the more I'm a bishop, the more I realize that everything is about externals: the outfits, the building, and so many other externals. Instead, we need to boil it down to God's love, and bringing God's love to people. I love being a bishop, and I try to focus on the internal part of my ministry!

Pratt: One word: Relationships. Being a bishop is all about relationships!

Nicosia: And the Church is holy conversation!

Buffone: This past Sunday, Catholic Women Preach shared a homily

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heritage, or if we recreate and

grow and learn and build on the riches of our heritage. Again, I want to thank all bishops for your work in the Independent Catholic Movement. I would have liked to have heard from those priests who don't belong to Independent Catholic jurisdictions: Does that make you less Catholic?

Goddard: I ground my ministry as a bishop in the tremendous depth of unity in diversity. We recognize and acknowledge that all people are God's beloved!

Strong: These conversations are a blessing to me and to the call I have received as a bishop. Let's build relationships and live out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in our communities!

Carter: I want to say thank you to all bishops: You make it possible for us to be who we are, and we are profoundly grateful. You provide a layer of unity beyond our parishes and local communities that we would not otherwise have. Thank you!

Mathias: I, too, thank God for the bishops in our tradition. They allow us to share the sacraments of the Church in a way that is unassailable by our friends in other traditions. Here in Austin, we have enjoyed independence from any jurisdiction for nearly three years, and we have enjoyed getting to meet a number of bishops who have come and shared the

<p><i>Many of us who pastor larger parishes see ourselves as the "overseers" of our communities. We may not have a pointy hat or a fancy title, but we certainly see ourselves as part of that ancient tradition of local, catholic communities that worship &amp; join together with others.</i></p>	<p>sacraments of the Church with us. Many of us who pastor larger parishes see ourselves as the "overseers" of our communities. We may not have a pointy hat or a fancy title, but we certainly see ourselves as part of that ancient tradition of local, catholic communities that worship and join together with others—just as we are for these conversations!</p>
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## Overcoming Patriarchy in Independent Catholicism

*Many Independent Catholic clergy and laity come from the Roman Catholic tradition, which possesses an entirely patriarchal culture. How well is Independent Catholicism including women in ministry and leadership roles? In what ways does Independent Catholicism fail to realize Jesus' "discipleship of equals"? What obstacles remain to sacramental justice and the full inclusion of women in our movement, and what might we do to help dismantle these barriers?*

Mathias: We acknowledge that women are underrepresented in the Independent Catholic Movement. Three times more men than women joined us for our virtual happy hour last week. As is the case in many churches, women have not occupied the same spaces and enjoyed the same opportunities as men. What can we do to better empower our sisters in ministry? What can we do to show that we really are living into the inclusive vision of Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus?

Furr: My book club just finished reading *White Fragility*, an excellent book. Like racism and other systemic issues, patriarchy is embedded in our social and economic systems.

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It's the result of 10,000 years of structures that have defined us. The question becomes: How do we change the entire structure upon which Independent Catholicism rests? Patriarchy is part of the root system of our social, political and religious structures. It's not something that can be fixed by a single conversation on patriarchy.

There is no simple conversation on how to root out patriarchy from Independent Catholicism. Entire volumes could be written on the various aspects of patriarchy, and still we would only be getting to the root of it. All of us are influenced by patriarchy in some way—and in ways we aren't even conscious of. Our awareness of it has the potential to trigger a retreat back into what's safe, or a yearning to step into the possibilities. If we truly addressed patriarchy, we could be incredible, radical, countercultural

change agents! We can't simply address patriarchy in our documents; we have to examine the root system that permeates the entire "forest" of our social interactions.

Plemmons: Women have been so carefully edited out of our own Christian history that we speak only of the "Fathers of the Church." How marvelous it would be to find more Greek writings on the Mothers of the Church—and to know how deep and true those roots are!

Furr: And it goes back beyond Greece: Aristotle had no use for women at all. Patriarchy evolved over centuries, and the dismantling of patriarchy will be centuries in the making.

Cheasty: I recently listened to an interview of Margaret Mary O'Connor, a woman priest who spoke of Mary, the mother of Christ, as the first woman priest. We've lost sight of the radicalism of the ministry of women. As the Church evolved, the societal norms of patriarchy took over, and the radical innovations of the early Church were lost by the institutionalization of ministry. Rev. Dr. Gayle Felton, a United Methodist pastor and an amazing woman, spoke of

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words that hurt and words that heal. The language we use hurts us. Look at our prayers and the heavy emphasis on God as "Father." Our prayers are riddled with patriarchal assumptions! Often we don't even think about it until we deal with people who have been very hurt by the patriarchy. Women who have been abused by fathers or

husbands have difficulty relating to a heavy, masculine identity of God. Based on their personal experience, they can't wrap their heads around this talk of God as "Father." We might begin by looking at the language of the prayers we use! Because we use words to form our thoughts, ideas and images, we might use more inclusive or gender-neutral terminology. It starts with the little things, the things that are instilled in the minds of children. They'll grow up with

images of God and images of the place and role of women in the Church. We could be prodding and poking and encouraging change toward more inclusivity!

Furr: I totally agree. I've worked with domestic violence survivors for years, and I can't

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count how many times I've had that same conversation with women who can't relate to God because their father abused them. They associate "father" with abuse, not love, and the language of our prayers continues that abuse, rather than frees them from it.

Cheasty: I'm thinking about the doxology, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him, all creatures here below. Praise Him above, you heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost." How do we change that triune language? How do we lead people to the mystery of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer?

Furr: Think of the "orientation" of God in our hymns and songs. We think of God as "up," and we start thinking of people as "up" or "down." When do we sing about the God within, the Holy Spirit within us? That's the feminine aspect of God! We are the womb of the Creative Spirit!

Cheasty: The word *ruach* [Spirit] is feminine—but we don't seem to get our heads around that!

Furr: I was a Franciscan nun for 28 years, and we once had an artist and dancer who provided an extraordinary, transformative experience at one of our assemblies. She told the story of Abraham and Isaac from the perspective of Sarah, who, according to some serious theologians, might have been a priestess in a goddess tradition. Instead of imagining that God intervened and told Abraham, "Do not touch this child," imagine Sarah intervening. She was in tune with what was happening—and a mother would never consign her child to death simply to prove "allegiance"! She intuited what Abraham was going to do, and she intervened and said, "You will not touch this child!" What

system would ever suggest that a loving God would place people in that position of having to kill others out of obedience? That experience shifted how I relate to the Source of All Being, leading me to see that God is beyond gender and the gender assignments we've given God. On the one hand, we say, "Our Father who art in heaven," and, on the other hand, we recognize that gender is a recent evolutionary process and that God is so much greater than

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gender. Our scriptures reinforce that patriarchal notion of God. How do I relate to that patriarchal image—as a woman, as a human being, or as Earth creating Herself as a human being? How do each of us relate to God within evolving constructs where deity is not based on patriarchal writings?

Plemmons: For a while now, we've had a wealth of queer theology.

We're now starting to have a body of trans theology, and our discussions are breaking open the "boxes" people have tried to put God in. Some of the things I've written break open a few "boxes" with respect to Jesus and genetics. The theology is absolutely there, and I encourage us to play in it!

Hayes: As a seminarian, I wonder how far we should go in changing prayers and scriptures to be more inclusive.

Božek: You hit the nail on the head. I agree with everything I've heard, but there's a point where our academic conversation alienates our parishioners. If I were to begin every prayer "Dear Mother/Father," I would alienate most of my members. So, I choose to say, "Loving God" or "Almighty God." I choose gender-neutral words, rather than invent language that might seem awkward or that might alienate people. My grandmother taught me to pray in Polish. The Polish word for God is *Bóg*, but every grandma teaches her grandchild to pray with infant versions of the word—so my grandma taught me to pray to *Bozia*, a feminine word! For the first six years of my life, I was convinced that I was praying to a female God. You can imagine my surprise in

first-grade religion, when the priest told us to “pray to Him.” “Him?” I said. “Father, you are wrong: My grandma told me that we pray to *Bozia*,” which is clearly a feminine word. Not all languages are as patriarchal as English. We use feminine words like *ruach* and *el Shaddai*. Even Wisdom, in other languages, is feminine. English is blessed—or cursed—by not having gender “boxes” for words. I’m a big proponent of a “bottom-up” ecclesiology, where we tell

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girls from a young age, “You can be a priest. You can do these things—because we are all made in God’s image!” From a young age, they need to see that women can served as priests just as effectively as men. When a girl in a First Communion class is told that she can one day be a priest, the seed is planted for her to

be a priest! We need to start with our children: That’s where vocations happen! When did you start thinking about being a minister? Most of us were empowered as children to dream about what we would one day be. Sunday school is the time and place for us to tell our children: “Yes, you can be that minister. You can be that teacher. You can be that priest or deacon. You can be that bishop or pope!”

Lynch: I first received my call to the priesthood from my grandmother: When I was eight years old, she told me that I would become a priest one day—a dream that I realized at age 63. We don’t change texts in our community. We use the liturgy and the scriptures as they are presented to us. We

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respect the dignity of the prayer writers and the translators. If there is some aspect of the Divinity that you feel needs to be addressed, compose new prayers or create a new translation of scripture, and,

if we think it has merit, we will use it. I’m a composer, and I don’t want people changing my work! Respect the



intellectual and artistic dignity of the author. We need to be judged more by what we do, than by what we say. In the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, we have three women bishops and a number of women priests and deacons. My wife is a vocational deacon. One way to address the issue of patriarchy is to ordain women and give them positions of power!

Krawczyk: My whole career has been in non-traditional work environments. I worked for the Department of Defense for many years, in labor management relations and negotiating contracts. I find that there's no difference: In all parts of society, women are not treated the same as men. The Department of Defense operated within a patriarchal structure. Independent Catholicism operates within a patriarchal structure. These structure place a burden on women. When I was in the U.S. Army in the 1970s, I served as the only woman officer on my staff. I recall how the

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Criminal Investigation Division didn't know how to deal with one issue—because there were no women on it. I was in the room when staff members started making fun of rape. I lost it. Like Khrushchev, I took off my shoe and

banged it on the table. I said, "This is not right—and this is not something to joke about." Words are great, but it takes more than words. We need to integrate women into all professions. We need to model inclusivity. In my services, I use the term "Mother, Father, Creator"—because God does not have gender—and I watch people react to that phrase. Some people will never change the way they think or feel. A patriarchal system is engrained in our society. I saw it in the Army in the 1970s, and I see it with the treatment of women today. I'm admittedly a pessimist regarding the integration and equality of women. I even hear women state that we should not be where we are!

Hanser: Words are important to me. I grew up in a very traditional Roman Catholic family. I have three sisters—and all of us were supposed to be boys. My dad was very disappointed after each birth. We grew up feeling not good enough for our dad, and it took me a long time to get over that. Only

once did I hear my dad say he was proud of me, but here I am, a deacon. I am very grateful that I was called by my community to be a deacon.

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Patriarchal language sometimes leaves me speechless, and I continue to be shocked by some of the things people say. The Independent Catholic Movement is one of the greatest-kept secrets: If more women knew about it, perhaps they'd make the move toward answering the call!

Cheasty: Language is important. Words provide visuals and frame our understanding. As a United Methodist pastor, I saw how the hierarchy dealt with women, and how congregations received female pastors. Many years ago, it was pretty rough. There was no receptivity at all. As women, we had to prove ourselves over and over again—where men didn't have to. Women walked into congregations with big "checkmarks" against them, simply because they were women. That didn't translate to men. As clergy, we're probably 20 years behind other professions, in terms of acceptance, and Reverend Andrea is absolutely right: There are women who make it miserable for other

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women who are trying to change the narrative. Father David Justin is also right: When children see women in the pulpit or leading the congregations, they have a sense of what's possible. I came from a house filled with professional women, and we were told what we could be teachers or secretaries or nuns. Or we could get married, stay home and raise babies.

Those were the options. The Church reflects societal beliefs in its dealings with women. How many men do you see in

churches preparing brunches or funeral lunches? We fall into traditional roles. I was in a bit of a pickle: I grew up Catholic, but I didn't feel that being a nun was the way to answer the call that I felt very strongly about. I've had to win over congregations in ways that men have not. I've had doors slammed in my face. And all I can say is: "If you have a problem with my gender, take it up with God, not me!" It's an issue. It's a real issue. The Church has villainized Mary Magdalene, turning her into a whore. Countless other women in the Bible did all sorts of things and went unnamed. In so many ways, they're looked upon as "less than." We talk about the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; how often do we talk about the matriarchs: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Deborah and all those strong, courageous women? We conveniently guide our narrative according to societal norms and expectations that are not consistent with the teachings of Jesus. As a Church, we're trying to catch up to society, rather than be ahead of society.

Furr: The very question of how we're "including" or "empowering" women in ministry is patriarchal. It shows how unconscious we are of the patriarchy in our system. Would we similarly ask, "How well are we welcoming men as priests?" When we hear that "women can be priests, just like men," do we recognize the roots of patriarchy in such

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comments? Can you imagine being fed the line that "Men can be priests, just like women"? Some jurisdictions exclude women from the clerical state. Others welcome women—but within the framework of patriarchy. Most often, we're unconscious of the ways in which we reference the masculine in our thinking or how we reference women's

roles. The way that we think about Church is through a framework of maleness and male preference and of "allowing" women to be equal. In patriarchy, there is no

equality. Even if the same roles exist in patriarchy, there will always be “one up, one down.” That’s the nature of patriarchy! We need to reframe our questions: Are we evolving in our understanding of Church? Are we fostering and nurturing the capacity to understand Church from a non-patriarchal model? Or are we simply attempting to create new definitions while clinging to the patriarchal model itself? And all this is within the larger context of moving through the 21st century and formulating how we want to be in our communities and on our planet.

Mathias: How might we better frame the question of how to achieve that “discipleship of equals” that Jesus seemingly esteemed and that Paul articulated in his vision of Galatians 3:28?

Furr: Paul was nowhere near non-patriarchal! Good Lord! We need to learn a whole new way of languaging. As Andrea pointed out, women are as embedded in patriarchy as men are. This isn’t “a guy thing.” We begin by realizing that everything we do and say and think is rooted in patriarchy. We can pat ourselves on the back and say, “We’re doing well” —which I really believe we are—but we’re never going to emerge from a patriarchal structure until we absolutely understand what that structure has done to us. Patriarchy is like racism: We’ll never cure racism until we really understand how systemic and all-pervasive it is. Once we understand how pervasive it is, we can choose how to move beyond it without recreating within the context that we’re coming out of. One concrete example of

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patriarchy is the levels of leadership in Independent Catholicism. That is not a feminine model. Hierarchy is a very masculine, patriarchal model. As nuns, we had assemblies to rewrite our constitution and our rules over four years. We tried every possible model to feminize our religious

community. We sent it off to Rome, and they came back saying, “You have to redo this!” Rome could not approve anything not rooted in a masculine model. Our inclusive leadership could only be inclusive to a point, after which it had to fit the masculine, patriarchal model. That’s the same

thing that leadership in whatever religion is trying to do. In Independent Catholicism, we talk about being equal—but only to a point. Our patriarchal structures limit us. Will we ever be able to evolve beyond those structures? Will we move beyond the “one up, one down” categories of the title “Father” for men, and “Reverend” for women? Will we ever refer to the Father, the Mother, the Source of All Being, the Creator of All in new ways—as the Holy Spirit who resides in us? Even the term “Almighty God” is masculine! We can begin with changes in our daily lives, but, until the Independent Sacramental Movement exists outside of the patriarchal structures in which we live, breathe and have our being, it will be a patriarchal structure where women feel the tension at some level, regardless of how egalitarian we believe we are.

Kemp: I see some hope in our patterns of communication. It’s not just about the words we choose. Male relationships tend to be about power, whereas female relationships tend to be about relationships. The 21st century will likely look more like the internet, which is very egalitarian. It’s based on networks of communication, not hierarchical patterns where people “on high” give information to others. We need to quit using old models. If we’re going to have a new Church, and if we’re going to have a different way of relating to each other, we’ve got to learn from the environment we’re in, which is based more on networks and relationships. Moving the needle is not as simple as “add women and stir.” As a Church, we’ll need to unlearn corporate models and power structures. We’ll have to get back to relationships, which is where women have the

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genius. Long ago, in feminism, they said, “Women don’t do things in ‘boxes.’” That’s a guy thing. Women do things in circles. For women, it’s all about being in relationship with everybody else in the circle.

Božek: I wonder whether we can escape hierarchical systems in our lifetime. As a Church, we face hierarchy and patriarchy. We have “Reverends,” “Very Reverends” and “Most Reverends.” We have a military-style hierarchy, where the women generals are still generals! I enjoyed Andrea’s witness about the military: There are more women in the military today, than in the 1970s – but the system is still the same. The structure remains unchanged, even if it is more inclusive of women. How might we transform or deconstruct hierarchical structures? Independent Catholicism has been failing in this country for the last 150 years – and we are badly failing souls. Perhaps, if we had women trying to do Independent Catholicism, we would not be where we are today! Words matter, which is why we changed our parish marriage applications in 2015 to contain “Spouse 1” and “Spouse 2,” rather than “husband” and “wife.” When I preach, I try to inclusive and non-heteronormative language. And while we respect the

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Furr: Women who serve in the military are a prime example of how women have been co-opted into a patriarchal system. By its very nature, warfare is a patriarchal structure. Don’t get me wrong: I honor military women – but they are part of a system that oppresses some. If I have the power to tell you what to do, without your usual discernment, that’s patriarchy! We saw it in religious life: The mother superior spoke, and we replied, “God said it. I believe it. That settles it.” That’s patriarchy – and, as women, we easily step into and operate within those patriarchal models. There’s no room for mutual discernment at the table of patriarchy!

Božek: What examples might exist of non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical structures?

Furr: When I was asked to be the pastor of our faith community, after a lot of prayer I said, "I will be the sacramental minister—but I will not run the parish." We had all sorts of former Roman Catholics in our community, and they came to me with all kinds of questions. "What napkins should we have with our doughnuts?" "Where do you want us to put the chairs?" I replied, "I'm the sacramental minister. This is *your* parish." It took a couple of years for people to get used to the idea that we are all in this circle together. If you look at the structure of our community, I'm not the decision-maker on parish things, and this has empowered our community members. I have not

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empowered them; that's patriarchal non-sense. In my community, we all pray the words of consecration together. How oppressive: that some people don't have permission to say certain words! For us, it's a community proclamation and an invitation. Change starts within us, with us rooting out the ways in which we're being patriarchal.

Božek: What I hear you saying is that we don't have an example, but that we have to create it ourselves.

Furr: Live it. That's what Jesus did. Do the inner work. Ask, "Where am I being patriarchal?"

Božek: It sounds like a great way to awaken lay ownership! For two years, St. Stanislaus had no clergy. The laity decided everything: which napkins to use, which hymns to sing, which scriptures to proclaim. If you really want to "empower" your people, go on vacation for a year—and they will be awakened!

Furr: Another way to say it is that they are empowered. I'm the one who has to change, to recognize that. I cannot "empower" someone else. All I can do is recognize their own innate power. From day one, as a way of recognizing the power of all, we changed the prayer, "Lord, I am not

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made us worthy to receive you, and, by your word, we are  
healed!" That shift opened a door, a window, a heart space  
where transformation can happen.

Kemp: In most of the communities in my jurisdiction, before  
COVID, we gathered in a circle, and everybody said the  
prayer of consecration—and we don't do that horrible  
contrition. I can't even imagine doing that!

Bellino: I was raised by military parents, so I grew up working right  
alongside women. I've served seven sheriffs, two of whom  
were women. I've worked with people of different sexual  
preferences, and that didn't matter as long as they could do  
the job. As a supervisor, I focused on people doing their  
jobs. I feel it should be the same in the Church. I'm just a  
parish priest, but if a woman says to me, "I'd like to try my  
hand as a lector," I want her to! Or, if she says, "I want to  
become a deacon," I'll present her to my bishop. We have  
women in positions of authority in our parish: as president  
and secretary and treasurer. We're trying to change our  
culture. In the 1950s, women stayed home and made babies  
and cooked in the kitchen. It's 2021, and we're still fighting  
that battle, and we've got a long way to go before we get  
where we need to be!

Hayes: We've improved with respect to equality and women in  
vocational ministries. My formation director is a woman  
archbishop—which says something. I know several women  
who are bishops and priests, all fulfilling their vocation  
within a hierarchical society we can't escape. Let's continue  
being inclusive, thinking "outside the box," and becoming  
more "circular" in our language and in our inclusivity,  
showing all that the Independent Sacramental Movement is  
a great place to be!



Carter: Decades ago, I read the works of Dr. Riane Eisler, who distinguishes between dominator models and partnership models, showing how both have unfolded in history. I come from a church that had an actual matriarch running it: a patriarch, then a matriarch, then a presiding bishop. Julie Byrne's book about our church, *The Other Catholics*, shows a woman being ordained on the front cover; the second paragraph speaks of the amazing gains we've made in that area. Yet I don't want to pat myself—or our church, or the Independent Catholic Movement—on the back, because we're "not there yet." We have way more work to do. Our

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former matriarch once commented: "If first-century Palestine had been a matriarchal, instead of a patriarchal, society, God would surely have sent Her Daughter! In the Roman Catholic

Church, John Paul I said in 1978 that God is our Father, but, even more, God is our Mother. We have all sorts of great examples within our tradition to inspire us. Jesus was unusually close to women. The Spirit is overtly feminine in some languages and descriptions. Wisdom is feminine. Let's grab that 'low-hanging fruit' from our own tradition when we need to subvert patriarchy.

Mathias: I've long thought of myself as an ally in this fight, but this conversation has given me a lot to think and pray about. When you're swimming in the water, you don't see the water. I so greatly appreciate all of you for helping us to reflect on the "water" in which we find ourselves!

Krawczyk: There's no single answer. There's no easy fix. It will take time to resolve the many issues connected to patriarchy. I see how my own presiding bishop, Bishop Doreen, is treated by some men. I see how she is treated differently than our male bishops. That tells me there's a long road ahead.

Furr: We are who we are—and we can celebrate that!

## The Sacramental Justice of Independent Catholicism

*In many places, Independent Catholicism manifests an inclusive spirit and shares the sacraments of the Church with those excluded by some churches and some societies: women, married persons, divorced persons, and LGBTQIA+ persons. In this conversation, we explore the foundations for this sacramental justice and examine how truly inclusive Independent Catholicism is.*

Mathias: In our conversation on patriarchy, we recognized that for many, many years a large part of the Church was excluded by the Church: the gifts of our sisters in ministry! We also know of other groups of people who have been excluded by the Church throughout the ages based on their race, their marital status, or their self-identity. Fortunately, in many corners of the Independent Catholic world, we manifest a more inclusive spirit. We try to embody sacramental justice! What are some of the foundations upon which we base this sacramental justice? How truly inclusive are we as a movement? What persons might feel most excluded by or within our movement? And in what concrete ways might we better manifest our inclusive spirit to the world?

Yell: From a historical perspective, the average age of the people to whom we minister might fall into one of two groups, each requiring a different approach. The members of one group—largely the younger one—are largely unchurched. They have experienced rejection. They’ve heard stories of how dreadful Christian churches are doing. They are already inclusive. They don’t need us to tell them anything. They believe we have nothing to offer them. They don’t need Jesus, and they don’t need the Church—until they really do. They have other things to do on Sunday and on Monday through Saturday. The older group has experienced church in one way or another but hasn’t found a faith community to sustain them. Many of them have given up on it completely. So, I see two different questions here. One about reconciliation and mission and we tell people, “I know what you’ve heard. But that’s not true of us,” while at the same time reaching out to the unchurched groups who really couldn’t care less. Their life is very nice, and they are already very inclusive. I fear we are rediscovering what it means to proclaim “Churchianity” —

which is some sort of adapted Christianity—to these groups. Too often, our egos get involved. We get hung up

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on the belief that the Holy Spirit needs us—while I have the sneaking suspicion that She has it all organized. We think, “My Church is shrinking.” “My ministry is failing.” What the vast majority of both the previous groups want, I suspect, more likely resembles the style of

Jesus’ ministry: Meet people where they are and when they are!

Newman: Those individuals for whom Jesus is not a necessity and for

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whom religion is not a value: They are okay with where they are, leaving us asking ourselves why we would expend energy to reach out to them. Why would we want to spend effort and energy on those who don’t need what we offer?

Lynch: Our sacramental justice is based on the ministry of Jesus himself. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus didn’t practice the exclusivity that came to characterize many so-called “Christian” churches. On Sunday, I preached on the “unauthorized” exorcism in Mark 9:38-41. Jesus doesn’t really care who does it; he only cares that it gets done. That’s implicit in sacramental justice! We find another theological foundation in the Beatitudes, which posit a positive orientation, rather than a “thou shalt not” command. Like the argument over who is the greatest, in

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the previous Sunday’s gospel (Mk. 9:33-37), we sometimes get all bound up in power and influence. Our Independent Catholic inclusivity and sacramental justice vary from place to place. The ordination of women and LGBT persons is widespread in our movement, but not a given everywhere. In my experience, the

trans community has the toughest time, since so many people don't understand transsexualism. I fall back on the idea that Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves—and I don't have to understand people in order to love them. The key to better manifesting our inclusive spirit might lie in our baptismal covenant. In my community, we use the baptismal covenant from the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. I have an Anglican background, so, though I left the Episcopal Church in 2013, I like the "promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons...respecting the dignity of every human being." That's why we have to be inclusive. I accept women as bishops, priests and deacons. For me, that's not open to further debate and discussion any more than women lawyers, women doctors and women dentists. We accept downtrodden groups, those who have faced invidious discrimination, and that goes a long way toward normalizing our inclusivity.

D'Arrigo: In the Convergent Christian Communion, we recently picked up an entire gaggle of Eastern Connexion Catholics, who come to us from Orthodox Catholicism in the Independent Sacramental Movement. In their tradition, clergy change their names and have an Orthodox title and name, which is foreign to 70% of our communion. Upon hearing that our presiding bishop took a connexion name, John Gregory, many reacted: "We're becoming an Orthodox Church! What's happening to our Communion?" They didn't realize that we are simply broadening our horizons and opening more opportunities and allowing the Holy Spirit to meet more people where they are. One of our priests, Father Kevin, suggests that Affirming Christianity is a stream of Christianity, in the same way that Evangelical, Charismatic and Pentecostal are streams of Christianity. We have a long history of Affirmation in Catholicism. In the

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1990s, John Boswell published a wonderful book called *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*, which shared same-sex marriage rites from the 900s, 1000s and 1100s. Most of us in the ISM have a pretty good grasp of the "clobber" words, and we can speak to the social context of the

Bible. If we look at affirmation theology as a genuine stream of our faith, that really opens up the conversation! That affirmation isn't just about LGBTQIA+ folks, which is a big focus now. Affirmation theology includes female ordination. I came into the ISM with the really stupid belief that everyone in the ISM is affirming across the board: of women, of gays, and of everything in between. Now that I'm in the Promised Land, I see that there are a number of ISM churches that still don't ordain women or that don't truly affirm LGBTQIA+ persons. There are folks who have no theological understanding of transgender or intersex issues. We need to see Affirmation as a stream within the traditional Catholic faith, focused on social justice.

Božek: I ask: How do we include and affirm those who are of different minds than we are? Most Independent Catholic communities were created by us, by the leaders and pastors who create our churches and congregations in our own image and likeness. If the pastor is progressive, the congregation is progressive, and if the pastor is more conservative, the congregation is more conservative. There's a unified vision and mission within the congregation. Fifteen years ago, I came into a parish community that existed for over a century. I couldn't create my congregation in my likeness. Instead, I came into a very politically- and culturally-diverse parish. As we have journeyed together and become more inclusive on all of

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these bullet-point issues, my very serious question and challenge has become: How do I make sure that people who disagree with me still feel included? During the last five years, my challenge has been: How do I include the MAGA [Make America Great Again] crowd? How do I include people who have very strong political convictions that are different from my own? It's easy to be "inclusive" when everyone

agrees with me; it's much more challenging when there are people who strongly disagree with me! As we become more affirming, as we ordain and consecrate women as deacons, priests and bishops, as we celebrate same-sex marriages, how do we include those who disagree with that vision? How do we make sure that we don't become another super-progressive denomination that loses the other "wing," the other "lung" of the Church? How do we keep being a movement that includes both "wings" or both "lungs"?

D'Arrigo: I thoroughly relate to that question. In 2013, when I left the final version of the Anglican Communion that I was involved with, the Anglican Province in America (APA), six families from the church followed me, not because they agreed with me politically, by any stretch of the imagination, but because of how I teach the scriptures. These folks were dynamically MAGA. In 2013, they wouldn't have invited gay people to dinner, out of fear that the "gay agenda" might rub off on them! Yet we were offering them something, and they were fed in a way they weren't at their APA parish. One couple in their mid-60s was conservative to the core, but they said, "No one has ever contextually taught us what the Bible says—and you do. At the end of the day, we can disagree with you, but we know that you're honest about what the Word actually says. No one's ever done that!" Soon afterward, Charles died, no longer being particularly homophobic. That was a victory. Connie now has lunch with Braden and Andrew once a month, and they cook her dinner, and they go out dancing. She's now friends with a bunch of gay people—and she believes that they're going to join her in heaven! During my midday meditation today, I was reflecting on how we are called to love our enemies and our "frenemies," how we're called to show Jesus' love to those who literally say, "you're an abomination," how we're called to be like Jesus, meeting people where they are. I live in rural Georgia, and I try to

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love everybody where they're at. I remind them that, when it comes to women's ordination, it's really simple: Who was the first person to teach you about the Bible? Was it your dad or your mom? I'll bet that

your first Sunday school teacher was a woman. The people who have taught me the most about God are women! Why are we denying them the priesthood? Paul wrote letters, directly addressing women and not men alone in those churches. Why was that? Showing Jesus' love to folks who disagree with us is, in fact, our greatest job. We help people realize that the intersex guy who chromosomally is not male or female, was born that way and isn't an abomination. God made them that way for a reason, and there's scripture to back it up. Women and LGBTQIA+ folks have blessings that straight, cis men don't have. They transform and become new creations in Christ in ways that others can't imagine. In that rebirth, transgender Christians transform the most: They're literally the butterfly effect!

Cheasty: As a female clergy, particularly at a time when there weren't as many of us as there are now, I've found that simply visiting and breaking bread with people breaks down barriers. We all have the same feelings—even if in different ways, at different times, and in different places. We fear. We love. We cry. We sing for joy. We get frustrated. We love our friends. We want to wring some necks. Rather than focus on the differences we have, we focus on what we hold in common: our humanity. Connecting with someone else's humanity is the basis for our ministry and for friendship. I play old-time, a new genre of folk music, with ultra-conservative, MAGA people—and I've never had an argument with any of them. We focus on what we hold in common. We focus on our music. We focus on our community of incredibly wonderful people. They joke that I'm their "token liberal," we set our politics aside, and we decide whether we're playing in the key of D or G. Focus on what we have in common, not on what separates us. We need to get out of the judging business. We're not called to that. We're called to see people for who they, to see their humanity, and to see what binds us together.

Božek: If we "preach to the choir," we are not changing anyone's mind. If everyone who listens to me is already "on the same page," we're not improving the situation. The only chance of that is when we talk to people who disagree with us!

Yell: This conversation on sacramental justice really hinges on our definition of “sacrament.” Many sacramental traditions define three or seven or twelve sacraments. Historically, the definition of the sacrament has been the one given by the Church. For the past 10 to 15 years, I have viewed sacraments as *minimal* examples of how God interacts with the world. They are starting points, not end-points. They are a process, from baptism, to what used to be called extreme unction. The sacraments are minimal guarantees of God’s engagement with the world. Before I was ordained, I worked with a Roman Catholic priest who referred to holy days of obligation as “holy days of opportunity.” In a similar way, we might need to redefine sacraments in the Independent Catholic tradition. Our understanding of “justice” also comes into our redefinition of sacramental justice in terms of access.

Carter: I don’t initially see the necessity for redefining the sacraments in a specific way. In traditional churches, the streams that many of us came from, sacraments make the invisible visible—and the invisible is Divinity! We operate with the hope that, since God became human, we, as humans, possess that divine image and likeness and that potential for becoming more divine. That’s what we want to make visible to other people! The question of how we might help those who disagree with us likely bridges to the question of how we can help the “nones” and younger people who feel that we don’t have anything to offer them. We need to share what we do have: the love of Christ in a tradition that says, “We honor your individual human conscience as an expression of the Divine—and we love you, even when we disagree with you!” We honor that tradition within Christianity that emphasizes those who have been marginalized, those who have been excluded, those who are not receiving sacramental justice. If we point out and live that ideal—where our focus as Christians ought to be—people will see and respond to that. The idea of inclusivity is solidly within our traditions, even the



traditions of our more conservative brothers and sisters. We see the prophetic stream of scripture, and we see the table

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fellowship and the inclusive example of Jesus, so we have no problem justifying the source of our obsession with extending sacramental justice and making the invisible God visible for everyone! Are we inclusive enough? Yes and no. We're far more inclusive than many people to whom we're

compared. We pretty much tolerate everything but intolerance! We are wonderfully inclusive, and we deserve to pat ourselves on the back for that. I also recognize that I am a White, straight, cis male. I have certain privilege, so I need to listen during these conversations as much as possible. When I do listen, I hear—especially from my sisters in the movement, but also from all people who aren't as privileged as I am—that, even without being aware of it, folks like me often accidentally overstep. We marginalize. We assume. We don't live up to the ideals of inclusivity.

Buffone: I appreciate that definition of "sacrament": that the sacraments make visible God's divinity through humanity. In 2016, our Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC) hosted a synod in Texas where we discussed clericalism. I was part of a panel of five women: three priests, a deacon and a lay woman. The conversation was called "A Circle of Voices Rising." Many of our ECC priests and many of the male priests within the Independent Sacramental Movement

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were ordained in other faith traditions. They have a "chip" in their mind concerning the way we operate as church. Women have not had the privilege of incardination. Our conversation continues on what it's like to be a woman in the Independent Sacramental Movement. Sacramental justice is not just about ordination. It's about

everything else that happens, even after ordination. In the ECC, we found that men were always called “Father,” while women clergy were referred to without the title of “Mother” or “Reverend.” Not all our women clergy were invited to co-preside or preach when visiting our parishes. These are never questioned if you’re a male priest: If you’re a man, you presume you’ll be invite to preach or concelebrate. Some of our sister priests were not welcomed to preside at certain parishes. In our closed ECC Facebook page, some of the men were recently complaining that they were getting phone calls from potential parishioners who, once they discovered that we are Independent Catholic, challenged our priests: “You’re not real Catholics!” Women responded, “At least you get the phone call.” When we, as women, advertise ourselves as pastors of our communities, we rarely get the phone call. That’s privilege: when men get that phone call because they are associated with the Catholic priesthood. When people see “Reverend Rosa Buffone,” they automatically assume I’m an Episcopalian. When I visited the Vatican, I was given a discount because they thought I was an Episcopalian. I corrected them: “*Io sono cattolica. Non sono episcopaliana*” [I’m Catholic, not Episcopalian]. That blew their mind. So many times we are reminded that we don’t possess privilege, even within our circle. We face it all the time—to the point that we have a women’s support group, where we can say, “Can you believe what he just said?!” I’m sorry to say: Guys don’t see it. They have a different lens, one shared by many parishioners, who see through the same lens. Sure, people want women priests. They want to see women ordained—but they also want a male serving as pastor of the community. They want someone who will receive the phone calls that women rarely get. It’s still a struggle for women in the Independent Sacramental Movement, especially with so many former Roman Catholic priests in the mix. So, please don’t take offense when we hold up the mirror and say, “Did you see what just happened here?” I give thanks for my bishop, our founding bishop, Peter Hickman, and for our current presiding bishop, Francis Krebs: As many times as they put their foot in their mouth, when I hold up the mirror, they are so humble and grateful and appreciative. I love and respect them for that. We all

need to work harder on sacramental justice—not just leading up to the day of ordination, but thereafter.

Krawczyk: Before I came to the Catholic priesthood, I was a minister with a spiritualist church. As a woman minister, I found the same issues, though not as severe as now, as a woman Catholic priest. Most religious organizations are imbued with the mindset of our patriarchal society. I don't have a parish; my ministry is spiritual warfare. I do exorcisms, and I deal with hauntings. Most of the people I deal with are not Christian, so I see it as an opportunity to bring to them the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. As a result, I've had people ask me to baptize their children. I really believe it's about going beyond the human person, to the spirit of that person, and seeing the Divinity within. Whether we're Christian or not, whether we're Catholic or not, when we recognize the Divinity in others and surround them with the love of Christ, that's when we become totally inclusive!

Ellis: Really, Catholicism is a way of being Christian, and the thing that unites us is the Eucharist, where we feel most comforted and challenged. Michael Angelo's stories—on being “living sermons”—and Patrice's words about talking to and breaking bread with people: that's Word and Sacrament! Those are the two jet engines that propel the Church through history!

Yell: If I had the opportunity, I'd ask everyone I meet two questions: What are the “sacraments” that you've received in your life? That is, when and with whom have you experienced the presence of God-made-manifest? Secondly, when have you been a minister of God's “sacraments” in the world? God's sacramental action is incredibly active all the time, everywhere. When we start affirming everyone as a minister of God's sacraments in the world—to their neighbors, friends, parents and siblings—we form a language around what it means to come together and create the sacraments out of our lived experience of being sacramental people by nature of our humanity!

Hayes: That begins with us looking at everybody as Christ!

D'Arrigo: Thank you, Reverend Rosa. In my intersex "bubble," I sometimes forget the privilege that is attached to being a big, bushy, bearded guy who is seen as a straight, cis, married male. You nailed my issue to the wall: Sacramental justice does not stop at ordination. I don't think about the phone calls I receive. I don't think about the fact that I'm not asked, "Are your sacraments really sacraments?" I'm really humbled by the mirror that you hold up for us, and I'm appreciative of that. I have this extremely foolish notion that

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the eucharist is the great communizer, the thing that makes us all equal when we receive the Body and Blood. As we learned in the seminary: Ideally, that's true – yet it's not true. It doesn't ring out in real

life like that. Women in the ISM: You are seen. You are heard. Keep reminding us, because we're inherently stupid creatures who live in our own bubbles and quickly forget!

Buffone: "I once was blind, but now I see!" What Marek said – how we create our parishes in our own likeness – is true of my parish. We are very inclusive: I have a Jewish woman, a Methodist, a member of the United Church of Christ. We are male and female, homeless and very affluent, LGBTQ – but, as Patrice says, we go to the common ground we share. Our theology is all about divinity: It's about Christ within and without. The whole world is a sacramental experience – the altar in the world! As pastor, I equip the ten to twelve people of my small parish, so that when they go out to do Christ's work, they'll have the strength and the courage to be sustained from Monday through Sunday. And when they come back, I'll raise them up again, so that we can all go out and do that work again. People have dropped in who don't like my likeness, so they go and find someone else. That's okay. The people who are meant to be with me and with us, they come, and they find us.

Božek: Our inclusion also has to include racial justice. All of us in this conversation look very pale. Our parish was built in a neighborhood that, in the 1880s, was very German and Polish. Today, it's 99% African-American, and we're getting more children and teenagers, thanks to Mother Annie's

youth ministry. As a result, we're in the process of reflecting their faces in our sacred art, which is all White. All our angels are White. All our statues are white. The people in our stained-glass windows are White. The boys and girls who come from our neighborhood don't see themselves in our church. So, we're repainting some of our angels with other skin tones, to reflect our neighborhood. We might do well to have a future conversation on how we participate in racial inclusion and justice!

Cheasty: I personally relate to Reverend Rosa's experiences as a female clergy—both by clergy and by laity. We're all influenced by prejudices and biases, by the good, the bad and the ugly of our communities. We come together—with our biases, experiences and ideas—and we accept the challenges that are put forth. We all come to and fit at the one table. We're looking deeper than the surface, which is a good and holy thing. We put a smile on our faces, and we try, even if we don't always succeed!

Carter: Father Marek, I love what you're doing to increase the visual representation for those you serve! Reverend Rosa, you so very graciously forgive us and say, "We once were blind, but now we see." As we know from scripture, there are sometimes some transitional stages to getting our full vision back. People look like walking trees (Mk. 8:24), and we don't see as clearly as we probably should. Followers of Christ knew that they hadn't arrived, but that they were followers of the Way. Presuming we don't magically receive Gnostic enlightenment, we're all on the way as long as we're alive. I'm inspired and challenged by these conversations. Though I sometimes beat myself up for getting lost and waylaid, I'm still on my way toward that destination!

Mathias: I certainly live with the tension of finding myself torn between the real and the ideal: We possess a vision of the ideal, of how we might bring greater justice to our world. It lies on the horizon, seemingly so far off, yet we recognize that we're on the journey, and every step brings us closer to that goal. I appreciate being on the journey with you all, and I look forward to seeing where the Spirit will continue to lead!

## Unity versus Independence

*Centripetal and centrifugal forces are at work in the Independent Catholic Movement: Some desire that we build bridges and work toward greater unity, while others greatly treasure the tremendous diversity and independence inherent in our movement. The United States esteems similar polar ideals of independence and unity (E pluribus unum). What does it mean to be both Independent and part of a Catholic tradition that is much larger than any of us and our communities? In what ways might we better manifest our unity while not sacrificing our independence? Are there points or considerations around which Independent Catholics might coalesce, or even unite, despite our great diversity?*

Mathias: As participants in a diverse movement, we feel a certain tension: Like the early Church, we want to self-identify with others in our *synodos*, our “walking-together,” but many of us also capture a certain desire for independence in the name we give ourselves: Independent Catholics. How do we balance the centripetal desire to walk together with the centrifugal desire of the many “Lone Rangers” in our tradition?

Buffone: I’d love to hear from those who lead Independent communities. Our parish, Holy Spirit Catholic Community, is part of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. I’ve attended three Intentional Eucharistic Community (IEC) gatherings during the past twelve years, and my experience is that, even though we’re part of the same Independent Catholic movement, they prize their independence and want nothing to do with organized jurisdictions like ours. I’ve felt like an outsider, very shunned by IECs and not welcomed in their small-group discussions. For those of you who are independent of jurisdictions, what do you love about being independent? Is there anything that you have against jurisdictions or against the idea of joining a jurisdiction?

Mathias: For six and a half years, our parish, Holy Family, self-identified with a jurisdiction. As a former Roman Catholic priest of more than ten years, I sometimes joke that my progressive spirit found itself in a “bad marriage” with the conservative and less-than-pastoral Roman Catholic bishop

imposed on our diocese by Papa Ratzinger. When we joined the Independent Catholic movement, Holy Family found itself in an equally unhappy “marriage”: We were the only parish ministry in the jurisdiction, and there was no force outside our parish community trying to bring clergy together during six years. We found ourselves in a situation where our four priests and two deacons had little community and no network of support within the jurisdiction. We had an eye-opening experience in 2018, when one of our priests celebrated his silver jubilee and we offered to pay the travel costs for any clergy wanting to join us from throughout the U.S. You can imagine our disappointment when a single priest took us up on that offer to build community. After coming out of that “relationship,” we were admittedly not in any hurry to enter into a relationship with another jurisdiction. Instead, we have enjoyed being an autocephalous community. It has been a beautiful gift for our parish to get to know the various bishops whom we’ve flown in for our semi-annual celebrations of the sacrament of Confirmation. In four weeks, we’ll fly in another bishop for a diaconal ordination. I find it fascinating that some people might have a problem with our parish community not having a bishop—with us being autocephalous—while they have no problem with the autocephalous nature of Independent Catholic bishops! My impression is that various pastors of large Independent Catholic communities—including Lawman Chibundi in

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Louisville and Marek Božek in St. Louis—see ourselves as the “overseers” of our communities, as was the case in the early Church, such that we don’t feel a need to enter into an arrangement with other “overseers.” Certainly in Austin, we’ve enjoyed

experiencing life outside the structure of Independent Catholic jurisdictions.

Božek: When you leave a bad relationship, it's not easy to enter into a healthy relationship. Our parish community was "married" to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis for over 100 years. Then, the "divorce" happened. Like every divorce, it was a traumatic experience. There were fights over the "house" and the "children" and everything else. It was a very legal and a very, very traumatic battle. For us, the "divorce" included excommunication and legal challenges. For a time after that, we were cultivating a very close and friendly relationship with the Episcopal Church and the local Diocese of Missouri. The closer we got to the Episcopal Church, the more lawyers became involved, and, representing a huge organization, they seemed very interested in our property and the ownership of our "house." We chose to be friends without going to bed with them or any other jurisdiction. We do feel a void, that something is lacking from our catholicity. It would be nice

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to have a bishop who is "our bishop," but, in some ways, it's also good to be "single" and to look at our "ecclesial Tinder®" and "swipe left" and "swipe right" – but our parishioners are not ready to enter into a legal relationship with another legal entity.

Griffin: I've been part of the Independent Catholic Movement for over 20 years, and my experience is that many people who attend our churches and are part of our jurisdictions have been hurt. Many come from experiences where they weren't treated well or where they were excluded for many reasons. It has been important for me to see how I can bring people together and to see how we can come together and work together. We've connected with a couple of different jurisdictions outside our diocese, and a couple of them didn't turn out too well. My intention and my goal always come back to Jesus' prayer: "that they might be one, as you and I are one" (Jn. 17:21). I'll always be an optimist, hoping that we can work toward coming together. That doesn't mean that we'll one day be one church, like the traditional Roman Catholic Church. But how do deal with all our



differences and become one? How do we show that we're trying to work with others? How are we welcoming others? How are we becoming part of their joys? As for me and my jurisdiction, we're always willing to work toward that vision of becoming one — without strangling one another!

Buffone: I totally relate to what's been said. My parish came from a Roman Catholic parish of 2,700 households. When we split from them 15 years ago, we felt hurt and pain and marginalization. So, I understand that pain. I understand that we're an alternate experience for people who don't fit with Roman Catholic teachings or who want to express their catholicity in a different way. So, I understand the desire to be one catholic church, and I understand not wanting to be "married" to somebody. It's okay to be single. These conversation are a really good platform for people to come together and talk. In the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, multiple communities are forming themselves into regions or dioceses, across the country and abroad. They have local bishops and a constitution, and every local community has its constitution. So, now we have the legalities of three constitutions playing out: a parish constitution, a diocesan constitution, and a communion constitution. It almost feels a little wrong at times to think that rules and regulations bring us together — so there's an allure for me to be an IEC without all the rules and regulations. IECs are really beautiful. They promote joy and positive expression, unity and wonderful, healthy relationships, creativity and lay involvement and sharing of responsibilities. The word we use in a lot of regions is "covenant": How do you be covenant together? In the ECC, of course, we've embraced LGBTQ priests and unions, which is fabulous, but sometimes our clergy think, "We have all these rules!" As Chair of our House of Pastors, I see the value of such rules, and I was surprised that no one at an IEC gathering wanted to talk to me. It was as if I were part of a different sect — like I was evil or bad, just because I belong to a communion. IECs gather every eight to ten years. All that to say that there's a lot of great work happening out there in Intentional Eucharistic Communities, by people who could care less about

conversations like these. They're doing great work, and I applaud them.

Mathias: Despite our diversity, and despite our belonging to various jurisdictions, is there any way for us to create unity within the Independent Catholic movement?

Nicosia: I often use the phrase "holy conversation." If we keep the conversation alive, there's a chance that unity will bubble out of our encounters. Our founding bishop, Peter Hickman, posted on Facebook today: "Originally, the ECC was never meant to become an ecclesial jurisdiction. I operated it as the presiding bishop and the only bishop in the ECC. This was a mistake on my part: I confused the ECC with my ecclesial and pastoral responsibility as a bishop of a local diocese. The ECC was not intended to be an ecclesial jurisdiction, although it began to function that way by providing ecclesial oversight. The ECC is an ecclesial association of Independent Catholic faith communities. The ECC is a community of communities, which had a principle that each member faith community had a right and responsibility to self-determination and self-government. The property and assets of a faith community remained within the local faith community. The ECC could make no claim upon the property and assets of a local faith community. The ECC is a 'community of communities.'" That phrase, "community of communities," is in our constitution. It's a framework for maintaining our independence and diversity. That said, I also see the advantages in strong covenants that bind the pieces together. When each community is totally autonomous, you don't have an undergirding support system. As an example, we don't have a "safety net" for retiring priests in our communion. We have no pension or way to support them when they retire from ministry, and our priests don't make big bucks, so unless they're fortunate to have lucrative, secondary employment, they're not stashing money away for their retirement. I certainly see the advantages in larger jurisdictions that have those "safety nets" for their clergy. There are pluses and minuses on both sides of dependence and independence.

Kemp: In our jurisdiction, the Ascension Alliance, most of us have “tentmaking jobs” that we engage in on the side. I just retired as a community college professor, so I have a retirement: with social security and some income from my previous employment—but I love doing ministry. I love celebrating mass. I love being part of the Ascension Alliance. No one in our jurisdiction makes enough dollars to live off their parish. We’re similar to the ECC in that we have a lot of priests and bishops within our jurisdiction, but

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we really put a premium on independence. We don’t try to micromanage what people do. We consider ourselves a loose association or alliance of people. We also came out of a bad relationship, which Julie Byrne referred to as a “holy implosion.” Our jurisdiction came out of my mission parish, which primarily served people in recovery: After the “holy implosion,” that mission community became a jurisdiction! We’re 12 years old—so the “kids” are still together, and we’re not yet “adolescents”—and we have a really fine group of people whom we love and value very much. Scott represents another part of the “holy implosion,” and that’s all good. We’re okay with playing with others—and we’re still learning to play with others. Our gathering in Austin in 2019 was a very big step in terms of coming together while retaining our independence. That works for us—as long as nobody tells us what to do. So long as you don’t tell us what to believe, we’ll play with you!

Carter: I was one of the “kids” in that unraveling relationship: I was in seminary, and I very much felt torn. I love my “mother” and my “father”! So, thank you, Alan, for “playing” with me! That’s one of the reasons I’m so grateful for Father Jayme, who brought us together in Austin, and for this movement toward increased unity between us. I see Alan, and I love him. He’s wonderful. I knew him superficially when I was in seminary, but the “family” didn’t stay together long enough for us to get as close as I would have liked. Coming together for conversations like this is a really beautiful thing. People have history, and it’s not fair for me to wish away their history. When I look out over these

chasms, I see bridges everywhere! The centripetal and centrifugal forces are very real. In some ways, they are part of our identity as Independent Catholics. They are our blessing and our calling; they are also our charge and responsibility. It's our blessing: that we're all catholic, that we're all part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. We're all brothers and sisters. No one can separate me from the love of God (Rom. 8:35), and no one can separate me from the catholic expression of that love! That draws me to all of you in a really profound way. It's satisfying on an intellectual level and on an emotional level. It's a profound blessing and gift. There's a theology of Independent Catholicism here, to be drawn out here by a theologian. On the other side, we find within scripture this reminder that we're all called to be one (Jn. 17:21, Gal. 3:28), that we're all part of Christ (1Cor. 12:12, Rom. 12:5), and that we have individual gifts (Rom. 12:6, 1Cor. 12:8-10). As Independent Catholics, we have that Catholic connection—and we also have local responsibility. We have individual charisms, we're all attempting to serve a particular population of people, and some of us are more independent than others. It's only natural that we feel in our conscience, in the place where we all meet God, the right and the responsibility to step up and offer what we can offer, what we are responsible for doing, what we can best provide.

Kemp: There's a lot of talent within each of our jurisdictions. There's a lot of talent within my own jurisdiction, which I really appreciate and love. And for others—like Marek, Jayme and Lawman, I think it's okay to “play around,” to “play the field” a bit. Each of you has gifts, and it's nice that people come and celebrate the sacraments and participate

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with you. In some ways, we have transcended the old Roman Catholic Church, and some of us are aspiring to go back to the “womb,” to be the primitive Church, rather than to be so rule-bound.

We're trying to live the spirit of Jesus. We're trying to live his message of love. We're trying to remain connected with God. I imagine a time before rules in the Church: It was probably somewhat chaotic and disorganized, but I suspect it wasn't so terrible!

Cavins: Like many of you, I had a bad experience—two of them, actually. I had a bishop whose message was, “pay, pray and obey—and then pay some more!” In the second experience, the bishop said, “We’re going to start a new thing, and everyone’s going to be involved.” That quickly turned into “the laity will be ‘consulted,’ but only the bishop will make decisions!” For the past year, I’ve been looking for a jurisdiction. I haven’t gotten the support I need from others—which is why these conversations are so wonderful. I have an application for incardination that is being considered by the board of directors tonight, so say a prayer that the Holy Spirit might move us all together! Father Scott is right: We’re all parts of the Body of Christ, and each part is different. I see no reason why we can’t have independent parishes. My parish has been completely independent for two years, and we’ve done okay, COVID notwithstanding. There’s something about overcoming exclusion and being in union with other parishes. I had that experience with Jayme several years ago: One of our deacons went to Austin and wanted to receive communion at Holy Family, and I said, “I wouldn’t do that!” It was top-down thinking: that my clergy shouldn’t interact with others without my permission! I’ve come to recognize that we’re all individuals, and the table is open to everyone. What can we unite around? We can unite around Baptism and Eucharist as primary sacraments. We believe in the other sacraments, but, if we’re looking for unity, it’s around those two!

Mathias: Are there other things around which we might unite? A recent group of Independent Catholic bishops proposed the four points of the Anglicans’ Lambeth Quadrilateral as possible points for union, raising the question of whether we can unite around any or all of those points.

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particular beliefs on people. We're also non-creedal. We don't insist on the creeds. We recognize that many creeds and ecumenical councils were about power within the Roman Empire, and that a lot of harm has come out of disagreements over creeds. I'm not against ecumenical councils, but we have to ask ourselves some tough questions when people argue and die over theological points! What good do creeds do? Are they essential? We don't argue

about them. We don't say that they're good or bad. Instead, we choose not to be creedal or dogmatic. We let things unfold according to the Holy Spirit – and we're continually amazed at how the pieces fall together when we "get out of the way."

Furr: We call ourselves "Independent Catholics," but we're coming into a whole, new paradigm where there is no independence. There is only interdependence! Independence does not exist in this universe. Everything is dependent – or interdependent – on other things. The very term "Independent Catholics" doesn't speak to the completeness of what we can potentially be about. It stifles our ability to "think outside the box." There's no hierarchy in interdependence. I don't sit very comfortably in the

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"box" of independence, which can contain hierarchy. I use the term, "Independent Catholic" because we don't have another word for ourselves yet, but we need to "think outside the box"! The Council of Nicaea was a political event. Why do

we still hang on to it? Years ago, Joan Chittister wrote an interesting book on the creed, *In Search of Belief*. Knowing what we know about physics, it makes no sense to me to say that Jesus “descended into hell” and then “ascended into heaven.” Joseph Campbell famously observed that, even if Jesus ascended at the speed of light, he’d still be in the Milky Way and *en route* to heaven today! Do we have the courage to say that some ancient beliefs – some things we’ve held on to all our lives – don’t fit with who we are and what we believe today? Are we willing to dream of what the Holy Spirit is asking of us today? How adventurous can we be? I don’t see “Independent Catholics” coalescing at all. I see interdependent believers in Jesus who have already coalesced. When we create creeds or canons, we’re already excluding someone. All human constructs exclude people. Being humans, we write things down and codify them, and those words become more important than the spirit behind those words. We see this in history, in religious traditions, in politics and philosophy. As soon as we’ve put a “box” around something, we’ve excluded someone. We’ve moved so far beyond the Nicene creed, which is why I really like the idea of Intentional Eucharistic Communities, of really bringing Jesus and our awareness of faith into a time that is more spiritually, physically, theologically and philosophically appropriate.

Robison: The Nicene Council was a real discussion within the Church. We often fail to remember that the political forces that called it into being lost. The emperor lost at Nicaea! He was an Arian. All his support staff were Arians. The Hagia Sophia was built by Arians, and, to a large extent, it expresses Arian theology. It’s tempting to write off the Council of Nicaea as a political event, but the Spirit spoke

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through that council. As one who rejects the Western notion of inevitable progress, I don’t think we’re in much better shape to express the faith than they were. We have to ask ourselves: Do we embrace with humility the tradition that’s been handed to us? Are we saying we’re

better than them or smarter than them? We can't separate our creeds from the sacraments, the scriptures or the episcopate. They are a unit. When we pry them apart and try to create individual understandings of them, they lose their meaning. When we talk about Baptism or Eucharist, we borrow phrases from the other three.

Ashmankas: I wonder if we can be creedal without being dogmatic. Something happened at Nicaea, Chalcedon, Vatican I and Vatican II. In the same way that Arianism lost at Nicaea, a certain faction "lost" at Vatican I when they didn't get unlimited infallibility. The Spirit moves among such councils and through saints and Church history. Most of us are not fundamentals when it comes to the Bible. Rather, we likely believe that people engaged with the Spirit to write down things as best they understood them. The councils are similar. There is no deep division among us because we're not dogmatists. We share a Catholic tradition that tells us what happened at these councils, what happened with these saints, these structures, these sacraments—but we don't have to think of them "in a box." We can think of Eucharist and the creeds and the scriptures "outside the

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box." The creeds, scriptures and sacraments are all part of the "stream" in which we move and participate. Despite our best efforts to prevent it, the Holy Spirit has been working within that stream!

Kemp: The Holy Spirit is alive and well today, and the message of 2,000 years ago isn't always, necessarily the right message today. In physics, we speak of interdependence and interconnectedness, and our interactions with each other create networks. That's how the Holy Spirit is operating within our little part of the mystical body of Christ today. I'm quite public about the fact that we, in the Ascension Alliance, are not wedded to creeds. We're not for them or against them. We certainly see them as potentially problematic, and I'm personally not convinced that the Holy Spirit was speaking through those council as much as human beings engaged in politics and power. A lot of good things have happened in the Church, but a lot of bad things,



too, resulted from the Church's coming into power and being wedded to the State. Our situation is different today from 1,000 or 2,000 years ago, so perhaps the Spirit is operating in different ways today. I have absolute faith in God and in the Holy Spirit's ability to speak to us, to inspire us, and to teach us how to love better today!

Carter: Like freedom, all "independence" is relative. None of us is radically or ultimately free ourselves—we're embedded in interdependence—but I'm still willing to use the word "free" in a relative way. I still think it's useful to talk about independence with respect to Independent Catholics: We are independent of Rome, and we are jurisdictionally independent. For me, it was a huge breakthrough in my own spiritual life when I stopped asking, "Is this true or not?" and started asking, "In what ways is this true? In what ways is this good and beautiful? What parts of our ancient tradition serve us, and which parts might be hurtful to others? Which parts are worth preserving and passing on?" There are aspects of the Church's councils that are political: They were filled with people like us, many of whom were spiritually moved and were spiritually sincere. In the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, we don't insist on the use of creeds in our liturgies. Being less dogmatic, we don't force them on our communities. We can treasure the good parts of any creed without believing them literally in all cases. We're not fundamentalists. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was inspired in some way and can be useful in some way, even if not literally understood. Old Catholics draw their inspiration from the early Church.

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They readily admit that their understanding of synodality didn't exist in the early Church, but they also see the early Church as a hermeneutic principle, as something good, true and beautiful that can move and inspire us today. I wonder why we couldn't have a similar view of the creeds. Our presiding bishop allows us to deviate in a particular way: We can use the Nicene Creed or other creeds, but we are not required to. The rubrics of my local liturgy state: "The following brief expression of faith is used, if the Nicene Creed or another traditional creed is not. The earliest professions of faith in Christ were heartfelt expressions of a life-changing experience, and the same Spirit lives in us today." It continues by detailing some things that might be exclusionary, but that most people agree come from scriptures: Jesus is Lord. Jesus is risen. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed Son of God and Son of Man—where these are scriptural references and not gender-based comments. I understand the consensus as recovering the treasure that was passed on to us, without using the negative aspects of that tradition as a weapon to exclude people or to limit our thinking, as has often been done in the past.

Božek: I'm the pastor of a parish, so I always speak from pastoral experience. If we ask a person in the pews whether they agree with the Chalcedonian definition of the will of Jesus, they will stare at us blankly and ask what we are talking about. As an immigrant, I see these dogmas and creeds as

<p><i>As an immigrant, I see these dogmas &amp; creeds as having a value in the same way that the U.S. Constitution has a value: They were created by very flawed people, with very flawed reasons. We keep them as our grounding documents, even though we constantly amend them, giving new meaning to old words. We go beyond the original intent of the writers of the Constitution, &amp; we ask ourselves, "How is this meaningful to us today?"</i></p>	<p>having a value in the same way that the U.S. Constitution has a value: They were created by very flawed people, with very flawed reasons. We keep them as our grounding documents, even though we constantly amend them, giving new meaning to old words. We go beyond the original intent of the writers of the Constitution, and we ask</p>
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ourselves, "How is this meaningful to us today?" As someone who studied for the U.S. citizenship test, I know more about the U.S. Constitution than most of my American friends. The same might be said of our creeds and dogmas: They matter to those of us who studied them, but they matter very little to the Spanish-speaking family who comes to mass on Sunday wanting to baptize their children. Pastorally speaking, we have bigger questions to ask ourselves, like, "How are we pastorally serving those people who come to us for nourishment?" When I think of the centripetal and centrifugal forces in our movement, two words come to mind: standards and scandals. During the past 15 years, our congregation has studied and look at all the Independent Catholic churches in the U.S., and our parishioners have been scandalized by the stories of constant divisions and implosions within our movement. Every year, new jurisdictions are created, bishops are named archbishops and metropolitans, and eureka, someone invents the wheel again! Our constant reinvention of Catholicism is scandalizing. The number of bishops with the need to create jurisdictions is scandalizing. Our lack of standards is scandalizing. All those scandals are a centrifugal force for us, and many of our parishioners have been traumatized, scandalized and wronged by the *status quo* of the movement in the U.S. today. In terms of centripetal forces, we need to establish standards that bring us together and that set us apart from less-serious players. I always tell our seminarians that we first have to take ourselves seriously, if we want anyone else to take us seriously. No one will take us seriously if we don't set standards for our behavior and education. We don't have to agree on how to amend Nicene or Chalcedonian definitions, but we do need to agree on standards that are currently lacking in our U.S. reality of Independent Catholicism. Even jurisdictions that claim to have standards don't follow them. We find excuses to consecrate people as bishops, even when they have no education whatsoever, just because they are holy and "needed." So, standards and scandals go hand-in-hand: When standards are absent, scandals appear.

Buffone: *Standards and Scandals* is a great title for a book!

Campbell: One standard has to be that all bishops have churches. Too

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many times, clowns who have no churches are made "bishops." They have no sense of identity outside of being a "bishop." That makes me scratch my head and walk away.

Furr: The people who come to our masses and to our religious and spiritual gatherings have a sense of the Spirit within them. It would be an interesting exercise to bring together a faith community for a day retreat, to write its own creed and to ask: What does this community believe in?

Kemp: During our 2019 convocation, our presiding bishop presented a fascinating workshop on what it means to be non-creedal. People come with beliefs, and it was fascinating to see their interactions and what they came up with in terms of their *credos*.

Mathias: Many of our communities may have similar experiences with the creation of mission statements. Here at Holy Family, we hosted a four-hour retreat for lay leaders some years ago that resulted in our mission statement—our "creed," if you will—our desire to be "Loving. Inclusive. Catholic. Doing it Jesus' Way!" What final thoughts might we share as we think about the tension between unity and independence?

Nicosia: I love the term "Interactive Catholics"! We can't let our independence disrupt our work. Here in Colorado, our ECC region is a member of the Colorado Council of Churches, but the Roman Catholic Archdiocese is not because it decided it didn't want to "play" anymore, when the Colorado Council of Churches decided to accept the Metropolitan Community Church as a member. As Interactive Catholics, let's focus on "playing well" together and getting the work done!

Strong: There was a period when our church was looking at affiliating with the United Church of Christ. They asked us how we reconcile the creeds of the Church with those who might not accept them in their entirety, and, before I could answer, the conference minister said, "For us, the creeds are not a test; they're a testament" – and I said, "I can live with that!" Our creeds testify to what our ancestors believed about God. In Eastern Orthodoxy, they see the creed as a symbol. For me, a creedal profession is really important to my faith and to my teaching as a pastor, but I would never say to my non-creedal brothers and sisters, "I can't see you

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Christian

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TOCCUSA wanted

to come together

with Utrecht. Perhaps other churches would talk to us if all of us in active ministry came together and said we're Catholic, we're doing God's ministry, and we have standards, so as to avoid scandal. People don't come to us because we have M.Div.'s, but they do come to us because we have serious, spiritual formation. They don't come to us for our creeds or apostolic succession. They come to us to connect with Jesus. We need to come together as a communion of communities trying to live out our faith, with the freedom to operate as our own jurisdictions and congregations.

Hayes: I grew up with the Apostles' Creed, and I've confessed the Nicene Creed for the past two decades, but I've come to believe that maybe belief in a certain creed is less important than how I'm serving people. Rather than forcing creeds down people's throats, we need to focus on connecting with

and serving others. No

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Creed or no creed, dogma or no dogma,  
we still need each other!*

Cavin: We say here that our task is to make God's love known in Central Florida, and, of course, we need standards to do that.

Ashmankas: I love the idea of creed as testimony, not test, and I like the idea of uniting around something that's fluid and that allows people to exist in this testimony, this history, this tradition without having a test of who's "in" or "out."

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Buffone: I love what Karen was saying: It's time to think from a different paradigm and use the word "interdependence."

Many of us repeat the Roman Catholic structure, because

*Many of us repeat the Roman Catholic structure,  
because that's where we came from,  
while rejecting the parts we don't like.*

*Instead, maybe we should ask:*

*When are we actually going to allow the Holy Spirit  
to create anew the face of the earth?*

*Or the face of what liturgy might look like?*

*Or what community or ministry might look like?*

*It's time that we start thinking "outside the box,"  
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Instead, maybe we should ask: When are we actually going to allow the Holy Spirit to create anew the face of the earth?

Or the face of what liturgy might look like? Or what community or ministry might look like? It's time that we start thinking "outside the box," rather than reinvent the wheel. Let's start seeing with new eyes, and allowing the Spirit to really use us as instruments and as gifts in the world!

Campbell: We really have to come together with some standards, especially standards around education of clergy. We have to address the fact that people are ordained with absolutely no formation—and, in many places, with no background checks. A priest could be removed from ministry in the Roman Catholic Church for sexual misconduct and receive *carte blanche* from an Independent Catholic bishop. We also need to come together in interjurisdictional cooperation. We have to work together!

Robison: I recall a quote from Robert Frost: When asked why he wrote sonnets, he replied that the traditional structures of poetry provide a certain freedom when you're "easy in your

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harness." With respect to standards and avoiding scandal, we need to learn how to ride "easy in [our] harness" as Christians. I was raised Presbyterian, and Presbyterians are constantly rewriting

their creeds and confessions: It's a biological function of Reform theology! So, let's learn to ride "easy in [our] harness"!

Furr: I'm an out-of-the-box dreamer, and I really think that we're evolving into a new paradigm. To embrace our evolution of spirit is a grace of God. We're coming into a time when the teachings of Jesus really are beginning to make sense—without believing in a literal Adam or Eve, or that heaven is "up there" and hell is "down there." I believe we're really called to step into our birthright, to bring the understanding of Spirit into the world today in a way that is, in the most beautiful sense of the word, transformative—not only of our species, but of the entire planet. We know that the way we've thought about things in the past does not work: Look at the planet we're trying to survive on right now! I'm at a time in my personal life when I say: "Get out of the box!" I've come realize how confining those "boxes" are, and I've experienced the freedom of being outside them. We can't let

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the Middle East of 2,000 years ago define what we're supposed to be doing today. Instead, let's ask where the Spirit is leading us right now. That's where I want to be. I don't

want to live in 325 A.D. I don't want to be "independent" of

Rome. Let's explore the possibilities that exist outside of thinking that we're doing something wrong. There is no "wrong" and "right" when you're talking about the Holy Spirit, since, as in physics, everything is entirely shifting. So, let's open the windows and doors, let's knock down the walls, let's throw open the boxes, and let's embrace the incredible potential we have!

Kemp: Personally, I prefer the creed of Father Edward Schillebeeckx. It's just beautiful, and I absolutely love it. I also love the fact that Pope Francis says that he has never refused communion to anyone. There are several hundred different Independent Catholic jurisdictions, and they are born and die by the minute! When I think of centripetal forces within our movement, I think of this little group that we have here, in this one, little corner of American Independent Catholicism. The centrifugal forces will never be entirely within our control, and we'll always have the plague in the Independent movement of the taint of the sexual improprieties of priests of the Roman Catholic Church. We do background checks in our jurisdiction, and everyone ought to do that — but I'm not the pope!

Božek: This year, two theologians passed away who shaped my theology: one in the States, and one in Europe. John Shelby Spong passed away a few days ago. When I came to America 21 years ago, I was fascinated by his writings. And

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Like our mission statements,  
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Hans Küng died a few months ago. He was very formative in my formation in Europe. Spong and Küng clearly transcended their "boxes" and were true to their consciences, yet they found a way to live and die within their denominations. To

Karen's point about writing new creeds, I think it's crucial for parishes to occasionally write such statements. After our excommunication at St. Stanislaus, we created our mission statement — and 14 years later, that mission statement is no



longer relevant or understood. We have new members. We have people in their 20s and 30s who've never heard of Vatican II. For many of us, Vatican II was the Promised Land, and we breathed in Vatican II theology; the people who come to my church today have no clue what Vatican II was. So, we're now creating a new and improved 2022 mission statement. It's a healthy and important exercise. Like our mission statements, our creeds must be relevant to the people in our communities today!

Carter: I love these conversations. They are real work. They keep us together, and they allow us to be who we are. Thomas Kuhn first popularized the idea of paradigms in his 1962 work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. We're open to new

<p><i>Let's bring together our gifts &amp; change what's worth changing!</i></p>	<p>paradigms. Let's bring together our gifts and change what's worth changing!</p>
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Mathias: I conclude with the words of William Butler Yeats. I encourage us to imagine him writing his poem, "The Second Coming," to describe the contemporary state of Independent Catholicism:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre, the falcon cannot hear the falconer; things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...Surely some revelation is at hand; surely the Second Coming is at hand. The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out when a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi* troubles my sight: ...That twenty centuries of stony sleep were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle, and what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

I imagine a "Second Coming" for us: a time when we turn from the "widening gyre" of our movement and recognize that something new waits to be born! I imagine what it would take for us to come together within Independent Catholicism. As I hear this conversation, I wonder whether we might unite around five ideas: (1) that we are followers of the Jesus tradition, once known as The Way, (2) that we largely find our exemplar in the pre-Nicene, early Church, (3) that we are largely informed by the history and

traditions of Western Christianity, (4) that we are autocephalous—lay people don't understand that term, but I'm coming to prefer it over "independent," and (5) that we are *pares*, equals. For a long time, the bishop of Rome was considered the *primus inter pares*; we recognize that we have no hierarchy here, but that instead we see one another as equals. I really appreciate the language of "standards and scandals"—what might bring us together and what might be obstacles to our unity. Perhaps that might fuel a future conversation!

## Things We Can Agree On

*Independent Catholic clergy are famously...independent! In this conversation, clergy discuss what, if anything, that might all agree on.*

Mathias: Next week, the bishops of the Catholic Bishops Forum will meet in St. Louis, and they'll discuss what they have in common, what they can agree on. They are coalescing around the Lambeth Quadrilateral with a fifth point on synodality. Hence, my questions:

Despite the great diversity of our movement—which we often hear described as “Old Catholic,” “Independent Catholic” or, a term that I’m coming to use more, “Autocephalous Catholic”—what can we come together around and agree on? Are there certain things that we all believe?

Anglicans have coalesced around the Lambeth Quadrilateral. What hesitations might we have with respect to its affirmations? Do the Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation? Are the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds sufficient statements of our Christian faith? Do we celebrate certain primary sacraments (e.g., Baptism & Eucharist)? Do we esteem the historic episcopate, with apostolic succession, locally adapted?

What hesitations might we have with respect to the following affirmations of our ecclesial communion: (1) We are followers of the Jesus tradition, largely shaped by Western Catholicism. (2) We largely look to the early, pre-Nicene Church as a model and hermeneutic for the contemporary living of our faith. (3) We value apostolic succession through the episcopal laying on of hands as a sign of unity and continuity of the Church, rooted in the near-universal practice and rule of succession in the early, undivided Church. (4) Like the communities of the early Church, we are autocephalous or “self-governing,” not subject to the authority of persons outside our communities and/or jurisdictions, and not interfering in other communities and/or jurisdictions. (5) We esteem Jesus’

“discipleship of equals,” largely seeing ourselves as equals (*pares*) despite our diverse gifts, titles, offices or seniority.

What else might we affirm? Is it necessary for us to affirm any models provided us by our spiritual siblings of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches or by others? Is it necessary for us to affirm our inclusive spirit, and, if so, what does this mean and/or how is this expressed? Knowing of the liabilities caused for our movement by rapid ordinations and consecrations, is it necessary to affirm the value of formation and education for clergy?

Quintana: I think we can all agree that the Church has been colonized. I lean more toward the apostolic Fathers, rather than those after Constantine, because that's when the Church was colonized by the Roman Empire. To escape persecution, we were willing to be integrated into the Roman Empire, which was a mistake. It was genius of Constantine to ally with the Church, but that has kept us from challenging Empire. We

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need to return to that posture of challenging the Empire, rather than being the insipid whore of the *status quo*. We need to be like the ancient Christians who stood up to the lions and gladiators! We need to decolonize

the Church. Its “Doctrine of Discovery,” which was instrumental in expanding the empire, decimated indigenous cultures. You see vestiges of colonization in our movement's tendencies toward “smells and bells” and lace and titles: We're top-heavy with clergy, but with few people. We need a major revolution in our movement concerning who we are. Rome capitulated to Empire. As Independent Catholics, we should stand firm against it and return the Church to its more pristine apostolic existence.

D'Arrigo: I am a lifelong Roman Catholic who went to the Church of England because I wanted to be able to marry. I then spent my adult life in the Anglican Communion, until I joined Independent Catholicism in 2014. What I loved about Independent Catholicism is that we seem to jump back toward the pre-Nicene Church, toward a small, social-justice-driven Church with a broad impact across the planet. I am blessed by a diverse group of folks who call me their pastor, that I would love to see a greater bent toward social justice and the unraveling of imperial models of Church. The first question Jayme asks is, "What can we all agree on?" I think we all prioritize social justice in our

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ministries. I think most Independent Catholics have social justice as a big part of their ministry. The gospel itself is all about community life and social justice! I agree that we are less "colonial," less imperial, though we are top-heavy, with more bishops and priests than people in

many places. Many of us who are younger in the movement are pushing toward other models, and toward a laity-driven Church. I know Father Jayme and Father Marek are all about the laity. I agree that colonialization is bad; I'm just not sure that our movement suffers from it. I wonder: Am I not seeing it? Am I not seeing the imperial trappings in our movement? Or, is your point that Rome is imperial, and we need to move on from that and embrace our independence and social justice, and destroy the imperial system?

Quintana: We have an Anglican tie to the Lambeth Quadrilateral. If we want to claim our roots in Old Catholicism, the Union of Utrecht says that the only representative that they have in the United States is the Episcopal Church, which, of course, is part of the Anglican Communion here in the U.S. I'm not sure how tied we should be to the Lambeth Quadrilateral, because the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion were very much involved in the imperial expansion of the Church through colonialism. We need to break ourselves away from colonialism. Saint Thomas, the "Doubter," is credited with going to India and forming the

Mar Thoma Catholic Church, which long predated English and Anglican influences in India. That's the attitude we should take: We ought to publicly and corporately deny the Doctrine of Discovery, which suggested that we should subjugate and exercise dominion over the indigenous

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*That's not the Christian way.*

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people we encountered. That's not the Christian way. That's not the "Jesus way." Jesus' way was becoming part of the people and showing the relevance of the gospel to their culture. We need a radical "cutting of the umbilical cord" from that concept.

Lynch: In her book, *The Other Catholics*, Julie Byrne examined many of these issues in detail. She formulated the three S's that define Independent Catholicism: succession, sacraments and saints. Nearly all Independent Catholic bodies pride themselves on having apostolic succession, we have seven sacraments, and we have a healthy concept of the communion of saints. Apart from that, the Independent Catholic movement, as a whole, is "all over the map." There are several issues that I very strongly feel we should have in common. One is the ordination of women. I am a strong supporter of the ordination of

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women. I'm married to a vocational deacon. The other issue that I think is important is that we welcome people of all sexual orientations. God made people as God made them, and we should not judge people based on those kinds of considerations. Married clergy is also an issue that tends to bind Independent Catholics. Talking about what we have in common is really a front for how we can all get along. The key to this is recognizing that we are all fellow laborers in the Lord's vineyard. What Independent Catholics have in common with the mainstream denominations is that we

have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. That's what binds us together: our baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have to stop thinking of ourselves as competitors. We are not competitors; we are fellow laborers in the Lord's vineyard. Sometimes we even share common parishioners, as people go from church to church. But my concept of Independent Catholicism has always been that of a refuge for people who have been rejected by other churches for various reasons: because they hold unpopular theological viewpoints or want to get married or are a gay couple. We take care of the things that some of the mainline denominations won't handle, and we don't do a lot of the things that they shouldn't be doing, like molesting children. I try to maintain good relationships with all fellow workers of Jesus. What should characterize the Independent Catholic movement, in contrast to the mainline dominations, is that we are a refuge for the rejected. I cannot emphasize that enough. There are so many people who have been treated very badly by religious institutions. Many stay and suffer, but others leave. We're here to offer them an alternative. We are a place where all are welcomed. What exactly does that mean? Does that mean that we adjust our liturgical preferences and our canons, to meet the expectations of the people walking into our doors? Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. For example, I'm not going to stop singing the Mass on Sundays just to build the church. That's a non-negotiable. But, if people are looking for something that we don't offer—a weekday Mass or bible study or catechetical instruction or spiritual counseling—I'm all for that. We don't have to compromise on the important stuff. To meet people's needs, though, we need to be flexible and offer additional things. Many of us know what it's like to handle Republicans or those who say that we preach communism. That won't change what we preach, but we recognize them as God's children, too. They, too, were created in God's image—so we can't deny them communion or any other sacrament. They may follow a path that's different from ours, but, regardless of their background, race or political leanings, they're all God's children. As Mothers and Fathers, deacons and bishops, we're here to take care of them. In last Sunday's gospel, when the disciples argued

over who would sit at Jesus' right and left hand, Jesus talked about those who lord power over others. He said we need to serve others. The worst mistake we make as clergy is not serving others. That's when we align ourselves with imperialism and authority figures. We have to keep in mind that we are servants. Deacons are servants, and all of us who were ordained retain that service throughout our ministry—and we need to provide a place of refuge and welcome.

Mathias: Michael Nicosia shared a comment in the chat box, in reference to my suggestion that many of us esteem Jesus' "discipleship of equals." He points out that the Polish National Catholic Church, which does not ordain women,

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might not be in agreement with that statement. We have to ask ourselves: How large a circle do we want to draw? Those of us who gather for these conversations tend to have a certain "hive mind"; we tend to think alike. Many of us would likely agree on the importance of

sacramental justice for all people. Do we want to draw a wider circle and include the Polish National Catholic Church, the St. Pius X Society, or others outside of Rome? Any reactions to how wide a circle we want to draw as we look for agreement within this movement?

Quintana: Colonialism excludes women, so I suggest that we not include those who don't ordain women. When we look at the scriptures, we see that women had a leadership role in the Church. As much as I'd love to include the Polish National Catholic Church, I'm not sure that we can be in communion with anyone seeking to be reunited to Rome, which excludes women. We need to formulate a manifesto or declaration of anti-colonialism. The Roman Empire,



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Cheasty: So many people in our movement have been marginalized by other churches due to their gender or orientation. Some feel a very definite call to ministry but can't sign up with the whole issue of celibacy. The Church has segregated and marginalized a whole host of people who have gifts and talents. I see us as a church, with many groups within it, and most of us adhere to much of what's in the Lambeth Quadrilateral—except that our sacraments tend to be more than Baptism and Communion. We are a home for people

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who've been kicked out or who've been put  
"in the back of the bus" by other churches.  
The attraction we provide is that we say,  
"Come as you are! Male, female, gay, straight,  
transgender: come! We see you as a child of God  
& as inherently worthy of respect & dignity,  
simply because you are a child of God!"  
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God and as inherently

worthy of respect and dignity, simply because you are a child of God!" Our little differences among ourselves are really minor. Let's unify as a group and reach the marginalized and the mainstream. Those within our movement who marginalize women, gays, bisexuals, the transgendered, married clergy: They're not "on the same page" as most of us. We can agree that whoever you are, wherever you've been, whatever you've done, you possess an inherent dignity as a child of God and there is a seat for you at the table! I hope that all who continue to marginalize others will experience a real Jesus moment! Christ didn't marginalize, so why should we? We have basic goals and a basic understanding of what it means to be the Church. Let's get together: We're stronger together, and our strength will allow us to reach more people and have a greater

impact. Too many people don't know who we are or what we're about because we currently have no voice. The only way that they will know what we're about is when we have a voice!

Nicosia: Our purpose here is to discuss the ways in which *we* are united. The churches and communities that aren't "on the same page" are going to self-select out. We don't have to

<p><i>We don't have to worry about including the Polish National Catholic Church: They dropped out of the Union of Utrecht! Let's focus our energies on the things we agree on, the things that unite us.</i></p>	<p>worry about including the Polish National Catholic Church: They dropped out of the Union of Utrecht! Let's focus our energies on the things <i>we</i> agree on, the things that unite <i>us</i>.</p>
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D'Arrigo: The New Testament Greek word for "servant" is *doulos*. I had a friend who once that said that *doulos* was like the skinny, third-row galley slave who sits between two really big guys and is forced to do whatever they say. That's how we need to be for Christ. I'm hearing that there's huge unity among us in being servants of Christ. I also have a Jewish friend who uses a Hebrew expression that speaks to the inherent nobility of all of creation (*b'tzelem Elohim*), because all of creation is made in the image and likeness of God. As Independent Catholics, we probably all believe in those two concepts. We believe that everyone is a creation of the Creator and possesses inherent nobility, and that we are servants of Christ. Also, we need to cut some slack for our friends in Eastern Europe—in Czechoslovakia, Slovenia and Poland. They live in a time machine, where they're liking our 1980s music and flipping up their jeans. They're at least 30 years behind us, particularly in their thinking about gay rights and the ordination of women. We need to

<p><i>Like parenting, we need to choose our battles. The Eastern Church will come to where we're at, but it's going to take them time. We need to cut some slack for those who aren't as progressive as we are. Jesus met everybody where they were.</i></p>	<p>be careful in our blanket statements about Independent Catholicism to be mindful of the massive cultural differences. Like parenting, we need to choose our battles. The Eastern Church will come to where we're at, but it's going to take them time. We need to cut some</p>
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slack for those who aren't as progressive as we are. Jesus met everybody where they were. We've got to be Christ for the Eastern Church, and we we've got to allow them to meet folks where they're at.

Božek: A temptation of every reform movement—and Old Catholicism is a reform movement—is rupture and discontinuity. That's why there are so many denominations—and Independent Catholic jurisdictions—in this country: Everyone wants to start a new and better church. As much as I hate to quote Cardinal Ratzinger, he said that we need to oppose this hermeneutic of rupture, with a hermeneutic of continuity. The Body of Christ was not born yesterday. We are 2,000 years old. We made many mistakes and committed many sins when, in our infancy, in 325 A.D., we became involved with the Empire. But the Body of Christ continues to learn and grow and mature. We can't cut off our 15<sup>th</sup>-century or 17<sup>th</sup>-century or 19<sup>th</sup>-century limbs without losing a part of our identity. The Catholic way to approach our colonizing sinfulness is to repent and do better. We have been entangled with more than one empire. American Christianity is entangled with American Empire. We sin as Christians today in this context of American imperialism. Rupturing our identity and suggesting that everything that happened after 325 is not true Christianity leads to the continuing multiplication of entities and identities, with everyone feeling that they must reinvent the wheel from scratch. We cannot deny our sinfulness and our connection to empire, but rupture is not the answer. It is colonialism for us to go to Africa, South American or Eastern Europe and to tell people that we have the truth and that they must subjugate themselves to our norms, rules and regulations. The Polish Catholic Church in Poland is a member of the Union of Utrecht, and Utrecht allows each national church to journey in its own space. So, some Utrecht churches ordain LGBT individuals, while others don't. Some have marriage equality; others don't. It's a simple recognition that each locality is working out a theology in a different culture, in different environmental circumstances, and at a different speed. Michael Angelo is right: In some ways, Poland is 20 to 30 years behind the United States, but to say something like this in the context

of Africa or Asia is colonialism! They won't buy our theology in the same way that they buy our used Levi's. They have to come to terms with inclusion in their own way. The Mar Thoma Church, which was mentioned, is not very inclusive, according to our Western understanding—but it is one of the most ancient churches in Christianity, and it has survived millennia of persecution. According to our norms, they would not qualify to be with us because they do not include the people that we would like to see included, but the conversation about colonialism is a crucial and necessary conversation. As Americans and Westerners, it's difficult for us to see how colonialism permeates our vocabulary, our way of thinking, and our way of praying. When I speak as a male, I speak with patriarchal prejudice,

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When I speak as a male, I speak with  
patriarchal prejudice, whether I know it or not.  
When we speak as White North Americans  
or Western Europeans, we speak as colonialists,  
we pray as colonialists,  
& we theologize as colonialists.*

whether I know it or not. When we speak as White North Americans or Western Europeans, we speak as colonialists, we pray as colonialists, and we theologize as colonialists. We can't escape it. So, we repent, and we try to do better.

Cheasty: I have difficulty with some of the things I'm hearing. If not now for inclusion, when? Jesus did not exclude or marginalize any group of people—not even those who were marginalized in his culture. I respect what you're saying in terms of colonialism, but even Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman! As a woman who has been marginalized for most of my life, I've had to work harder and "go the extra mile," just to be given a minimal amount of voice at the table. My LGBTQ brothers and sisters are in a more difficult position, since their lives are threatened in many places. I'm in a bind. We don't want to cram it down people's throats, but, if we're going to be consistent with the gospel of Jesus, then the voice of inclusion is the one that really has to be heard. The United Methodist Church is now

splitting over the LGBTQ Methodist debacle—over an issue of marginalized people! The group that pulled the Methodist Church back from accepting full inclusion was the African Church. Africa tends to be more conservative. No doubt, colonialism caused great harm, but how can we profess the gospel and, at the same time, say that it's okay for another culture to marginalize entire groups of people? My gut reaction is, "hell no!" So many women and people of color and LGBTQ folks bring so much to this movement and to the work and furtherance of the gospel: I really have a hard time with giving a wink and a nod to continued

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marginalization of whole groups of God's children just because they live in another place. Think about the Black Lives Matter movement: We took little steps through slavery and Jim Crow, and people said, "Wait, let's give it some more time." Finally,

people said, "The now is now! There's no more time to wait to be accorded full personhood, dignity and participation in society!" That's how I feel about women in ministry and about our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. People don't need to wear pink triangles any longer!

Ellis: What we're trying to do here is not colonialization; it's evangelization. It's curious to me that, when we start talking about inclusion and sacramental justice, the conversation sometimes shifts to sociology or anthropology. We become unmoored from the sharpness and the counter-culturalism of the gospel. There are so many Independent Catholic jurisdictions in the United States because we take it more seriously. My husband worked for European companies for 35 years, and we are both Europhiles. We absolutely adore everything about Europe—except that, as political/cultural analysis suggests, Europe is highly nationalistic. People just "take it or leave it" and say, "Of course, we don't agree with the Church on this or that—but we still go, and we still give money from time to time." There are people who have decided not to do that—and I think that actually reflects

well. The whole notion of timing: My goodness, after 2,000 years of catechesis and exegesis, some people still say, "We mustn't upset the heterosexual" or "They'll be too gay or too open or too vocal." They're fragile. I'm in complete agreement that the evils of American colonialism are rampant. I don't know that we can't escape them. We can

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certainly become cognizant of them in a way that shapes our conversation, while at the same time remaining true to a gospel that we experience as a

personal claim of radical inclusion that should cost us something. Otherwise, it has no value.

Quintana: Evangelization is used as an excuse for colonization. People like Junipero Serra, who was canonized a few years ago, wrote in his own diary of practices that were extremely cruel. That paradigm of uniting evangelization with the overtaking of a culture has to be divorced. To evangelize does not mean to colonialize, and to colonialize does not mean to evangelize. That's what the Doctrine of Discovery was trying to propagate. We need to divorce the two. I'm all for promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ, but we can't do it if we are married to a culture of dominance, White

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supremacy, power and politics. We just cannot do it. We have to divorce ourselves from all of that if we are to continue to promote the gospel. The Roman military was required to be celibate, and we bought into that culture. Yes, we need to be patient and tolerant of those who perhaps aren't culturally where we are, but we don't need to keep ourselves behind. We cannot

allow ourselves to be held up in our mission. Our Lord said that we need to break from that kind of Pharisaical dominance and that we had to become, as Saint Francis said, "minors" — friars minor, brothers and sisters minor. We

ought not to be dominating one over the other. That's the whole idea of last Sunday's gospel.

D'Arrigo: I don't at all disagree about the East needing to catch up, and that the time is now. Please do not misinterpret my need to clarify cultural differences with my believing that those differences are right or just. One of the number one reasons I left the Worldwide Anglican Communion was because of what was going on in the global south and their re-creation of all things gospel in the African context of homophobia. Please do not misinterpret what I'm saying. I am the "I" in LGBTQIA. It's a slippery slope when we define injustice as that which we're complaining about. The joy of being Independent is that we don't have to hold ourselves accountable to some other thing. I feel like my role today is to remind us of why we got together: to discuss things that we can all agree on. I'm hearing that we all agree that colonialism is bad, and that we should be against it. We're going around a circle about the same stuff.

Strong: Everything that I've heard so far is so Eurocentric. The Old Catholic Church has not expanded into Africa or other places. The Philippine Independent Church is organized around a principle: justice and liberation. There's a whole

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Church that existed and was not colonized by White folks. Yes, Africans have certainly been influenced by colonization, which is why they are more homophobic and anti-women. We have an

obligation to be in dialogue with that. We have an obligation to continuity and to disruption. There are young folks from Ethiopia who are coming out as gay and trying to embrace Orthodoxy. The two can coexist. We need to disrupt colonialism on the left and on the right. We need to disrupt homophobia. How do we cross that bridge? Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. talked to people he didn't really care for, and he still held his ground. I will always be an openly-gay male when I speak with people who don't see eye-to-eye with me. I have some limits on what I will allow you to say to me, but I'm willing to dialogue. We leave out a whole group of folks who do not share our view. It's like the

people in our movement who call themselves patriarchs and cardinals. Do we accept such foolishness? The Roman Church is in conversation with the Oriental Orthodox. How can we be in conversation with those who've never spoken to a gay person, to tell them, "What you're doing doesn't fit with the gospel"? Let's build friendships, just as we're doing here. We cannot rule out talking to folks who see things differently from us.

Furr: I absolutely agree that colonialism, racism and sexism are so rooted in who we are and in our culture. Words have power. When I hear, "We're against (any group of people)," that doesn't feel right, energetically. We can understand inclusion in the Body of Christ from a non-oppositional perspective—but I can't really describe that without sitting and reflecting on it a bit. When we talk about our culture as being better than any other, I really beg to differ. We are the worst in healthcare in the developed world—and what a colonial word that is! Our education systems are far behind the rest of the world. Our political system is a laughingstock anywhere else in the world. People look at citizens of the United States with pity. We're clueless: We think we're the best thing in the world, and we really are not. An honest reflection on who we are as cultural beings is important. Jesus was about love over evangelizing or structures. It's about the divine reality within us, that divine presence, that Christ consciousness, that Holy Spirit within us. Instead of talking that way, we talk about being against patriarchy or sexism or colonialization or (fill in the blank). That oppositional stance that we are born and bred into in our culture is a big stumbling block. Jesus was inviting, not oppositional. He didn't hate those who they didn't agree with him. He didn't try to overly convince them that they were right or wrong. That's what the gospels of the last couple of weeks have been telling us. It's not about the law. It's about getting in touch with who you are, as a being sacred to God. That's where it starts. Utrecht is a tremendous example of people who discerned that their



church was not going in the direction it should – and they stepped away from it. The Holy Spirit opened the door and allowed in some fresh air of free heart-speak, allowing us to come together years later and ask ourselves, “What are we

really about?” We also stepped out of where we were, into this incredible path. It begins with how we speak about who we are, and how we reflect who we are, and how we live. If we want to evangelize, we don’t need to give somebody

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our manifesto; we just need to live the gospel, and people will respond to that, according to how the Spirit leads them. We say we want to include them. Into what? *They* are the Body of Christ! There is nothing on this planet that is not infused with the Spirit of God. What are we doing when we say, “Come, join our club”? Let’s not create yet another country club!

D’Arrigo: I read from 1John 4:7-8: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God. Everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.” We are all vicars of Christ, the hands and feet of Jesus on this earth, representatives of the Holy Spirit – may She forever be pleased with what comes out of my mouth, or at least laugh with me! We just have to keep meeting folks where they’re at, and just keep loving on them, even when every instinct in us wants to hate them. We need to meet them in love!

Ellis: There is something deep in the DNA of the gospel that is subversive. Its subversity does not make it the gospel, but it’s part of it, and the gospel should cost something!

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Quintana: One foundational thing we can all agree on is that Jesus is Lord. That's why we're here. And, yes, Michelangelo, we must love, love, love!

Strong: A friend who passed away a month ago was famous for saying, "God is love, and God is for everyone." The Eastern Church teaches so well that everyone is the image and likeness of God – so I want to grow with those people who try to follow Jesus, even if imperfectly!

Cheasty: Many things bind us together in terms of our understanding of the gospel, and in terms of where and how we're being led to spread the good news and to include all of God's children. That includes people who don't agree, but that doesn't mean that we give up our understanding of inclusivity. Among us here, there's far more that binds us together, than separates us. So, why are we in different "camps"?

Božek: Our conversations focus many times on the liturgy and sacraments and sacramental inclusion in the ecclesial and theological sense—but there is more to Church than sacraments and liturgy. "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" (Mt. 25:35). When a gay person comes to my church, nine out of ten times they are White and rich; they are seldom Black and poor. When I open our food pantry, those who come are usually non-White and non-rich. Maybe our pushing of an agenda of inclusion and sacraments and marriage, needs to be equally about doing something literally for the hungry and the homeless, the sick and imprisoned. Calling ourselves an

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Furr: That's so true! Being church versus doing church resonates very strongly with me. One thing that we have in common, and that we can celebrate in very diverse ways is that we have the spark of the Divine within us. That's what unites us. If you take Jesus's prayer seriously, we are one. There is no separation. I want to come to appreciate diversity in that context. We need to hold people accountable for their hurtful ways, but we can do that in love, recognizing that the spark of the Divine is in each person and aware of the fact that we are one!

Carter: This has been a great conversation. I loved so much of it, though I suspect it was not the conversation that Jayme was looking for. We often get confronted with the question: Who are we as Independent Catholics? People don't know, and

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we don't have a unified voice because we're not sure what we all agree on. The majority of this conversation was about our partial disagreements with and how to deal with

others who don't agree with us. We were fully ready to affirm what each of us was saying, but we kept devolving into: How do we deal with those people who aren't there yet? How urgent do we need to be? How do we define them: as "in" or "out"? The question was: What do *we* all agree on? One question is: Who are "we"? I think that Dr. Julie Byrne's approach is the right way to deal objectively, from an outside, academic point of view, with "What is an Independent Catholic?" That immediately poses the problem: There are plenty of "Independent Catholics" who disagree with us and are not inclusive. They don't reflect the values of Jesus that we all agree on. I would love to see us get at the nitty gritty of the doctrinal stuff, the theoretical stuff, to see if we don't really agree on most of this, and then we can share a unified voice with the world. I would love to see a conversation that actually ticks through the

Lambeth Quadrilateral. I have answers to all the questions that Jayme shared at the outset of this conversation. I would love to see a conversation that actually ticks through Jayme's proposed list, and I like the way he asked it: "What hesitations might we have with respect to the following affirmations of our ecclesial communion?" In his first point, for example, Jayme asks whether we can agree that "we are followers of the Jesus tradition, largely shaped by Western Catholicism." We immediately run into a problem that we barely got into, because we were derailed by how to deal with others in the larger movement. Jayme's second point says, "We largely look to the early, pre-Nicene church as a model and hermeneutic for the contemporary living of our faith." So, some people disagreed with a section of part one, by pointing out how they agreed with part two. I think there's a lot of "meat" there if we want to have a conversation on what we, as Independents, can all agree on, so that we can reliably present that to the world as an identifier.

Mathias: Here at Holy Family, one of the favorite hymns of our English congregation says, "We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord," and, to paraphrase Michelangelo, "they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love!" Despite all of the centrifugal forces that drive us apart, it's beautiful to see us coming together today to see if there's some centripetal forces that might bring more of us together throughout our movement, despite our histories and personalities. The Catholic Bishops Forum will meet next week to discuss what they have in common, then many of us will meet in Las Vegas in two weeks, and Marek will be reflecting there on the things that unite us. Somehow God is working through us! Next week, let's delve into the Lambeth Quadrilateral and those additional nine points, to see what concretely we might all agree on!

## Things We Agree On, Part 2

*In this conversation, clergy continue to explore possible commonalities, with a point-by-point analysis of the Lambeth Quadrilateral and other statements.*

Mathias: The Catholics Bishops Forum is convening this evening in St. Louis, Missouri, and they are wondering if they can agree on the Lambeth Quadrilateral. I'm wondering if we might contribute to their conversation by asking ourselves whether we agree or disagree with the following affirmations. Let's go through them one-by-one. For each affirmation, tell us: What do you like about it? What do you hate about it? What edits would you make to it? What words would you add or delete or change? I also appreciate your willingness to play "devil's advocate" with each affirmation! My question: Can we, as Independent or Autocephalous Catholics, agree on any or all of these four statements? We'll start with the first affirmation from the Lambeth Quadrilateral: "The Holy Scriptures are important to us. They contain all things necessary to salvation."

Lynch: First of all, we need to define what "the Holy Scriptures" are? There are several versions of the Holy Scriptures. There's the Protestant Bible, there's the Catholic Bible that has the seven deuterocanonical books, and there's the Eastern Orthodox scriptures, which add a few more books. We also have extracanonical gospels. First, we have to decide what "Holy Scriptures" means. With reference to "all things necessary to salvation": What about the tradition of the Church? What about the proposition that God is always revealing God's self to us on an ongoing basis? God didn't stop talking when the scriptural canon was closed.

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God speaks to all of us, every day. Finally, some allowance has to be made for advances in the sciences, including the soft sciences, like psychology, sociology and anthropology, and the hard sciences, like chemistry and biology. Finally, we need to define

what we mean by “salvation.” Is it something eternal, something on earth, or some combination of the two?

Kemp: I would add that we have the extra-canonical gospels, which include the Gospel of Thomas. Some people believe that there are several parallels between the Gospel according to Thomas, and the so-called Quelle or “Q” source. There are scriptural writings that go beyond the four canonical gospels, which were not adopted until the beginning of the fifth century. I’m good with the scriptures. I think scriptures are beautiful. I love the four Gospels, but I don’t think we should restrict ourselves to those.

Mathias: We approved the first scriptural canon around 400 A.D., so I like to point out that it took us about 300 years to agree to include the Book of Revelation in our scriptures.

<p>Furr: I really don’t like this statement at all. Yes, the Holy Scriptures are important to us, but they don’t contain all things necessary to salvation, because salvation is not dependent upon those scriptures. Salvation is dependent upon the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p>Scriptures are important to us, but they don’t contain all things necessary to salvation, because salvation is not dependent upon those scriptures. Salvation is dependent upon the Holy Spirit. I have a fundamental issue with that whole statement. I think the intent was good, but I don’t find that statement to be appropriate.</p>
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Božek: I would describe these statements as the lowest common denominator. They are intentionally very loose and open to interpretation. So, David is right: They don’t define the canon. They let individual churches and communities define their canon. They don’t suggest that sources of salvation can’t be found outside the scriptures—in tradition, science, etc. These statements are purposefully open-ended, to allow each community to build on the lowest common denominator. For that reason, I do like them. They are so open-ended, inclusive and open to multiple interpretations.

Mathias: Our parish is currently in the middle of a course on biblical apocalyptic literature, which is fascinating because the

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Strong: Like Marek, I read the Lambeth Quadrilateral as an attempt to bring together the Anglican Church and to find common ground with evangelicals, Anglo Catholics, Orthodox and Catholics, including the Church of Utrecht. I interpret it as: The scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation, but not everything required for salvation. Our Eastern sisters and brothers would say that *theosis* is our growing in the likeness of God.

Robison: Interestingly, a series of essays from 1988 called *The Quadrilateral at 100* fell into my lap a couple of days ago. Article Six defines the scriptures as the Protestant canon. It says, "The Church reads other books, for example of life and instruction of manners, but does not yet apply them to establish any doctrine." The Quadrilateral came out of the faith in order movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which was its own beast. There was an ecumenical movement that inquired into the baseline on which we can all agree. The Episcopal Church defined them, then the bishops at Lambeth refined them. It's a document very much from its historical context. We must ask how they speak to us over 100 years later. Maybe they need to be refined a bit. In the

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confusion.

Mathias: The next affirmation is: "The creeds are sufficient statements of our Christian faith."

Lynch: I want to endorse that particular statement in its entirety. We also need to speak loudly about the tendency of some people in the Independent Catholic movement to do away with the creeds in the name of inclusivity. The creeds are something that we all sing together, and they are subject to different meanings for all of us. The person next to me saying the creed is not going to have the same idea of what

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it means as I do – and I'm okay with that. We need the creeds to hold us together, but that doesn't mean that we all have the same interpretation of them.

I find the creeds very inspiring. In fact, I have composed a couple of musical settings for them, and we sing the Nicene Creed every Sunday. I do have an issue with some versions of the Nicene creed that defines the Holy Spirit as a male. The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* says "He is worshiped and glorified," referring the Holy Spirit. We have changed that, to say, "who is worshiped and glorified" – leaving the gender of the Holy Spirit neutral. Here at St. Cecilia, we teach that the Holy Spirit is female. My wife is a vocational deacon, and she has very strong feelings on that.

Kemp: The Ascension Alliance is non-creedal, and we do not impose any creed on anybody. As statements of belief, they're certainly interesting, but I have some problems with the wordings of some of them. For example, how can we say

*How can we say that Jesus Christ  
is "the only son of God"  
when we preach that  
we are all children of God?*

that Jesus Christ is "the only son of God" when we preach that we are all children of God? That takes away from how Holy Spirit inspires us to interpret these creeds today. If you

want to accept the creeds, have at it, but we don't impose creeds on anyone. It's part of the "loosey-goosey" charism that we received from Herman Adrian Spruit. So, I'm on the opposite end of the spectrum as David.

Ellis: I'm less sanguine about this, than I am of the first one. I would assent that the Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation to the degree that we understand Christianity to be an incarnational religion, which has a history that matters. The scriptures are not an exhaustive rendering of all things Christian, but they are normative for



us, and they shape us. The second statement, that the creeds are important to us: Without doubt, they are sufficient statements, and I tend to take them literally. They are sufficient statements of our Christian faith, as far as they go, to the degree that they address the topics that they raise. Are there other ways of thinking? Are there other topics about which Christians can profitably theorize, that are not contained in the historical creeds? John Henry Cardinal Newman spoke about the development of doctrine, but nothing that is repugnant to either the scriptures or the creed. The scriptures

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and the creeds are important insofar as we are an historical religion grounded in the beliefs of those who've gone before us.

Kemp: What's necessary for salvation is grace, so I don't think that just believing in the creeds is sufficient for salvation. I think that salvation, in terms of our union with God, is dependent upon grace.

Ellis: I'm in complete and enthusiastic agreement with you about that, and I think the Holy Scriptures are saturated in grace and are a testimony of grace—and because of that are sufficient.

Božek: I tend to look at the scriptures and the creeds the same way that I look at the U.S. Constitution: They are our founding documents. They are what they are. They were given to us, and they are hugely imperfect, but they contain the new idea of how to be a community—in terms of state for the American Constitution, and in terms of church with the scripture and creeds. Should they be interpreted and reinterpreted in every generation? Yes. They constitute us as a community, as a church, just as the U.S. Constitution constitutes us as a state. So, we should be inspired by them. Again, I like how open-ended those statements are: They say they're important. They don't claim that nothing else is not important, or that they are exclusively limited to these statements. Speaking of grace, we wouldn't have terms like "grace" without the tradition and without the Church. We

are slaves of our translations, and we are slaves of tradition.  
The question of which came first—the scriptures or the

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tradition—is a chicken-and-egg conundrum. The statements affirm that the scriptures and creeds are important, but they don't exclude other sources.

Kemp: What bothers me about the statement is that it implies that the creeds alone are sufficient statements of Christian faith. I don't believe that the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed are sufficient for Christian faith. To paraphrase, Jesus said, "Love God with everything you've got, and love your neighbor as yourself." If you want to narrow down the core of Christianity, love is where it's at: Love God, love neighbor, and love yourself!

Strong: I was recently talking to some UCC folks, who are non-creedal, too. They believe that the creeds testify to what the early Church believed centuries ago, but that we've come to different understandings now. The creeds are testimonies: What we believe about who we are.

Mathias: Here in Austin, we recite the creed every Sunday, but I'm personally intrigued by the complex history of the creed. The very word *credo*, "I believe," distinguishes what I believe from what others believe. Creeds are, by their very nature, divisive: They distinguish those who uphold or

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espouse them, from those who don't or can't. In our mass programs here at Holy Family, we put the English translation of filioque, "and the Son," in parentheses, to acknowledge how the Roman Church deviated from the "north star" of our

faith prior to 1054 A.D. I'm not willing to stake my life on the Roman creed being any more "necessary to salvation" than the creed of the Orthodox Church. I'm intrigued by the purpose of creeds—and also by the formulation of creeds. When you get together an ancient group of bishops whose task is to unite the empire in a common belief, how much of their work is inspired by the Spirit, versus human dynamics? How much of it is more than a dogmatic people—Christians, in this case—attempting to distinguish themselves from "heretics," like the Arians who had a different view of Christ?

Kemp: Thank you for saying what I've been saying for a while!

Ellis: There's a certain freedom that comes with discipline. There's a prayer in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* that speaks of our service to God "whose service is perfect freedom." We have yet to exhaust the freeing nature of the scriptures. When people are oppressed, they read the gospel and apply it to their lives! They start to *do*—and not just believe—theology. If I had a vote on the canonical scriptures, I would definitely add Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." It is inspired.

Lynch: After a considerable amount of study and research, we decided not to use the *filioque*. If you look at the genesis of how the *filioque* was added to the creed after 800 A.D., you will see that it was originally added by one local bishop, and then a bunch of others followed suit, and it upset the Eastern Church, which wasn't consulted. If we're going to have a creed, it needs to be a product of the whole Church, which it was when it was originally formulated. For one

<p><i>If we're going to have a creed, it needs to be a product of the whole Church, which it was when it was originally formulated. For one bishop to add the filioque clause undermines the unity of the Church! The filioque, as defined, serve no useful purpose.</i></p>	<p>bishop to add the <i>filioque</i> clause undermines the unity of the Church! The <i>filioque</i>, as defined, serve no useful purpose.</p>
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Furr: With what we now know about how the universe works, the languaging of the creed and its concepts are old. When I recite the creed, it doesn't feel right for me. The concept of going down to hell, for instance, no longer makes sense.

Robison: The *filioque* is interesting and arose because Spain was dominated by Arian Visigoths who kept inquiring into the relationship between the Son and the Spirit. The bishops of Toledo brought an end to the conversation by saying that

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*Now, if we take it out,  
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the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. The *filioque* failed backwards into the Western creed.

Now, if we take it out, we're left with the question of the relationship between the Son and the Spirit. The Reformed churches still get hung up over creeds and confessions, asking

themselves, "Should we say the Westminster Confession or the Helvetic Confession?" The Anglican bishops decided to start with the two ancient creeds – and they stopped there, knowing that it doesn't further unity to argue over whether you're going to say the English Confessional of 1678 or the Westminster Confessional.

Kemp: People have spent a lot of time over the years arguing about the creeds. I'm not sure what we can add to those arguments here. I feel a little defensive, because the Ascension Alliance has gone on record, saying that we're non-dogmatic and non-creedal. When I'm in a group of people for whom the creeds are extremely important and who recite them every Sunday, I feel that my raising of issues is like bickering, which I don't mean to do. I'd much rather talk about things that we agree on, rather than arguing over whether or not to include the *filioque* in a statement of beliefs. I'm not sure what that does to advance the living of the Christian life, or the love of God and the good pastoral stewardship of our brothers and sisters. Perhaps I am a deviant, so I feel defensive about this issue. My heart's in a good place, and I don't want to bicker with

*Why do we spend  
so much time on such things?  
Is it really "walking the walk"  
to be engaged in this kind  
of nitpicking?*

folks. I simply wonder: Why do we spend so much time on such things? Is it really "walking the walk" to be engaged in this kind of nitpicking? I'm not opposed to anybody believing anything, and I'm glad that these things are open to interpretation. I love

theology for its task of exploring the meaning of these things for us and for each generation.

Mathias: The third affirmation deals with the sacraments. It intrigues me that our sisters and brothers of the Catholic Bishops Forum are using the Lambeth Quadrilateral, which suggests that the dominical sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are important. In the Catholic tradition, we have honored seven sacraments now for some twelve centuries. Last week, David Justin suggested that there could be many more than seven. Thought on what we might agree on with respect to the sacraments?

Robison: When the Union of Utrecht was born, they said that there were two dominical sacraments that are necessary for the Church. Seven is the perfect Aristotelian number, so naturally we would come up with the other five things that we commonly called sacraments. The funniest part of the *Summa* is when Thomas Aquinas tries to shoehorn Marriage into the sacramental structure. Baptism and Holy Communion, in this instance, form the lowest common denominator. We are commanded to do both.

Kemp: Numbers are highly significant, and the number seven is also important in Jewish mysticism. I'm good with seven, even while recognizing that the question of seven sacraments versus two cost Sir Thomas More his head. People's lives have been lost over such trifling issues!

Robison: Early modern English history is my thing, and much has been written about More. His final statement was that he was willing to accept everything, except for the statement that the pope was not the head of the church. He died for papal supremacy, not the number of sacraments.

Kemp: I stand corrected.

Robison: Thomas Moore gets off way too light for being an absolutely horrible human being—but he had Jesuits writing his biography!

Kemp: The nitpicking of theology just doesn't feel open and loving and focused on spirituality.

Mathias: Here in Austin, celebrating the seven traditional sacraments of the Church is one thing that makes us feel "Catholic."

Part of the tradition that we've been handed are these seven sacraments, and, if I were honest, a lot of people come to us for sacraments at Holy Family, who don't come to us for mass on a regular basis. There's certainly a complex history surrounding the sacraments and the income they generate. People want the sacraments of the Church, and they are willing to donate considerable revenue streams to parishes like ours because the sacraments are so important to them. In the Latino context in particular, baptisms and *quinceañeras* are very important for people, so we are happy to celebrate the seven traditional sacraments of the Church for the People of God.

Strong: Our Eastern brothers and sisters recognize seven sacraments, and they recognize other sacramentals, as we do. They also share the three sacraments of initiation at the same time. The Polish National Catholic Church considers preaching a sacrament. Historically, there was a value to the idea of seven sacraments, but I'm not sure that I want to be so limited that I can't say that other things—like rites of passage—have a sacramental value.

Furr: For five years, I lived on a Navajo reservation, where people used corn pollen as a sacrament. The *people* are the Church, so, if they regard something as a sacrament, who am I to say

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that it's not? If we're going to be a truly inclusive Church, we have to recognize that different cultures will have different sacraments and traditions that are important to them. We

can't limit the sacraments to a certain number. The number of sacraments depends on where you are and what tradition you come from.

Božek: Beginning toward the end of Vatican II, the German theological world engaged in a conversation of Christ being the only sacrament: Jesus the Christ is the sacrament of God. Karl Rahner famously dubbed the Church the uber sacrament of the faith. We could name "sacraments" forever, but, like that German tradition, I believe that Jesus

the Christ is *the* sacrament of God, though whom all other graces come.

Mathias: The next affirmation suggests that the historic episcopate, locally adapted, is important for us. Here in Austin, apostolic succession is indeed very important for us. It allows us to defend ourselves from detractors who might suggest that our sacraments are not valid.

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Kemp: I was attracted to the Independent Catholic movement many years ago by the idea of a transmission of historical validity that bestows sacerdotal authority. I think that many of us in the Independent movement would agree on this, since it establishes our validity.

Božek: For most Old Catholic and Anglican churches, succession is so much more than historical pedigree. We buy pedigreed dogs knowing that they were bred from dogs that were bred from other dogs. For me, this is one of the biggest scandals of the Independent movement in this country. When I came from the Roman tradition and saw hundreds of bishops claiming to have a pedigree that goes back to Jesus Christ himself, I found it funny and scandalizing at the same time.

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They highlight the historicity, whereas most Anglican and Old Catholic churches emphasize the sharing in the faith of the apostles, over any historical chain of the laying on of hands. That's why these lowest common denominator statements are important, since they connect us with the historic faith. Historical episcopal succession is important because we do not reinvent the Church in every century.

Kemp: Many people in our movement are really focused on apostolic succession. Herman Adrian Spruit claimed 17 different lines of apostolic succession. I have a hard time

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with that. There's only one apostolic succession—and it goes back to Jesus. In the Eastern Church, the idea of being a bishop and functioning outside the Church is anathema. If you're a bishop and you leave the church, you don't practice the sacraments anymore, because you have no authority outside of the Church!

Ellis: I'm in substantial agreement with Father Marek: Apostolic succession is first and foremost a succession of the apostolic faith, which interestingly takes us back to the first two affirmations. Properly understood, apostolic succession

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was originally intended to be a guarantor of faith. Hans Küng says it is secondly a succession of service. Only thirdly is it a succession of office. If the first two are not met, then the third is of no practical value, even though the person may have, according to Augustine, the ability to confect the Eucharistic.

Laying hands on another person is predicated on the faith and service! The issue of “wandering bishops” worries me less if bishops are doing what they're supposed to be doing as bearers of apostolic succession.

Strong: Apostolic succession must be connected to a church or community. We often attach that to “dioceses”—which is why people criticize us for having dioceses across the country. With apostolic succession, there needs to be a people whom you've been called to serve. For me, it's hard to accept the idea of a “bishop” who has no flock, no people.



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How can he call himself a bishop simply due to having received the laying on of hands? Consecration has to be more than the mere laying on of hands. It has to be connected to a community!

Lynch: Rather than criticize somebody for calling himself a bishop, we need to keep in mind that we are all laborers in the Lord's vineyard. Rather than heap criticism on "wandering bishops," whoever they are, we need to do what we can to help them have a fruitful ministry. There are many aspects

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Let's be Christian to one another.*

of ministry: liturgical, chaplaincy, religious orders. Let's not be too critical about bishops without a community. Let's be Christian to one another.

Strong: Many folks who are consecrated to the episcopacy don't want to do any ministry – apart from saying mass in their private chapel by themselves. I've been in this movement for over 25 years, and I've seen way too many people who have no experience as priests and no experience of ministry to a community – yet they expect all the benefits of the laying on of hands.

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They have no commitment to mission and ministry! Many of the people I've encountered who participate in solo consecrations and who have no people, have no desire for mission or ministry.

Lynch: Let's help them get there!

Strong: They don't want to be there!

Robison: According to legend, when Anselm became archbishop of Canterbury, he had a sign placed over the door of his library at Lambeth Palace, which is where he met with the bishops of England. The sign contained a picture of the 11 apostles (not including Matthias) and read, "Not first in authority,

but in service do we descend.” Bishops are consecrated to serve! I worked for a summer as an actual shepherd north of Austin, Texas, and I can tell you: Taking care of sheep is not an easy task! There is no stupider, filthier creature on the face of this earth than a sheep. The Bible is not paying us a compliment. In TOCCUSA, before anyone is elected a bishop, they must pastor a parish for at least three years. That has caused us complications, but it is a big thing. And a diocese has to be made up of at least three parishes. We’ve

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consciously, to our detriment at times, hung on to the idea that a bishop is the center of a community, not just somebody wandering around with a big stick. Unless the shepherd smells like their sheep, they aren’t a shepherd!

Mathias: We have focused on the Lambeth Quadrilateral, which is what the Catholic Bishops Forum is

discussing in St. Louis tomorrow. During a recent conversation, I was trying to formulate other high-level ideas on which we might agree. I’m interested in people throwing darts at these and playing devil’s advocate. (1) We are followers of the Jesus tradition, largely shaped by Western Catholicism. (2) We largely look to the early, pre-Nicene Church as a model and hermeneutic for the contemporary living of our faith. (3) We value apostolic succession through the episcopal laying on of hands as a sign of unity and continuity of the Church, rooted in the near-universal practice and rule of succession in the early, undivided Church. (4) Like the communities of the early Church, we are autocephalous or “self-governing,” not subject to the authority of persons outside our communities and/or jurisdictions, and not interfering in other communities and/or jurisdictions. (5) We esteem Jesus’ “discipleship of equals,” largely seeing ourselves as equals (*pares*) despite our diverse gifts, titles, offices or seniority.

Strong: When we gathered in Austin in 2019, Bishop Frank Krebs of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion shared a presentation that highlighted the Lambeth Quadrilateral but also shared

a fifth point: synodality. So, we've had a discussion similar to this.

Mathias: David, thank you for pointing that out. For those who are interested, we published the proceedings of that conference, which included Frank's presentation, under the title *A New Way of Being Catholic*. I certainly recommend that we all acquaint ourselves with that presentation!

Kemp: I like the second point, about looking to the model of the early Church. Primitive just feels more pure.

Mathias: Is anyone willing to play devil's advocate with that affirmation, since we have had some 1,700 years of history since the great enactment of uniformity that occurred through the Council of Nicaea?

Robison: Our context today is more like post-Nicene when the Vandals were at the gates of Rome. Our cultural situation is more like the end of the Empire, than it is the pre-Nicene Hellenistic culture. Things were not falling apart during the pre-Nicene Church. The wheels weren't coming off. Our situation today more closely resembles going into the Dark Ages, where "the center cannot hold." We need to take that seriously as we address the world around us. We might look to the pre-Nicene, but we face a world that is very different.

Kemp: Elaine Pagels and others point to the great diversity of the early Church—and diversity wasn't a bad thing. There

wasn't universal agreement about all things. Christianity was not a homogenous movement. I like that idea of freedom and diversity in the pre-Nicene Church! My greatest criticism of the Roman Catholic Church is its desire to be homogenous and to standardize and control everything. I don't mean to be critical of the Roman Church, but I don't think that's conducive to Spirit!

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Furr: We live in an era where the Christ consciousness is a new thing. I sometimes wonder whether this change of consciousness that we're all going through is the Second Coming—since the First Coming was all about changing our consciousness. I wonder whether having creeds doesn't keep us in a box that prohibits us from having the capacity, freedom and ability to "think outside the box" that we've constructed over the last 2,000 years. I absolutely go along

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with the creeds, but they are old—and we're not in a place where "old" works that well anymore! We're in a whole different place now, and we need to be able to say, "Let create again!"

Strong: I like the idea of the pre-Nicene Church as a model and hermeneutic for a contemporary living of our faith. We can reach back to that Church, and we can also benefit from all that we've learned from Black liberation, women's liberation, LGBT liberation—the voices of all who have come since the early Church!

Božek: I like the pre-Nicene—or, as Alan says, the "primitive"—model of Church because it's a good administrative model. It presumes the local autonomy—or, as Jayme says, the autocephalous nature—of the local church, but it also assumes local unity of the Church. When Paul was in Corinth, there were not five bishops there. There was a single "overseer" of the church there, and the local church had a structural and theological unity. It was diverse from the churches across the Mediterranean Sea. Another scandal of the Independent movement in the U.S. is that we often

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have five or six bishops residing in the same city—each claiming apostolic succession, and each with a very small community, if any. There is no local unity or cohesion

whatsoever! The lack of the primitive unity of the Church on the local level is scandalous. The fact that we have five or six Independent Catholic bishops in St. Louis, for example, is absolutely scandalous.

Robison: When I was in the seminary, we joked about the autocephalous archbishop metropolitan of the Slovo-bian Orthodox Church for all Lower Southeast Sandusky—which would put you in the middle of one of the canals!

Božek: We have far fewer centripetal forces in our movement. Instead, when we allow diversity on the local level to be unlimited, we end up with a scandalizing, centrifugal administrative situation.

Strong: We're certainly not alone: It's happening in the Orthodox Church in America, too. When I lived in Minneapolis, there were two or three Orthodox bishops there.

Mathias: I throw out for our consideration seven more statements.

1. To facilitate good will and avoid confusing the people of God, we do not self-identify as Roman Catholic (since we are not part of the Roman Catholic Church) or as Old Catholic (since we are not part of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches).
2. We recognize that all people are created in the image and likeness of God and are temples of God's Spirit.
3. We do not withhold the sacraments of the Church from people based on gender, gender identity or marital status.
4. We practice open table fellowship, where all are welcome to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ.
5. We love and accept people "where" they are.
6. We recognize that many people have been hurt by churches and by their sinful, human ministers throughout history; while recognizing our own sins and shortcomings, we desire to provide a different witness. When we hurt others.
7. Believing that God calls us to community and relationship, and that isolation results from sin, we esteem unity, relationship, cooperation and partnership as sources of productivity (Eccl. 4:9), support (Eccl. 4:10), comfort (Eccl. 4:11) and strength (Eccl. 4:12). We aspire to build and not burn bridges.

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since such labels of ourselves confuse people or lead people to believe something that is not true—for instance, that we belong to the Roman Catholic Church or the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic

Churches. For perspective on this one, I’m largely looking in the direction of John, who is part of “the Old Catholic Church of the U.S.” The other statements are perhaps less controversial—like number two, about us being created in the image of God, which I believe to be an important tenet. These seven statements come from our last conversation, and I simply tried to capture what I was hearing from various voices as y’all suggested other things that might be important for us.

Kemp: I’m careful not to identify as Roman Catholic, and I like these others.

Robison: When I say that I am “Old Catholic,” I use that phrase to mean that I embrace an ethic and a tradition. I’m very careful to say that I’m not a part of the Union of Utrecht, but I’m also happy to explain how our movement has its roots in the Netherlands. I often cite Döllinger about how it is that Rome created its “new” form of Catholicism when it embraced papal infallibility. At that point, they renounced their embrace of our beliefs, and they stopped being part of us. I’m quite clear in that there is no community of Utrecht-

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style Christians in the U.S. TOCCUSA is trying to adopt Utrecht’s model here in the U.S. The word “autocephalous” might be better: It makes people stop and stare. I don’t find the first statement objectionable in principle.

Strong: Regarding the first statement, I often say that I embrace Old Catholic theology. When we start using words like “autocephalous,” it’s often gets complicated for people. I had an interesting experience with the sister of my ex-partner, who observed, “You’re asking me to join something that’s ‘old?’” There’s a problem with the translation and marketing of that word!

Robison: I’m constantly saying, “No, I don’t say the mass in Latin!”

Strong: The sixth statement likely needs to spell out how the Church has hurt people – through racism, sexism and classism. I like to say that all -isms find their home in the Church.

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All -isms find their home in the Church.*

Furr: I tend to shy away from statements about what I *don’t* do, and focus instead on what I am doing. We’re still comparing ourselves to Rome and the Old Catholic Church: When are we going to stop doing that? We don’t need to say that we’re not part of them. As long as we keep trying to apologize, we’re still hooked into those organizations energetically – and I don’t know that that’s healthy or

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energetically – and I don’t know that  
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progressive in a good way. To me, that’s problematic. I don’t need to tell anybody that I’m *not* part of the Roman Church but I am very open to saying who I am. We’re trying to move away from the word “independent,”

but we are a sacramental movement that is all about inclusion and the love of God. For that same reason, I don’t need to say that I’m *not* part of the Old Catholic Church.

Kemp: I did my D.Min. at a United Church of Canada school, at St. Stephen’s College in Edmonton and St. Andrew’s in Saskatoon, at the University Saskatchewan. We had people from different churches from all over Canada and parts of the United States, and, by identifying myself as Independent Catholic, people wanted to know, “What the

hell is that?" It gave me an opportunity to engage with my colleagues from other churches and to explain that, no, we're not part of the Roman Catholic Church, although we derive some of our lineage from there. And it gave me an opportunity to talk about Utrecht and the Independent movement in the United States. Each of us has to have an "elevator speech"!

Strong: I fight having to define myself as something other than Roman Catholic. As I've embraced Old Catholic

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theologians, I've found a language that doesn't reference Rome, as many Independent Catholics do. It boggles my mind when people in our movement self-identify as "Old Catholic" but they celebrate the

Immaculate Conception or the Assumption. We need to define our Catholicism in a way that doesn't reference Rome or Utrecht. In a lecture to TOCCUSA, Günter Esser spoke of creating an American version of Old Catholicism and of the American elements of the "Old Catholic" theology that we possess.

Božek: I'm happy to play devil's advocate on two points. Regarding the second statement, it's important for English-speaking churches to correctly translate Paul: When he says, "Don't you know that you are temples of God," he is not speaking of the singular "you"; he's speaking in the plural. We are not the temples of God as individuals; the only time that we are the temple of God is when we are community! To think that "I am a temple of God" is a very Western, individualistic, non-biblical, non-Pauline "Jesus-and-me" concept. It's a limitation of English. Regarding the fourth statement, what is troubling to me in pastoral practice, and to anyone who has a semi-traditional parish ministry is: How do I fit my "open communion" policy with preparing children for First Communion? At our parish, we have a



two-year program to prepare children for First Communion. When I say, "We welcome everyone to communion," the kids might as well say, "...'everyone' but us!" How do we reconcile "open communion" with our

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*When I say, "We welcome everyone to communion," the kids might as well say, "...'everyone' but us!" How do we reconcile "open communion" with our traditional parish practices of preparing children for a year or more, to mindfully & conscientiously receive the Eucharist?*

traditional parish practices of preparing children for a year or more, to mindfully and conscientiously receive the Eucharist? I would look for a way to qualify that statement, perhaps to read "all properly-prepared persons." It's difficult to be inclusive and practice open communion while, at the

same time, having First Communion preparation. I'm not sure how to do it.

Mathias: Here at Holy Family, we adopted many years ago a policy of bucking the semi-Pelagianist idea so firmly rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition that people need to "earn" the

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sacraments of the Church. As a result, we offer a single class for sacramental preparation, on the day of the celebration, so that people understand what they're celebrating and how we celebrate it. Prior

to the pandemic, we had our Children's Liturgy of the Word, and Deacon Elsa offers catechesis for the Spanish-language families that desire it for their children – but never as a parish requirement for the sacraments of the Church. It's one of the attractions of Holy Family: We don't have a six-month or one-year or two-year program of "hoops" to jump through for sacraments. The "earning" of sacraments was condemned as a heresy by the early Church! We have to trust that the Spirit is present and active in the sacraments

of the Church—even if we don’t have a forced march of teenagers through a Confirmation program for two years.

Furr: Sure, we believe that “all people are created in the image and likeness of God and are temples of God’s Spirit” —but we’re also learning now about the sentience of all life, both flora and fauna. So, why do we continue to put ourselves in a particular category that doesn’t need to be a particular

*We’re also learning now about the sentience of all life, both flora and fauna. So, why do we continue to put ourselves in a particular category that doesn’t need to be a particular category? We continue to introduce hierarchy into our relationship with all of creation!*

category? We continue to introduce hierarchy into our relationship with all of creation! I don’t believe that we are the only species created in the image of God. I believe that all of creation is the image of God—and that we use languaging that

separates us from that reality. I also have a problem with the sixth statement: “We recognize that many people have been hurt by churches and by their sinful ministers throughout history. While recognizing our own sins and shortcomings, we desire to provide a different witness.” Where’s the commitment in that? I desire to have a Harley Davidson motorcycle, but I don’t have the commitment to going out and getting one! There are no “teeth” in that statement, nothing to grab onto.

Strong: We need to name the hurts and be explicit about our commitments! In light of George Floyd, we have all sorts of

*We have all sorts of anti-racism statements that have resulted in no action. Let’s name the hurts, & say what we’re going to do to stop them from happening any more in the Church!*

anti-racism statements that have resulted in no action. Let’s name the hurts, and say what we’re going to do to stop them from happening any more in the Church!

Kemp: The original sin of America is racism, and we need to confess that we have sinned. People of privilege have hurt a hell of a lot of people. We need to be honest and real about that. I’ve been an Independent Catholic a long time—though not as long as you, David—and before going to Austin in 2019, I lived in my own little universe without a

lot of contact with other Independent Catholics. I don't know what the pre-Nicene equivalent of Zoom was, but I appreciate the group that came together in Austin and now continues to come together in these conversations to talk about who we are and to build relationships with one another. Building relationships takes a long time, and intimacy requires interaction. I assume God has a plan for us that we aren't yet aware of!

Robison: I hope I don't come across as overly-antagonistic in this group: As an undergraduate, I was educated in a philosophical and historical school of thought that basically involved arguments that were "fights to the death" in our professors' offices. I appreciate our frank, open exchange of ideas, and I apologize if my "teeth" come out. I learn a tremendous amount from all of you—just like I now have to go and examine again my views on sentient life! I was part of a panel a few years ago on alien life. A Jesuit at the pontifical observatory wrote a great book: *Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial?* It opens up a world of questions—just as we're doing here!

Marsh: I'm grateful for the diversity of this group and the frank opinions that we're able to share. It's nice to speak with other laypeople and clergy in the Independent world!

Cheasty: As I look at this group, I think: There are great many things that can divide us—but there's a whole lot more that unites us! Let's continue to affirm what unites us amid our diversity, and let's continue to come together in grace and respect. This group is a model for all who are involved in the Independent Sacramental Movement! It's natural that we compare ourselves to others, so, when people ask me about Independent Catholicism, I tell them, "We're

*It's natural that we compare ourselves to others, so, when people ask me about Independent Catholicism, I tell them, "We're Catholic—without all the crazy!" We're on a path, and we have no idea where it leads—but that's part of the excitement!*

Catholic—without all the crazy!" We're on a path, and we have no idea where it leads—but that's part of the excitement!

Božek: It takes both intellectual and spiritual humility to accept the simple fact that we are standing on the shoulders of thousands of people who came before us, and someone else will be standing on our shoulders. That historical humility

requires me to accept the historicity of the Church and to humbly play our role in making it better—in very proactively fighting racism and sexism and all those “isms.” Accepting where I came from doesn’t mean that I accept the sins of my parents. It means that I hope that my children will live without them, and that I will try to give them the richness of our tradition without the sins of our grandparents. This takes a huge dosage of intellectual and spiritual humility!

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## Growing Local Communities

*Many clergy wonder how to grow their local communities. In this conversation, they share their ideas with one another.*

Mathias: We thank Marek for suggesting the theme of today's conversation. Many years ago, a seminar on community organizing suggested that the secret to power and influence in this world lies in organizing people and resources. I found that maxim to be true when I ran for political office and served on our local school board here in Austin, representing a district of 55,000 voters for eight years. In order to be elected to public office, I had to organize people and get them to the polls, and, in order to do that, I had to organize the necessary money to fund those efforts. That experience admittedly shapes the way I view our endeavors as a Church. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, has done a marvelous job of organizing people by telling them if they don't go to Sunday mass, they will go to hell! Then, at each gathering of people, they pass around a basket, so that they're organizing resources as well! That's why the Roman Church has all the resources it enjoys. I'm not necessarily advocating that we do the same, but Marek's question is valid: In light of the fact that Old/Independent Catholicism is largely a phenomenon of very small communities, of "house churches" in many places—and

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Božek: Some of you who have come to the Independent movement from bigger churches likely share my experience. When I and we were excommunicated, I googled “non-Roman Catholic churches in the U.S.,” and the list appeared endless. I clicked into the websites of dozens of jurisdictions, and many of their website were truly

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16 years ago have ceased to exist. It seems that parishes, dioceses and jurisdictions in our Independent Catholic movement are constantly being reinvented. My question is: How can we create sustainability, and how can we grow? We seem to be sentenced to running in circles. We seem to be okay with not having sizable congregations. Many of us are okay with not wanting to grow parishes. I don’t want to diminish other small, face-to-face ministries, which are important, spiritual and God-given ministries – but maybe there’s room for growth in our movement for more traditional parish ministries. I am not happy with limiting our wonderful movements to a “house-church” movement. Hence, my questions: Do we even want to grow? If so, then how can we grow? Things seem not to be working, and the definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over again, while expecting different results. The Independent movement in the U.S. seems to be following this definition of insanity quite literally. For me, it comes down to two very simple questions: Do we want to grow? And, if so, how?

Cass: I love Marek and his church, and I had the opportunity to visit for an extraordinary ordination and consecration weekend several years ago. Marek brings up something that you've heard me harp on before: the clericalism in our movement! We all want to be a tiny little Rome, or an itty

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bitty Utrecht! We all want to be Canterbury or Augsburg! As Catholics, those are the only models we know. We think that we have to have bishops with all sorts of powers, and we end up with communities that are top-heavy with bishops! Then we try to support the structure that we've created, and we lose sight of what we're really about: a reform of what it means to be truly Catholic.

I was just joking last week that we should start an Hispanic or Latinx parish in Greenville: There's a different Hispanic or Latinx community church on every corner! How can they have all these different churches that sprout up and are packed? The response was gold: "This is an industrious community. The Latinx and Hispanic community know what it means to come together as community and give birth to dreams!" The Independent Sacramental Movement is not a community-based movement. We introduce ourselves as splinters of the wood, rather than as Catholic Christians who merit a church. Marek's church has done something very unique in the movement by staying away from affiliation with a jurisdiction. I went after them, thinking what a beautiful gem it would be to have St. Stanislaus as part of the Progressive Catholic Church International. Numbers of other bishops have approached St. Stanislaus. Marek understands what it means to be a pastor who shepherds a community that calls forth a dream. Perhaps we should make a conscious effort to restore or to build community first, and to allow this movement to be community-driven. Let communities call our bishops and priests—instead of us setting up whatever we set up, then wonder why things aren't growing! We need to be out tilling the soil and planting the seed.

Yell: Two things come to mind. No Christian community exists without relationships, and let's be honest: people seem to like to find ways to separate us from each other rather than find our common ground. Problems have always brought people together, and we predominantly-European Anglos don't have a common problem in this movement. We don't have a coat hanger on which to hang our need for the Divine, and we don't want community because of the demands it places on us. One of the reasons that immigrant communities build such vibrant churches is because they need community for security, strength and voice. Numbers are going down in all White churches because we don't want or need one another. During the past 2,000 years, most Christian churches have not been selling relationship with Jesus as the basis for our relationships and community. They've been selling relationships with a set of rules and organizations and donations on Sunday. Many years ago, my marketing professor said that there are two ways of doing marketing: You can find what you want to sell and try to persuade people to buy it, or you can go out and find

what people need, and find a way of delivering it. We need to build relationships and ask what people need. Their deepest need is not Sunday mass. Jesus never told people to go to the synagogue. He met people where they were. He never endorsed community in the ways in which we try to sell it. I have to ask: Are we doing Christianity the wrong way?

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Seneco: Perhaps we need to define community. We need two communities: We need a community of clergy to support one another in this movement, which has been so dysphoric, with clergy all over the place. We need to break down walls and stop holding people at arm's length. Some of that trepidation about the building community with other groups is warranted. For the 20 of us in this conversation, who take our work and this movement seriously enough that we spend this time talking together, there are many more people who would make us groan.



We've all heard the horror stories. To me, it's not just about building community, which might sound exclusive; it's about building effective community. Sometimes in our movement, we focus more on the structures we build than on the souls entrusted to our care. If you google "Old Catholic" or "Independent Catholic," you'll find all sorts of

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community with people who  
are thirsting for Christ and  
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the Roman Church or the  
Anglican Church? People  
could care less about our

canon law or apostolic succession. They want to pray and go to mass! I have done a lot of traveling with the government, but I'll be damned if I can find an Independent Catholic church in many of the places I visit. So, we need to support one another, and we need to support effective ministries to real people.

D'Arrigo: Marek, you always manage to make my brain spit steam and smoke, so thank you for a doozy of a question today. I hear what you're saying, but I see a lot of really interesting growth right now in this movement, the greatest example of which is our ability to come together like this and talk about issues and bring them back to our communities. I want to point out three things. The notion of "If you build it, they will come" is an absolute lie. To say that I have a thriving parish would be a lie, but I am experiencing thriving growth in our mission-like ministry. There are some 15 strongly-affirming Christian churches in the metropolitan Atlanta area. They are all wonderful places to hear for the first time that it is completely okay to be gay and Christian, or trans and Christian, but they're all notoriously horrible for anything after the "kiddie pool." They have no theological training or in-depth scriptural study. There's no way to meet people where they are and keep them moving forward. They simply say, "It's okay to be gay." That's wonderful, and, in the Southeast, in the

Bible Belt, people need to hear that. So we offer Sunday services, but we also offer Thursday night Bible studies and Monday night Bible studies, and pastoral counseling. As pastors, we need to fill needs that have previously found no filling. My wife and I were at the grocery store on Sunday, and I heard the young man at the register say that he can't drink grapefruit juice because it interferes with his medications. Knowing that he was likely talking about Prozac or Zoloft, I gave him my card and said, "I can't drink grapefruit juice either. Here's my card if you ever want to talk about it." This morning, he texted me. He's 17 years old. He's trans. His parents are on the verge of kicking him out of his home, and he doesn't know where to go. He has certainly never heard in his lifetime that God loves him and can use his transformation as something holy. We need to grow communities around needs that need filling. That's where Jesus went. I'm thinking of John Robison who subtly shares the good news with people at science fiction conventions. I see it in the ministries of so many of you. We

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look at the chaos of our greater movement, and we become worried that we're not growing. We need to help people where they are and create a community there that can grow. Marek's

model seems to work: His historically-Polish church is now in the center of an African-American community. He pulls in the kids as his acolytes. Do you want to grow a community? Involve the kids! They'll bring along their parents. That's the natural path to growth, and I think we are in fact growing.

Marsh: I live 25 miles from my bishop, and we have begun celebrating mass and or healing services every other week. Many times it's just us and our family members, but we're spreading the word and hoping to grow through word of mouth. We're starting from very small beginnings!

Aguillard: I agree that you need to go out and do the legwork and the one-to-one contact in the community. For some time now, I've been particularly taken with Afghan refugees and the depression they experience when they find out this country is not all it's cracked up to be. That's why I started to purchase and deliver dictionaries and books for Pashtu, Farsi and Dari speakers who want to learn English. I haven't been trying to advertise my church; I've just been trying to do something that I can do. I Zoom with a group in Santa Fe that no longer has a brick-and-mortar church, but they seem to think that that's the thing that will cause people to come to them. I think that we should be about filling needs, and not necessarily support such structures. The sacraments are important, and we should provide them if

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that's what people need, but buildings and organizational structures are not going to draw in people. We need to tell people that they are loved. Otherwise, think of something to do, do it, and people will jump onboard.

Plemmons: I've been a chaplain for a long time. I know how to sit on a street corner with somebody who's lost everything. I know how to be the person that people just come to when they're stressed, overworked and overwhelmed. What I don't know is how to translate my ministry to the people of God

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into creating a community that together serves the people of God. I really feel that I need to focus more on building a mission team than a congregation, and the mission team probably needs to pray to support its work—but I don't know how to make that jump.

Robison: I've noticed two things. When I speak with people at sci-fi conventions, people ask if there's a parish near them. I often don't know. The other thing I notice is that people want

community, but they don't want another job. We tend to talk a lot about lay leadership and lay involvement. People here work two to three jobs to afford housing, so they don't have the time and energy for some of the expectations that we might have for community involvement. People want to be fed; they don't necessarily want to help write a budget.

Mathias: In a book that I wrote in 2019, *Extraordinary Celebrations for Extraordinary Growth*, I shared a theoretical framework for the five stages of development of Eucharistic communities in the Independent Catholic movement. My question thus became: How can we help to mentor those who have not yet reached the stages at which our communities might find themselves? How can those at Stage 2 mentor those at Stage 1? How can those at Stages 3 or 4 mentor those at Stage 2? I've often thought about drawing together the pastors of the larger Independent Catholic communities here in the U.S., to talk about how we can support one another—and how we can support other folks. In our 2020 book, *A New Way of Being Catholic*, Kevin Przybylski of Rabbouni Catholic Community in Louisville shared a presentation on the “secret sauce” of Rabbouni Catholic Community. It seems we do well to reflect on the “secret sauce” of other communities and to consider how we might grow as a result of what we learn. Just last week, we also published *Extraordinary Celebrations for Extraordinary Catholics*, another resource chock-full of creative ideas for building Eucharistic communities.

D'Arrigo: As we emerge from this pandemic and resume worship, we chose to host our service last Sunday not in a church, but in a park, which we chose for its location and pavilion rent. A bunch of people turned up, and 90% of them were exactly who I expected them to be. But there were three families along the back wall, all Latinx people unknown to us, and we encouraged them to get involved and to participate in the Eucharist with us. They enjoyed the service and shared about it on social media. Pedro then sent me a video this week on how his family celebrates *el día de los muertos*—with their altar filled with pictures and food dishes. Despite language barriers, I had a very profound conversation with him about how there's nothing more Catholic than honoring our loved ones who have gone before us. It's a

reflection of the resurrection! Now their Roman Catholic friends are telling them that they can't celebrate *el día de los muertos*, and I'm telling them it's great. There's a lot of ignorance here in the South, and we need to put a healthy

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Leary: As horrible as the COVID pandemic was, it allowed Jayme to bring us together in a new way for our 2020 virtual summer school. It was fabulous, and it opened my eyes to how big the Independent Catholic movement actually is—and, just as heaven is full of many mansions, there's something for everyone! My jurisdiction is chaplaincy-based. We don't have parishes. Before the pandemic hit, some of our ministries were developing into small communities—then everything was lost. One of our priests started celebrating mass on Facebook, which began reaching 450 to 500 people each Sunday. As we came out of the pandemic, he said he was going to stop that mass, and I told him, "You've got 400 to 500 people coming to you on a regular basis. You're fulfilling a need!" Electronic celebrations of the Eucharist leave me cold, but each group needs to do what works for them. Now that Jayme is cataloguing all Eucharistic communities and is pulling together conversations on seminary directors, we're beginning to wonder, "Why are we reinventing the wheel?" There's so much happening out there that we're just learning about. I just discovered the other day that I have an archbishop of the Liberal Catholic Church just 32 miles up the road from me. He gave me a copy of his prayerbook, which strikes me as uber conservative. Technology is bringing us together, and now I'm able to see folks like Taylor Tracy, who has built a thriving church from nothing. We need to reach out to him and figure out his "secret sauce"!

Strong: One of the things that Taylor Tracy did very well was to incorporate church planting ideas from evangelical folks. Similar to what Jayme was saying, in its gatherings, the Episcopal Diocese of Texas organizes their congregations by size, so that they can learn from each other as well. Much of this conversation revolves around lay people: inviting

and growing lay people. Günter Esser of the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht says we need to meet people at their place of need. Here in the U.S., many of us come from such privilege that we're not cognizant of the real needs of

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others. We focus on former Roman Catholics who are middle class and successful. Even they struggle with issues, like addiction, that the Church has an answer to. We've got to be skilled in how to plant churches. The

Anglican Church in North America does it well. A lot of Protestants do it well. Ethnic groups do it well, especially when their leaders look like them. They are intentionally present with people where they are!

Seneco: "Small-c catholics" tend to "miss the boat" on how to church plant. I tell priests that they need three things to be successful: a bulletin, music and coffee. Those are the three things that every Catholic expects out of church! I've pastored parishes of 12 families, and I've pastored parishes of 40 families: Both types are holy and spiritual. I think that small ministries are sometimes beneficial: I'll bet that when Joel Osteen, who draws together thousands of people, stands in line at the bank to make his deposit, he's standing in front of someone whose house is being foreclosed on. Small communities allow people to have that familial experience of real support that they need. I don't

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understand how Roman guys can serve so many people. I feel for them and for the people they're trying to serve. Let's focus on effective ministry and forget the benchmarks of attendance and the collections plate.

D'Arrigo: For the past 12 years or so, I've been saying: We need to keep making the next best choice, trusting God in the process. Let's meet people where they're at, and trust that the Holy Spirit will provide the ways and means for growth with each of those souls that we meet where they're at—and

<p><i>Our plans are often much bigger &amp; more lavish &amp; people-driven than God's plans for us as God's ambassadors.</i></p>	<p>that will come together and blossom into what is, in fact, God's intention. Our plans are often much bigger and more lavish and people-driven than God's plans for us as God's ambassadors.</p>
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Furr: There's an arc of perspectives, but I ask: What can I do to influence what's out there? What am I doing, and what do I need to do? How can I organize what I do to influence this? In our community, it's reversed: I respond to what they want and call forth. At every single liturgy, I remind people of the invitation to love one another. I remind them that they have the Holy Spirit within them. As a result, people have come to realize their true value, and they're the ones who come up with ideas and who donate proceeds to charities and things like that. They initiate things. I can have all kinds of plans, but that doesn't recognize the empowerment of the people I serve. The question for me becomes: Is it my job to go out and get numbers, or is my job to clarify for my community their intrinsic goodness, worth and holiness? I just remind them what the Good News is. We've done the whole numbers thing. We've talked about how to get more people in. One parishioner reminded us that we may not be called to be a large community. Maybe it's our role to be really present to people during a time of shift and change. That touched me

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Yell: I'm part of a "progressive pastors group" here in Oregon City, and we have discussed many times the challenges of mission and maintenance. They are two tracks, and we

don't have enough time, energy or resources to do everything in most communities. I'm recalling a book called *The War of Art*. Each chapter was a single sentence or paragraph, and one of the sentences was, "Do not let the urgent become the enemy of the essential." As clergy, we try to juggle so much—our lives, families and businesses.

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We're dealing with the urgent, without time for the essential. That's why we need retreats and days off, to let go of the urgent and focus on the essential. I'm

also reminded of the Buddhist saying, "Do the right thing, and let go of the outcome." Within the conflict of the urgent and the essential, of mission and maintenance, if we can discern the next right thing and let go of the outcome, the Holy Spirit will work Her magic, and all things—including my mistakes—will eventually work to the glory of God.

Robison: Individual contexts shape individual missions and ministries. While we have an overarching metaculture of Anglo disdain for each other, how that takes shape is different here in the mid-Atlantic, versus the Northeast, versus the Southeast, versus you weirdos west of the Mississippi. We need to look at our individual contexts so much more than we do. Then we'll realize that something that works in Kansas City might not work in Laurel, Maryland. And we need to start paying attention to how things work in our own individual contexts.

Marsh: Look at your community, and grow with what you've got. Recognize and be attentive to the needs of others, and let the Spirit and the people guide your growth!

Leary: I look forward to seeing what comes out of "Sin City" this weekend and how the Holy Spirit will deal with that group there, challenging us to make the Old Catholic "stew" in

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such a way that people will keep coming back to the pot. Perhaps then we'll become a movement of collectivity and independence. Let's not make all the same



mistakes together, at different times; let's learn from one another!

Quintana: Since I've been in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, I have planted two communities and have been a part of the development of other communities. Despite Rome being part of our DNA, let's not imitate Rome all the time. If we are just another copy of Rome, people will not see any need

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to join us. Instead, let's accentuate our distinctives. Let's look at our liturgical expressions, to see how it is that people can recognize us as different—in our work and in our prayer. Let's also look

at our history and recognize the reasons for which Utrecht is wary of U.S. groups. It behooves us to read Peter Anson's *Bishops At Large* and Henry Brandreth's book, *Episcopi Vagantes*.

Buffone: We are a small community that is 15 years old, and, through the years, we have redefined what it means to grow. Like Karen, we've come to the resolution that, if we are all growing individually and if we're bringing the gospel out

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onto the streets and into lives in ways that touch people, that's growth! It's not about numbers. It's about creating the kingdom of God through our living witness. If we can bring healing or a food ministry or a word to somebody who will feel like

they belong and that they're loved, then that's what Church is all about. We don't need numbers for that!

Božek: I still look at this Independent movement as a fresh arrival, as an outsider. What I keep experiencing and hearing is that we seem to be comfortable with our smallness. We have seen so many failures around us that we don't dare to dream big. We are okay with dreaming small—and I don't want to dream small. I want to dream big. I want my church to serve the food and have those one-on-one conversations,

but I also want to have a growing congregation. I want it to grow in holiness and in numbers. Why not be bigger than my neighboring Roman Catholic parish? I want to compete with them. I want to be bigger. I don't want to limit my

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dreams and my vision to small numbers, because they're "holy" to me. Why can't we be a megachurch with many small communities?

Why do we have to dream small? I would love to dream big, but that takes a village—which is why I love these conversations. Some of you have mentioned Taylor in Kansas City: I think there's a "recipe" for what he's doing. Marketing is missing in typical seminary education, but one of the simplest things we can do is to be consistent. Be consistent with your schedule and location. Your consistency will pay off, and people will get used to coming to your service. People can't follow an inconsistent community. Many of you are right: Most English-speaking churches are not growing—so let's learn a language or two! You've heard the joke from "Tortilla Soup": What do you call a person who speaks three languages? Trilingual. What do you call a person who speaks two languages? Bilingual. What do you call a person who speaks one language? American! Let's put that joke to sleep and start learning new languages. Let's start reaching new people! While we respect inner growth and holiness, let's never give up on dreaming big and conquering the world!

## *Sine Qua Non* Conditions for Unity

*In this conversation, lay and ordained leaders discuss and provide feedback on the sine que non conditions for unity shared by Father Marek Bożek during his recent presentation at "Saints in Sin City," an interjurisdictional gathering in Las Vegas, Nevada. His presentation was published in its entirety in Our Better Version of Catholicism.*

Mathias: Two weeks ago, many of us gathered in Las Vegas for our second interjurisdictional gathering, titled, "Saints in Sin City." I'm seeing here various persons who were there, including Bishop Leonard Walker, Bishop Will Cavins, and Mother Karen Furr. Now that we've heard and read and had a chance to reflect on Father Marek's presentation at that gathering on the *sine qua non* conditions for unity within our movement, let's continue the conversation. We'll begin by inviting Father Marek to share some opening words.

Bożek: For those who have heard or read my presentation, you know that my point of departure or my theological locus is the fact that disunity is not something positive, and that our division, fragmentation and separation is not intended by Jesus Christ. This is the

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separation is not intended by Jesus Christ.* starting point of my prayer, my reflection and my ministry. Most of us were not born and raised as

Independent Catholics. We all have come from different churches or ecclesial structures from where we find ourselves today. So, the first part of my reflection was what it would take for me personally to "go back" to the Roman Catholic Church, and I listed those conditions that would need to be fulfilled before I would consider going back. The second part of my reflection was equally, if not more, hypothetical: Are there any hypothetical situations that I could see for my community, St. Stanislaus, to join with other communities in a more structured way? I cherish and am very grateful for our informal relations and friendships, which I find nurturing and very uplifting, but I ask myself: What would it take for us to bind ourselves with other communities in a more organized way. I pose seven points

as fundamental to our identity today and how we might relate to other likeminded communities. The most important element of both of these reflections was that the Church that we dream of needs to be a community-centered Church. My experience of Rome is that it is *not* a community-centered church; it is very much a hierarchy-centered church. It's very much a clerical institution, with all the sexism and other "isms" that come along with it. That is my biggest and most serious reservation about Rome: that it is not centered on the faith communities of its parishes. It's also my biggest reservation about the very fragmented North American reality of Independent Catholics: that we are bishop-centered and clergy-centered and not community-centered groups. We have created and continue to create countless well-meaning and well-intentioned structures that unfortunately serve clerical purposes, rather than our parishes or communities. In my very optimistic and perhaps even Utopian vision, either Rome or our future hypothetical body would be centered on communities, and not on clergy or hierarchy. That is at the heart of my dream. The church I dream of is centered on the people of God, the local community, which is where the Church truly is.

Mathias: Marek's *sine que non* conditions of what it would take for us to go back to any of our mother churches include that Rome, in this case, would need to end its clericalism, sexism, homophobia, and Eurocentric uniformity. Any thoughts on that point?

Cheasty: Marek, I read your presentation, and it was excellent. I don't hold out any hope that Rome is about to change. I grieve that Rome moves with a glacial speed, preventing change from coming to the Church. It's not worth my energy to give

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too much consideration to something that simply is never going to happen. When I look at the problem of what's keeping the Independent Sacramental Movement in the U.S. from being united, I believe it largely comes down to our lack of unity and the fact that we are clergy-heavy,

which is not getting us anywhere. You're spot-on: Our movement has to be rooted in community. The heart of the Church lies in parishes, in what you and Jayme are doing. The Church is one generation away from extinction. If we don't tell the story and train up the next generation, it won't happen—and that happens in the context of community. The division among us is not scriptural and is not moving us forward as a viable alternative for people who feel a deep connection to Catholicism and the sacraments of the Church, but who have been marginalized or excommunicated by the Catholic Church. I left the Roman Catholic Church because it had no place for me, so I was ordained a United Methodist pastor in 1991. The pull of Catholicism on me is still very strong, so I hope and pray that unity comes out of this group. Like you say, Marek: "Unity, not uniformity." We'll never move beyond our individual ministries, which will disappear after we're gone, without unity! We are called to further the Church, and that requires some foundational unity to hold us together and move us forward.

Brohl: I was involved in trying to establish the Independent Roman Catholic Church as a parallel alternative to Roman Catholicism, that incorporated and fixed all the things that were broken in the Roman Church. I'm old enough to have been a part of the evolving discussion in the Roman Church from the 1960s, as a result of Vatican II, to the present day. We know what the issues are. We know what's wrong, and we know how to fix it. I have found some support in a Catholic reform group called the People's Synod. They are a group of eight to twelve Roman Catholics who have one foot in the Roman Church and one foot outside it. I have been promoting within this group the idea of an Independent Roman Catholic Church, which is where I started out in 2002. I find that most Independent Catholics really resent that word "Roman" stuck in there. People have told me over and over, "You can't be an 'independent' Roman Catholic!" So, I left the Independent movement. I have not found anyone who is serious about discussing this issue—until I read Marek's paper today. I jumped past going back to the Roman Church because the Roman Church ain't ready for me! She just isn't. So, how can we get

our act together as a group? Why can't we get together? It seems that there is more that divides us than unites us, which may sound odd. Marek is not the first person to propose the idea of unity within this movement. It's been

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knocked around for a long time. There was a group of bishops that tried to pull us together so that Utrecht would recognize us—and that fell apart rather quickly. There have been some pretty serious attempts to pull together Independent Catholic jurisdictions. I

happen to be a bishop, but I'm prepared to give that up: I don't have a parish or community, and I only have one person—Bishop Brian Spencer in Las Vegas—who sees the value in what I'm trying to do. So I welcome every opportunity to speak about this with any person who crosses my path.

Newman: Marek, your paper was excellent, and it pointed out some very important points for us for to consider. I noticed, however, that it really focused more on structure and issues of clericalism, rather than on issues of dogmas and doctrines. I'm wondering what role, if any, they play in your decision personally, and what role they might play in any effort for unification or unity.

Božek: I failed to mention that I never left the Roman Catholic Church; I was pushed out of it. I was excommunicated in 2005. So, it wasn't my choice or decision to leave. It was a canonical penalty imposed on me. In all honesty, if St. Stanislaus and I were not excommunicated, I would still be a Roman Catholic priest today. There are many ways to serve God's people in the Roman Catholic Church, and people like Joan Chittister and James Martin are doing wonderful ministry as Roman Catholics. If it were not for my incidental excommunication, I would not have found myself in this distinguished group. That explains some of my relationship and my outlook on the Roman Church, which we all agree will likely not change in our lifetime. But there are pivotal moments in the history of the Church. It

crawled along after the Council of Trent for 400 years, then it jumped with the speed of light during Vatican II. We went from the excommunications by Pius XII of the likes of Henri de Lubac, who ended up being an official theologian of Vatican II ten years later. Things like that have happened and may happen in the future, but the Roman Church will probably not be our Mother Church again in our lifetime. As a result, I agree that we should focus more on unity among ourselves. The question is raised of doctrine. Many of our ills arise from the fact that there are so many bishops in our movement—with their miters and “dioceses” and “cathedrals.” This makes it difficult for us to come together. The other difficulty is that our beautifully-rich expressions of Catholicism result in very diverse expressions of doctrine as well. I love Archbishop Alan on the West Coast and his zeal for the primitive, non-creedal Church. There should be room in our group for those who are non-creedal and for those who, like Bishop William Myers, celebrate the

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Tridentine Mass *ad orientem* and happily profess the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The richness and diversity of doctrine does not need be a limitation on our dream. We are

community-centered, not clergy-centered or even doctrine-centered. Let’s use a real-life example: If a community is nourished by the Latin mass that Bishop Myers celebrates on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and if that doctrine and liturgical expression work for them, God bless them: Let them build the Church that works for them! If a community on the West Coast, where Archbishop Alan is ministering, finds its nourishment from a more primitive expression of the Church, why not? That would be my attempt to answer the lack of doctrinal unity. I don’t see the need for us to declare unity on anything absent an ecumenical council. The founding fathers of Utrecht said that, in the absence of an ecumenical council, it is not up to us to define the doctrine of the Church. We are not authorized by the tradition of the Church to come up with

solutions. In my very tentative vision, it would be up to communities, as the center and locus of the Church, to choose what nourishes them on their spiritual journey.

Mathias: Some of Marek's other *sine qua non* conditions for unity include that we would be a community-centered Church rejecting clericalism; that we would employ the "Council of Constance principle," where bishops would set aside their being bishops in order to foster unity among us; that we would exercise a model of synodality, particularly with respect to decision making; that we would have educational and professional standards for clergy; and finally, that we would not be shy about growing in numbers and in holiness.

Banks: My question centers around the same issue of dogma. Liturgically, I'm very open to whatever people want, and, as a chaplain, I sometimes have to do what I have to do. What I'm hearing, though, sounds almost like a Protestant free church model, and I'm wondering how we would ensure inclusion and all it entails.

Božek: That that is one of my *sine que non* conditions: I have no time or patience to talk about LGBT inclusion. Anyone who comes acknowledges from day one that every expression of love and gender is equal in God's eyes and in the eyes of the Church. Period. If you don't like it, too bad. After 40 years in a religious community and 32 years as a Roman priest, I grieved not being in the Roman Church for two years. Then I went to Utrecht in 2019, followed by our gathering in Austin, followed by our online summer school, and those experiences clarified for me that I no longer want to be a Roman anymore, even if I were welcomed back as a gay priest. I now find a different foundation for who I am. The

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long tradition of the foundational ecclesiology of the local church just doesn't fit with the universal Church of Vatican I—and Rome will never give up its claim to universality. For me, the challenge lies in how we adopt an Ultrajectine model of Church for a movement as large and diverse as ours.



Furr: I appreciate Marek's personal reflections on this. It seems we are trying to answer questions that have not yet been formulated. It's a good thing to think about how we might structure ourselves and work to create unity in the midst of incredible diversity – but I'm not sure that now is the right time. We're still formulating the questions. I really believe with all my heart that the expression of Catholicism is going

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to change so much in the next 100 to 200 years. I believe that the Church in the future is not going to look anything like the Church of today. If we try to play in the future, based on our understanding of what Church is today, we run the risk of recreating the same thing that we're trying to move beyond! I say this with compassion and not judgment: I'm not sure that the people who come to this movement from the Roman

expression are the ones to create the future. Rather than talk about how Rome needs to change, perhaps we do better to focus on how we need to change to be part of the creation of this diverse unity. Because we don't yet have the questions, I'm hesitant to say, "Let's create something new right now!" When we talk about "binding" with other communities, that doesn't sound lifegiving to me. How do we verbalize what we're contemplating? Our verbiage is likely based in a systemic sexism or racism that we don't even identify in ourselves. We can't expect the Roman Church to do all the work; there's a lot of work that we need to do ourselves. I would love to see us write a group letter to Pope Francis, telling him that he's great and that he's welcome in our churches anytime. We know from our history and experience that, due to its baggage, Rome is not capable of change. Rome is like an alcoholic during the first week of treatment. I do believe that the Church of the future is going to be one, but it's going to take a while to get there!

Yell: There's something about the Catholic identity that unifies those who call themselves Catholic. For six years as an Independent Catholic priest, I was on the staff of an Episcopal parish, so all sorts of people asked me, "Why don't you just become an Episcopalian?" I replied, "I'm different. I'm Catholic!" There's a reason we're Catholic rather than Methodist or Lutheran or Episcopalian. We're not better or worse; we're just different. Church is irrelevant if we don't have a relationship with the Divine through Jesus Christ. Let's leave the "Independent" bit aside for a

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moment, and discern what it is to be Catholic. Let's discern what it means to be a Catholic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let's evolve and distill our theology from the past into the future, and then build our communities out of that, and then, if we need it, build the structures—but not the other way around.

Robison: In the seminary, we had a church history professor who helped us to see that you can't have unity without some uniformity and vice versa. Comprehension only goes so far, and fundamental differences in belief or practices will rip an organization apart. Sure enough, five years after I graduated from my Presbyterian seminary, the PCUSA tore itself apart. The United Methodist Church is now tearing itself apart. Unless we address differences at the root, we'll eventually have poisoned fruit and further division. I recently got a book from the 1950s called *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church*, where the author, a church historian, says that we can't speak of a pre-creedal Church.

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Creedal language, as found in the *Didache*, is the next level of document that comes after scripture, so we really don't have a pre-doctrinal church. As soon as we say "LGBTQ inclusion is a requirement for moving forward," we have created an unmovable doctrinal position!

Perhaps we need to create more room between doctrine (our beliefs) and dogma (our immovable positions).

Božek: I truly appreciate all your comments. To Karen's very poignant point about not knowing the questions to ask, I say that my reflection comes from very concrete experiences within very concrete communities. I studied at St. Meinrad Benedictine Archabbey where one of my friends was Father Lawman Chibundi, the pastor and founding father of Rabbouni Catholic Community in Louisville, Kentucky. We have been asking ourselves for over a decade now: Where do we go, and how do we continue being Catholic when we are so drastically and radically on our own? The question that I have in my heart is: What will my community do in the future? We are a vibrant Catholic parish, with Sunday Eucharist and with Sunday school programs. We have all the things that Roman Catholic parishes do, but we are on our own. Our very concrete question is: Where do we go, and how will we shape, imagine and dream about our future? My question is a very concrete, tangible question arising from our experience as an "orphaned" community. I love Bishop Leonard's question about how to address the question of so many bishops in our movement. While it's an important question, it's a question of secondary or tertiary importance in my personal journey. It's not about bishops. Every pastor should know every parishioner as a member of her or his community. That's the personal connection of the shepherd. In the early Church, each community had a bishop. If one day we decide that each parish should have a bishop, instead of a pastor, it's a simple change of name and nomenclature, not of any essence in any person. It all comes back to the relationship of the shepherd to the members of

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her community. Ideally, the bishop is the center of unity, not of division. Structure, too, is a secondary or tertiary issue, since the local church is most important in my theological vision, and each local church should discuss and refine its vision. In the early Church, the church of Jerusalem was very different from the church in Rome, which was different from the churches of North Africa, so I have no problem with the church of St. Louis being different from the church of Atlanta, which might be different from

the church of Oregon. Let's allow each community to find the most nurturing and holy way for that community to be together as a church.

Strong: Marek, I enjoyed hearing you virtually in Las Vegas, and I enjoyed reading your presentation. I want my community, Spirit of Christ, to outlive me, so I believe we need to explicitly talk about our commitment to church planting, invitational evangelism, and forming community members as disciples.

Luft: I'm grateful that we are able to come together and discuss these issues. For many years, as we journeyed through various jurisdictions, I looked for something like this in the Independent Sacramental Movement, and the Independent Catholic Ordinariate was born out of necessity, in opposition to a lot of unhealthy faith and religious practices that we encountered. You're probably more likely to win

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the Powerball than to get bishops to lay down their miters to come together! I would not be opposed to that, since my principal interest is growing our community and our movement. This movement has a

systemic problem, with so many clergy who, whether they admit it or not, are mostly ego-oriented. If you enter pastoral ministry without the intent of serving people, then you end up with a lot of what we have in the ISM. I think that your second set of considerations is most important: What is our theological identity? Without an identity rooted in Catholic theology, we'll have problems later on. At the local level and in the ordinariate, we require lay people to be at the heart and center of governance. Our parish councils contain only one cleric, the pastor, because lay people have to be involved in the things that directly affect them in matters of faith. As clergy, we sometimes get stuck in our education and training and egos, and we need to refocus on what we're really about. I would entertain anything in the future that would bring some type of cohesion and gives us a level of legitimacy that we currently lack in this movement. We need stronger formation programs. We need the inclusion of lay ecclesial ministers. As a Franciscan, I will always wear my sandals and consider

the needs of people. When I studied at the Washington Theological Union, Cardinal Archbishop Donald Wuerl took over our *Transitus*, an authentic Franciscan experience, simply as an exercise of his rank and power. Similar events happen in the ISM. I'll take my miter off any day if that results in greater fruit for our movement!

Lynch: I have read Marek's presentation and have given it very serious consideration. However, I really don't believe that it speaks to our local situation here at St. Cecilia. First of all, I don't come to the Independent Catholic movement from a Roman viewpoint. I was an Episcopalian for almost 60 years before I joined the Independent Sacramental Movement. I left the Episcopal Church only reluctantly, after I realized that it was not the place for me to exercise the ministry of parish priest to which I was called. After some fits and starts, I joined the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, was ordained, and planted a church here in Palm Springs. I don't consider my local community to be the entire extent of my ministry. Instead, I go with John Wesley's idea that our "parish" is the entire world! As a priest, I serve many people who are not regular Sunday attenders. Last Sunday night, I went out to a hospital to see a dying man, because the local Roman clergy did not have time to take care of him. I do have good relationships with local Roman and Episcopal clergy. The one thing that I find offensive in

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Marek's presentation is the idea that anybody who wants to be a deacon or priest needs to get a theological degree from an accredited seminary. I have a law degree, and I don't have a theological degree, so, when I read that, I felt put down and marginalized. We need to keep that kind of thinking out of what we do.

Not everybody learns what they need to learn in a classroom. I have always done my best work, even in college, through independent studies and tutoring. And that's how I became a priest. I studied for the priesthood

with Father Jim Farris, and I read for orders. I feel that that experience formed me very well for becoming a priest and starting a church. We have to open ourselves up to the fact that there are various paths to getting educated and trained to be a priest. Whether I look good in the eyes of Utrecht or of the world, or whether I have a string of degrees after my name totally irrelevant to me. The important question is not whether I have certain initials after my name, but whether I have the skills, the motivation, and the necessary resources to carry out my ministry. That part of Father Marek's presentation needs to be excised like cancer. We don't need that.

D'Arrigo: Y'all are remarkable. This conversation could have been heated, dastardly and evil. We could have nitpicked and turned really ugly. Yet no one did. I don't entirely agree with the whole must-have-a-seminary-education, but I would append it to say "must have some amount of higher education and life experience," to ensure that the information that you are going to provide to the masses is accurate.

Banks: I resonate with David's concern over seminary degrees. I have a seminary degree, but I also desire to include those who don't. We need to establish some sort of Independent

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Catholic center or theological foundation. One of the first things that free church Disciples of Christ sought was a seminary. Perhaps that's the answer for us as well.

Yell: I remind us of the traditional saying, "The path is made by walking it." I truly believe that these sorts of conversations, and us just doing things together, will create the path to unity. I know it works ecumenically in England, because none of the churches are terribly strong or powerful—so they do actually physically need each other in the Unity movement in Great Britain. When I came to the U.S. 30 years ago, I couldn't believe how little churches talk and work with each other. I'm not even sure that most churches in

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America celebrate the Week of Christian Unity in January. We'll work out unity as we journey together, and I do believe that's the best way!

Cheasty: As the Church, we are called to be one, and our constant division is not consistent with the call of the Body of Christ. I think that unity is critical, but I don't think that that requires uniformity. I agree that having some level of training or education is critical. Those of us who attended seminary will agree that what we knew when we entered seminary was light years from what we knew when we left

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seminary. What we're talking about has a deeply-rooted theological position, so we need to understand the deeply critical role of education for clergy if we are going to pass on the faith to the next generation.

Luft: I'm grateful for this discussion, and I look forward to whatever comes of it in the future. I do hope and pray that more communities are born that evangelize, so that we can build a stronger Church!

Strong: The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, created an initiative called "A Mission-shaped Church" that focused on diverse ministries, but all focused on mission. Through the formation of lay folks and the ordained, let's build a "mission-shaped" movement!

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Furr: We are learning more about how the universe was constructed and created. There is no separation in creation. We all are one—so let's work toward unity!

Leary: Thank you, Marek, for pulling together that presentation, which challenged some of us to dig a little bit deeper. We all come from different groups, but it sounds like there are seven to ten points that we all agree on, that we might articulate and build on. As I look back at the Masonic groups that I've been involved in, each state is unique and answers to itself. It has its own ritual. But there are seven core facts that all Masons agree to, and one of those is monotheism. 64 grandmasters across North America come together each year, just like we're doing, to discuss and learn from one another. Let's find those seven to ten items that we can all agree on, and let's build from there, learning from each other!

Robison: There's been a lot of talk here at the end about formation. We can have different forms of formation, but I find that we depend too often on Roman Catholic seminaries and resources. We need to work together across jurisdictions to create a common reading program. That would help us

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establish a common idiom, it would help tremendously with respect to unity, and it would decrease our reliance on outside influences. Let's take advantage of the clergy who have master's degrees to

have them form others who don't have the time or money to engage in seminary studies. Formation never ends, and it amazes me how much I come away with after these conversations!

Brohl: Marek's presentation gives me renewed hope, and I hope that we don't let what's being proposed fall by the wayside. Let's move this ahead for the sake of unifying Independent Catholicism!

Scarlett: Being community-driven is very important. I've been ordained 21 years, and I've always formed my ministry around what the community needs. I agree with a formation process: Whether it's formal or informal, there



needs to be a checkpoint process. To build unity, we should get involved with other Independent churches, whether they're local or across the States. I recently traveled to Florida, and I googled clergy along the way. I wasn't able to connect with anyone, but let's continue building relationships with one another!

Yoegel: This is my first time with you all, but this is the kind of conversation that I have been looking for for years. I mean that sincerely. Unlike our dining room tables, where we find so many disagreements during these times we live in, I find myself in agreement with all of you. One issue that I've wrestled with since my ordination in the Orthodox Catholic

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Church of America is that we seem to be fighting the trend of the last 30 or 40 years: Church attendance peaked in the 1950s, and all denominations of Christianity have been losing people. For me, the question is: What do people want, and how can we provide that? Ultimately, that will build community!

Nicosia: One of the conditions for my going back to Rome would be addressing the issue of the centralization of authority that the Roman Church has historically bought into and promoted. I think that's cautionary for us: If we do get together at some point, we need to avoid a new centralization of authority.

Buffone: I feel very blessed in my 15 years of experience within the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. My experience has been that the ECC is very community-centered. We have many communities that have five to eight people, and we have parishes of 2,500 people. It's our premise that the lay people in each community call their pastors to service. Except for our retired clergy, we don't have any priests who are running around or who don't have a parish where they've been called by a community. So, in a lot of ways, I feel outside of this conversation. I'm happy to learn about what's happening outside of my experience, and I really do

feel blessed. Secondly, I am a bridge builder, and I'm not afraid to come out and visit you wherever you are. It's how I learned about TOCCUSA in California: I was visiting a friend there and decided to drive 45 minutes to meet Bishop Roberto Fuentes. It was great to celebrate mass with him and the six people in his community. I'll do the same when I visit any of the states where you live: I'll look you up and come pray with you! And I hope you do the same when you come to Newton, Massachusetts! Let's reach out to one another: Unity starts with us, and then we can share that excitement with our communities! I'm all for community-centered, bottom-up leadership – and for formation. I have a Master's in Counseling. I'm a licensed psychotherapist, and I currently work in geriatric care management. I was in private practice for 25 years, and I've now been in parish ministry for 15 years. They called me as a lay person to be the leader of this community, Holy Spirit. They then supported my Independent studies with my vicar, with my presiding bishop, and with my mentors for four years, until I was ordained. I do not have an M.Div., but I feel that I am appropriately formed – and I continue my education, which

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is very, very important. I feel like we're often "preaching to the choir," since those who need to hear what we're saying aren't here. It seems that our challenge lies in reaching out to them, too!

Carter: I was thrilled to pop into the Vegas conference and hear Father Marek's presentation. When Father Marek says something that strikes me, I have learned that, if I listen long enough, I'll hear something that actually puts a perspective on it and makes me say, "I not only absolutely agree with, but I wholeheartedly support it!" "A community-centered church that rejects clericalism." You would have to work hard to find people here who don't agree with that goal. There may be a problem with the neutron-bomb solution to too many, unqualified bishops, or bishops without communities. I sense some resistance from a variety of people who would say that the solution is not therefore to get rid of all bishops or to assume that they're all unqualified. That we are synodal, absolutely. There is also

a major movement with a huge number of proponents within the Independent Catholic movement for a church with serious educational and professional standards for

deacons, priests and bishops. Absolutely. Regardless of whether we disagree about the standards, or the dividing line being a degree, there is a major consensus for requiring educational and professional

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standards of some kind. "Dream big." There's nothing wrong with combining the idea of increased numbers with depth of individual spirituality. We're obviously all for that, and that brings me back to the point that if I listen long enough to you, I hear beautiful things that I profoundly agree with. You're not saying, "Only those of us who inherited large, bishopless parishes and jurisdictions are doing the right thing." You're saying, "I want to see a balance to the smaller groups of people." We want to have a balance. We don't want to be known as a tiny-church movement, with two people in a community. We want the full spectrum of communities. When we have these meetings, there always comes a point when someone who is very excited suggests that we should try to really get together, that we should try to really build something here. Yes, we all agree that we're doing that. Brett makes a very valid point about us benefiting from more options for better training and education of our bishops, priests and deacons. I want to remind folks that, assuming that you don't believe that every degree in theology or every bit of formation, discernment and training for our clerical folks needs to come from an accredited institution, the Independent Catholic movement does have multiple seminaries that are very affordable, with academically-accredited professors and classes available to not just their own individual jurisdictions, but to everyone, including people who aren't in the movement. Those do exist. There is the Sophia Divinity School, Ascension Theological College, and, as Rosa was saying, there are also some excellent training

opportunities in the ECC. And that does not exhaust our options. Because we perceive this as a potential problem, let's take advantage of the resources that we already have. To wrap up, Marek, you are on the right track. We are all already part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and we always will be. What we're doing here is far more valuable than trying to hammer out a strict, multi-point, formal agreement with each other. If we can continue to love each other and move forward, that's what it's all about!

D'Arrigo: I need to clarify something. My understanding is that Father Marek is not saying goodbye to bishops in perpetuity, but essentially saying that bishops are priests. Let's let a future generation of bishops rise up from all of these united

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communities, so that we're all "on the same page" and united together in our bishops, serving a large purpose than some of us currently are.

Božek: My words were meant as a personal reflection and as a vision or dream for our movement. I have been called a renegade priest for years, and some of my friends call me a provocateur, so I have embraced my mission to provoke reactions. My "nuclear option" of erasing all bishops is one such provocation. These are my very intimate personal reflections, and I don't presume to speak for anyone, let alone everyone. I appreciate your feedback as we continue to share our visions for the future of our movement!

## The Present State of Inclusive Catholicism

*In this conversation, lay and ordained leaders discuss and provide feedback on a presentation by Father Jayme Mathias at "Saints in Sin City," an interjurisdictional gathering in Las Vegas, Nevada. His presentation was published in its entirety in Our Better Version of Catholicism.*

Mathias: Many of us have heard or read my presentation on "The Present State of Inclusive Catholicism at the Dawn of 2022," which I shared earlier this month at our second interjurisdictional gathering in Las Vegas. My questions this evening include: What thoughts do you have on the content of that presentation, and are there any particular directions in which we want to push in terms of research or data? I'm also interested in the "so what?" of this: Now that we have these data, what do they mean for us as individuals? In what ways do we see ourselves more clearly? Is the Spirit calling us to something in particular as a result?

Seneco: I haven't seen any empirical data on the clergy of our movement. My clergy are entirely too White, entirely too male, and I would love to have some heterosexual clergy. I

*My clergy are entirely too White, entirely too male, & I would love to have some heterosexual clergy. I know of other bishops who struggle with similar challenges of a lack of diversity within our ranks. I have a Latino deacon and a Latino Benedictine in the monastery, but, apart from that, I don't feel that we represent a cross section of American Catholicism. I feel that, if we start pushing for vocations among different communities, we're pandering. I have a good friend who's a Protestant bishop with apostolic succession in an African-American church, with primarily African-American clergy and primarily African-American congregations. When I go to his church, I'm the only White. It's a different experience: It's energetic and lively. It's Pentecostal and wonderful. He has asked me to preach a few times, and, when he was installed, he asked me to do the enthronement. I got up and said, "I don't know why this fat, White guy is standing in front of y'all, talking about*

*know of other bishops who struggle with similar challenges of a lack of diversity within our ranks. I have a Latino deacon and a Latino Benedictine in the monastery, but, apart from that, I don't feel that we represent a cross section of American Catholicism. I feel that, if we start pushing for vocations among different communities, we're pandering. I have a good friend who's a Protestant bishop with apostolic succession in an African-American church, with primarily African-American clergy and primarily African-American congregations. When I go to his church, I'm the only White. It's a different experience: It's energetic and lively. It's Pentecostal and wonderful. He has asked me to preach a few times, and, when he was installed, he asked me to do the enthronement. I got up and said, "I don't know why this fat, White guy is standing in front of y'all, talking about*

Jesus!" I'm not comfortable reaching into those communities, to draw vocations. I'm afraid they'll think, "He's just reaching out to us because he wants Black priests — or straight priests or women priests." I'm stuck on how to do that. Three months ago, I invited my bishop friend and two of his priests to dinner, and I brought along my deacon, and my deacon made the mistake of saying, "All lives matter." I almost lost my mind. He was sitting between two African-American priests, and he said this to an African-American priest. The priest later said, "I felt bad for that deacon, the way you smoked him." I said, "Don't. He spoke incorrectly in public, and I rebuked him in public. It was completely inappropriate." I told my deacon to get on the train, or to get out of the station. As a privileged, White guy who was raised upper-middle class, I don't know how to reach out to others, and it bothers me.

Lynch: I operate without regard to anybody's race or nationality or sexual orientation or gender. When recruiting people for ministry, I look at the person: What do they do, and what

*When recruiting people for ministry,  
I look at the person: What do they do,  
& what have they accomplished?*

*What are their talents?*

have they accomplished? What are their talents? I have friends in the Independent Catholic movement of all different races, nationalities and languages. I don't ever mention the fact that

they have a particular identity. I treat them all the same. I treat them as people made in the image of God. I do have a ministry to the Hispanic community, and they're helping me learn to speak Spanish. I don't distinguish between people, and it bothers me that other people do. Nor do I do this whole "politically-correct" stuff: It's a waste of time and tends to be divisive. I just go about my business as a parish priest, taking care of the people of God, and I don't get involved in political or social stuff, or any of that, which is divisive. I have no time for that.

Seneco: To draw people into the pews, to develop their relationship with Christ, there have to be things that they identify with. Just like I don't understand how "celibate" Roman Catholic priests give advice to married couples who are struggling in their marriage, because they've never been married or had a financial struggle. They don't want for anything. The

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Furr: Are you looking for suggestions? Invite people of color into a meeting facilitated by somebody else other than you, and don't say a word. That person will explain that you want to explore how you can be a priest or a bishop and be present to people who don't look like you, and that you really are looking for help to understand how you can be a better priest with your life experience and background. And don't say anything; White people tend to take over in meetings like that. In a non-judgmental way, if you're wondering how to approach people of color, ask people of color. Get their input, and be willing to hear what they have to say without rebuttal. Make it informal, so that there's no sense that "the White person is calling us in." Invite them over for lunch, and say, "I just need some help."

Mathias: Looking at the data, it does strike me that we are a largely White phenomenon in the English-speaking world. We are

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Furr: If we ourselves are diverse, we will attract diversity. If we come and say, "I'm a White person, and I'm going to walk on eggshells and hopefully recruit some non-White people," that won't work. I don't mean this as a criticism, but as an observation of a typical White response: We do

this for our own edification. That's the inner work we need to do to get beyond our own Whiteness, so that we can be present to people of other cultures and persuasions.

D'Arrigo: My jurisdiction is tiny and nowhere near the "Big 12," and Jayme shares a sobering line about the ratio of clergy to laity in Georgia and Mississippi versus Connecticut: That hurt so much. In our tiny jurisdiction, we have a presiding bishop and three other bishops. One bishop is female, and she is in Missouri. Our bishops are not diocesan. They preside over associations, so it's about personalities and not ground. I look at how our jurisdiction encourages female clergy. We are really good at recruiting gay, straight and trans people. We are awfully White, but we are trying to actively do something about that. We are really blessed: We have three women in the process of being aspirants, heading towards Holy Orders. For a tiny jurisdiction, that's a relatively large amount of women! But what Karen is saying is so key, and it ties into my favorite phrase of all time: We are all vicars of Jesus. We are all vessels for Jesus to speak through and to act through. Jesus was the kind of person who said, "I don't care how dirty you are, or when the last time was that you took a shower. Let's go get a cup of coffee and hang out in the park. I just want to know you right now!" Our number one job in whatever community we find ourselves is say, "Hey, let's grab a cup of coffee! Where are you at right now? How can I help you today? What can I do for you right now?" If we keep genuinely doing that, our communities will grow. I'm still in shock that a number of weeks have gone by, and this swath of Latinx people continue to gather for each church service that we have. I don't speak very

much Spanish, and I don't speak the Spanish they speak. There's no Spanish in our service or our bulletin. We have no Spanish songs, but they keep coming because we're offering them something that

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they're not getting anywhere else. Through a translator, I'll ask them after every service, "What can I do to offer more?" And they keep saying, "Nothing. Just keep offering what you're offering, and we'll fill in the gap of what you're not giving us." Sometimes we forget that we are the vicars of Christ.

Lynch: The greatest number of people in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion are Hispanic, but they are principally concentrated in two parishes: Holy Trinity in Long Beach has about 2,000 people, and St. Matthew's in Orange County has a Hispanic congregation of about 500. St. Cecilia is a small parish with a few Hispanics, but we have discovered that Hispanic people, at least in our area, are not regular mass attenders. They show up for baptisms, *quinceañeras*, weddings and funerals. We have adjusted our ministry to meet their needs, rather than shoehorn them into our model. We advertise in the local Hispanic paper that we do sacraments, and we get referrals by word of mouth, and that's a completely separate ministry from Sunday mass. On Sundays, we don't see 90 to 95% of the people who come to baptisms. I had a baptism two weeks ago, where the church was packed like sardines, with over 50 people, and only one of them showed up for mass the next day. That's just the reality. We can't single-handedly change a person's cultural norms, to fit ours. It's up to the Church to adjust to them and to meet them where they are. Another thing I've discovered is that the Hispanic community loves music, particularly Spanish music. Our cantor is bilingual, so he's a great intermediary. There's too much of a tendency in all churches to get people to conform to the norms of the church, rather than meet people where they are. Our baptism ministry does that. Although 100% of our Sunday mass is sung, our baptism services include a considerable amount of spoken material, to meet the needs of the people who are attending, which is an entirely different ministry. A very prominent Protestant, John Wesley, said that the entire world was his parish, and I'm no fan of Protestantism, but I agree with him on that. I consider anyone who needs our services to be part of my parish. I respond to the needs of the entire community around me, and not just the people who come to mass on

Sunday. We can't be a country club, an elite crew with high barriers to inclusion. We have to reach out and provide for

<p><i>We can't be a country club, an elite crew with high barriers to inclusion. We have to reach out &amp; provide for people's needs. In business, they say, "Find a need &amp; fill it." That's what we're doing!</i></p>	<p>people's needs. In business, they say, "Find a need and fill it." That's what we're doing!</p>
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Mathias: Here at Holy Family, we have several people who come to us for the sacraments of the Church. There is a definite need in that respect, so, whereas the Roman Catholic parishes of Austin continue to perpetuate the ancient heresy of semi-Pelagianism, of making people "earn" the grace of God in the sacraments of the Church, we make the sacraments available to all without the obstacles and hurdles imposed by other churches. We celebrate the dominical sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist (or First Communion) on Sundays, and last Sunday we baptized some seven people and shared First Communion with five others. We have two English masses and one Spanish mass: The Spanish mass often has higher attendance than the other two combined, but the English masses sustain our community financially. That was also the case in my previous parish, as a Roman Catholic priest.

Leary: Regarding what Archbishop Michael said, we become our own worst enemy when we become too sensitive to the fact of our color. We need to represent Christ without allowing ourselves get hung up on color. As a grandmaster within Freemasonry, I was invited to several lodges of Prince Hall Masonry, where I was the only pale guy, and I had to learn to feel comfortable in my own skin. I can't change my color, but I can control how I behave and act with people. I try to be the vessel of God. I try to listen to and understand others. And I pray heartily that the Spirit might be with me and guide me and keep me from putting my big foot in my mouth. It's a challenge. Our group is small, our presiding bishop is a woman, and we have more bishops than most, but we have to feel comfortable in ourselves, and not let ourselves get in the way of us doing the work of the Lord.

Seneco: I'm quite comfortable speaking with diverse groups. My issue is that we claim to be inclusive and diverse, and yet 95% of our clergy don't represent the diverse populations we serve. I have preached at African-American churches

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around here, and I preached at Stallings' Imani Temple for over twelve years. I feel, though, that I and my 30 clergy don't represent a cross-cultural section of the population we're trying to

serve, and I don't know how to recruit or engage people in answering their call with us. As vicars of Christ, we need to represent the diversity we espouse. If we were interviewing candidates for our seminary, for instance, I'm imagining what it would be like for African-Americans or Hispanics to interview with three White bishops!

Marsh: Listening to the community is a really important part. My best friend for 30 years is of African-American descent, and during recent years I've really tried to listen to her perspective as a Black woman. When I think about and reflect on her experiences, I come to a greater appreciation of her. Let's put ourselves out there, listen with all our mind and heart, and create greater diversity!

Leary: When I was a police chief, my job was to hire the best possible people as law enforcement officers in my town, regardless of race. I would bring other people onto our review boards. Archbishop Michael, you might try the same: You could bring in the bishop you enthroned, and invite him to participate: You'll get to know each other a little better, and he'll better understand your processes. The job is the same: We're trying to find the "best of," hoping that they're motivated by the Spirit!

Seneco: I agree. At the end of the day, we want the best clergy, regardless of their "packaging." Ours is a recruitment issue. I just read an article today: While the USCCB is condemning Black Lives Matter and other social justice movements as "pseudo-religious," 77% of Black Catholics consider opposing racism as essential to their faith. This culture of White supremacy is disastrous to the American church, and

apparently people are leaving in droves. These are people who want to go to church, but who don't feel welcome anymore.

Strong: There are certainly resources out there on reaching African-American folks—but you're going to have a hard time if you're trying to give a White experience of the Catholic Church to African Americans. What Archbishop Gomez did in condemning social justice movements was pure racism by a Latino man who operates in a context of Whiteness and White privilege. The Independent Catholic movement is also centered in Whiteness and will not be a welcoming place until we figure out how to accept diversity and come to people in ways that are not patronizing. I've read articles on why much Black music is inappropriate for liturgical settings, because it's "too emotional" or written in the first-person singular—but when we say "I," we are not singing about ourselves as individuals; we're speaking of our corporate experience. Our singing and preaching are often testimonial and doxological, glorifying God and speaking to the needs of people. I will be honest: It's an uphill battle for most Independent Catholic jurisdiction to draw African Americans who are seeking to stay politically and socially connected to the Black experience. Sure, there are Black folks who love to go to high-church Anglo-Catholic liturgies that don't represent Black culture, but if you want to reach the masses, that requires a different approach.

D'Arrigo: Back to the broader question that brings us together. In his presentation, Jayme shared, "I reached out to all the bishops of the 'Big 12.' To provide a glimpse into the challenges of uniting these bishops, their responses might be summarized as follows: The Ecumenical Catholic Communion and Ascension Alliance expressed an openness to collaboration. The IOCC, PCCI and National Catholic Apostolic Church in the U.S.A. shared numbers but have not yet expressed an interest in collaborating. Leadership of the OCCI view our efforts to build bridges as money-making and self-aggrandizing and refuses to collaborate in anything in which a certain bishop is involved, but seems open to ongoing conversations." The final bullet point says that no responses were received from six jurisdictions. What strikes me about this is "Leadership

of the OCCI view our efforts to build bridges as money-making and self-aggrandizing and refuses to collaborate.” If we’re going to talk about our movement moving forward in any meaningful way, maybe we need to decide who is part of this movement, who has any desire to actually move

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forward. And who is part of this movement but is very happy to just be left on their independent selves and who don’t want to be a part of this conversation. Let’s establish that interest, rather than beat horses that have long been dead!

Kemp: Deciding who’s in and who’s out is a good way, I think, to kill your own movement!

D’Arrigo: I agree, and I don’t have an easy answer. It’s like we’re trying to move forward, but we’re carrying bags that are weighing us down. How long will we keep carrying the bags before we say, “These bags are weighing us down, and we can’t move forward anymore!” It’s really disturbing to hear that Jayme sends out an innocent message — “Hey, I’m trying to compile some data” — and he receives such harsh responses.

Dang: I’m Vietnamese, so I think I’m qualified to talk about race. I sometimes feel alone in this movement, since I’m going against the Roman Church, and I’m going against my Vietnamese culture, which is very Catholic. At other times, I feel this Independent movement is a great opportunity for us to shine. Sometimes I want to tell everyone about Archbishop Ngô Đình Thục, the first Vietnamese archbishop to separate himself from the Roman Church. His group has contacted me and asked me to join them—but they’re too conservative. When I travel, I like to take my mom to mass at Independent Catholic churches, but she has run from them in the past, saying, “That felt like a voodoo church!” Some communities, in their attempt to be “progressive,” pray in ways that don’t resemble the Catholic mass, and they make people like my mother wonder, “What the hell is going on?” I want to be proud of

Independent Catholicism and to introduce my family to it, but I too often find masses that are way too progressive for my family to feel comfortable with them. I'm very interested in apologetics and our development of an Independent Catholic apologetic. I'd love to equip myself

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and others for the fights that we have with the "wolves" out there who are ready to attack and bite us. It's interesting: Before the pandemic, the Roman Church was calling me a "fake priest," and now they're calling me to ask for my help. I

would love to arm myself with better answers for why I left the Roman Catholic Church and why we do what we do, and why I'm so damned proud of this Independent Catholic movement!

Yoegel: Going back to Michelangelo's point about the movement and who's in or who's out, I would ask: What is this "movement"? We have so little unity, organization or communion. Are we merely talking about cooperation or interjurisdictional communication? Those are all very different things.

D'Arrigo: I don't mean the whole movement. It simply frustrates me that we talk about some semblance of uniting and moving forward – and maybe we shouldn't worry about those who aren't coming along or engaging or getting involved or, even worse, those who are badmouthing us or this movement. How can we move past having to deal with them? How can we move forward together? I see a community that gets together here week after week, a group that wants to work together, so let's move this community forward and not worry about the rest.

Yoegel: Rather than deciding who's in or who's out, it seems that all our efforts should be invitational and open to all who want to join us. If we can use the

*If we can use the word "movement" of ourselves, what is this "movement"? We only see "the tip of the iceberg," it seems, with 90% of the movement being under the surface.*

word "movement" of ourselves, what is this "movement"? We only see "the tip of the iceberg," it seems, with 90% of the movement being under the surface.

Lynch: We sometimes think that we're in competition with other ISM groups, that we're in competition with each other. I prefer to think of us all as laborers in Lord's vineyard. Our parish has made an effort to reach out to people in other jurisdictions, to invite them to preach, etc. We focus our work on the micro level, at the local level, of developing individual connections. For example, Bishop Paul Breton is not part of the ECC, but he's a wonderful preacher, and we invite him to preach to us once a month. One of his priest also preaches to us at times and celebrates private masses here. I agree with Joseph that some ISM communities do not offer traditional liturgies, like we do. We have proper vestments and a professional choir, but we also can't be "one-size-fits-all" throughout the movement. We have to respect and allow for diversity, and we have to respect the integrity of each independent community, which worships as it sees fit. Instead, let's focus on our common identity as laborers in the Lord's vineyard, with all of us meeting different needs and serving the people of God in different ways!

Furr: I want to honor Joseph for what he shared. I appreciate that. We are a microcosm of what's going on in society right now. Our society is becoming more conscious than it was 50 years ago, and issues of diversity are far more impactful for us now than they were 50 years ago. Issues of inclusivity are moving us in a different way now, and, as long as we keep thinking that we're a male church that happens to have some women and gays, we're not going to get anywhere. When I am presiding at mass at Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Church, I am a woman, and I am part of a movement. I am part of something bigger. And I'd like to think that I'm part of creating new paradigms in a Church

long dominated by White men interested in domination and control. Otherwise, we're just recreating the Roman

Church and calling it something else.

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And no, we cannot call ourselves

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we do this, we negate other

*call ourselves "colorblind"; when we do this,*

people's cultures.

*we negate other people's cultures. Only from a place*

Only from a place

*of privilege can we say, "It doesn't matter if someone*

*is Hispanic or Black or Asian." That's racist!*

say, "It doesn't

matter if someone is Hispanic or Black or Asian." That's racist! I want to see diversity. I want to see and honor people's color and culture.

Strong: We can't be "colorblind." We need to intentionally invite people of certain cultures into our movement!

Furr: Yes, and we need to question our motives and intentions. If I say, "I want to invite people of color into the church," I need to ask, "Why am I doing this? Why am I imposing on others my idea of what diversity is supposed to be? Or am I really opening the doors and honoring the people who come in, wanting to celebrate?"

Strong: Evangelical churches are growing, and they are not having any problem bringing in people of diverse races. They adapt the culture through music and in other ways. What I hear you asking is: How can we make people of different groups and races feel welcomed and get them worshipping together? Being a White pastor is not a barrier in a Black city. I've seen many faithful White pastors serve the African-American community, but we have to ask ourselves as a movement: How can we be in New York City, Washington D.C., St. Louis and New Orleans—in cities with significant Black populations—and yet they don't

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know that we exist? We have no impact or influence. The groups that do are Black-led and stay in the Black community.



Seneco: We're better than our friends from Rome, but we also have room for growth!

Yoegel: I hope that what I'm about to say brings us a little smile to your faces. With respect to diversity, we have a pretty bad

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model to follow: Jesus' ministry was not diverse! He preached to Jews and a few Roman pagans, but he never got far from home, and his organization was

comprised of 12 Jewish men. I wouldn't even qualify to be Jesus' friend—since I'm not a Jewish man! I say this partly in jest, but also to bring light to the fact that we're all doing the best we can as we try to push this boulder uphill. Let's not be too hard on ourselves!

Kemp: I want to acknowledge how moved I was by Father Joseph's words. I can feel the stress you feel, in a culture so deeply rooted in tradition. As one who is not rooted in the *Novus Ordo* but who is experimenting with tradition, I felt in my gut the impact of your words!

Leary: I experienced a similar fear as Father Joseph when I invited my family to my ordination. They are devout Roman Catholics, so I wasn't sure how they'd react. My mother is 98 years old and could only be with us through livestream, but I also sensed that she was saying, "It's alright." I almost fell over when my sister and her husband and two children received communion. We had a woman deacon at the altar. I can appreciate how jarring some of those elements can be for people. We challenge everything that some people believe. I was in the novitiate during Vatican II, and it was the 35- to 55-year-old priests who had the biggest problem with Vatican II; the older ones just loved it and jumped

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aboard. Each of us needs to figure out where our ministry is taking us. I also want to apologize for my use of the word "colorblind." I didn't mean it in the way it came across. We spend a lot of time talking about skin color, when,

if we were to take our skin off, we're all the same: the products of cultures that are strong, special and important. I appreciate that this group keeps me grounded, moving me from my right-of-Attila-the-Hun stances and helping me grow in the Mystical Body of Christ!

D'Arrigo: Joseph Dang, you kicked me right in the gut, in the most uncomfortable and unimaginable way. I teach sacramental theology for my jurisdiction. I write the altar books and teach instructional masses. I have a rich history and love of the Anglo-Catholic mass, and yet the prayer of my community is as low as low-church can be: I'm lucky to wear a collar or stole on Sundays! I want anyone who comes

*Apart from the Eucharistic prayer,  
would most Catholics recognize  
what we do as a Catholic mass?*

*While I'm not sure how to change that  
for my community, I also recognize  
the disunity I create in a movement  
that strives to be fully inclusive.*

*I need to rethink how I'm doing things.  
Innovation just for the sake of innovation  
never gets us anywhere!*

to mass to say, "I feel like I've been here before. This is all familiar!" Now I'm thinking about our mass yesterday, and I'm wondering: Apart from the Eucharistic prayer, would most Catholics recognize what we do as a Catholic mass? While I'm not sure how to change that for my community, I also recognize the disunity I

create in a movement that strives to be fully inclusive. I need to rethink how I'm doing things. Innovation just for the sake of innovation never gets us anywhere!

Furr: I love and learn from each and every one of you. I'm so grateful that I live in a community where we're very fortunate to have two different inclusive Catholic communities: One is more conservative, and then there's Our Lady of the Angels, with a more progressive celebration. So, people have a choice.

Strong: I come from a very traditional background, and my study of Roman liturgy, particularly of Black-culture Roman liturgy, has arguably shaped me. I believe very strongly in evangelism, discipleship, invitation and apologetics as ways to grow our movement. If you come to my liturgy, there'll be gospel music, and I might speak in tongues, but I'll still come back to the form of the liturgy. There's room

for all of us in this movement! As David Justin says, we're all laborer's in the Lord's vineyard – we just do our work in different ways!

Dang: A woman begged to see me today. She recently moved from California to Denver. She survived COVID after six months in the ICU. She saw my talk show, and she wanted my blessing. She said, "You give me hope – and I just needed you to touch me and bless me!" I felt humbled that God

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called me to serve her in this way. Ministry doesn't just happen inside the walls of a church; it's what we do in our daily lives to help others. Let's give people hope, and let's share with them the unconditional love of Christ!

Buffone: Thank you, Joseph, for sharing that. I had a similar experience during Village Day here in our town many years ago. We had a booth for Holy Spirit, and I got into a conversation with a woman on the sidewalk in front of our booth. She told me that she hadn't been to her Roman Catholic church for a long time, because she was divorced and remarried. And she hadn't received communion. She started crying. I had the pyx in my pocket, and I asked, "Would you like to receive Communion?" She looked at me and said, "Can I?" I said, "Of course, you can." And she wept. Many times our ministry is on the streets. The other thing I want to share is that my dad is going to be 90 years old. I was ordained a deacon in St. Louis in 2008, so he wasn't able to come. But he came to my ordination to the presbyterate in 2010. My mom had passed, but my dad carried my chasuble to the altar, and he placed it on the altar for me – at age 80. He is a devout Roman Catholic Italian who speaks broken English – and afterwards, he was the first in line to receive my blessing. I wept. We both wept. He tells me, "It doesn't look like the church that I grew up in," but he receives communion, and that is such a gift to me. I often say that our mass at Holy Spirit is 75% familiar to Roman Catholics, and 25% different. Having a woman priest is probably the biggest part of that 25%! But if Joseph's family were to come to mass, they'd probably say, "What was that?" I challenge all of us: Are we just repeating

the Roman liturgy, or are we finding ways to grow beyond it? Who says that we need to follow it, right? Some of those older prayers just don't cut it anymore, and the Independent Catholic movement provides us the ability to embrace more contemporary theologies and new ways of thinking about God and our relationship to the Divine. A man once reported to Bishop Peter about my mass: "I don't

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know what Our Father she said, but it was so different. I just wanted to recite the Our Father that I've been saying since I was a little boy!" I'm hopeful that our movement will someday have something for everyone!

Carter: I couldn't agree more with the idea of having something for everybody. I'm on the verge of tears myself. We really are part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church led by Jesus Christ, and I'm proud to be a part of this group. We are Independent Catholic. We're autocephalous: We're "self-headed" administratively and, to some degree, theologically and ecclesiologically. We're independent of one another and of Rome. That gives us tremendous freedom. The challenge that arises from that freedom is what we're discussing here: How can we find the areas that

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we agree on, and how can we support one another in practicing and representing Christ according to our own individual charisms? I don't think it's a problem that we have a variety of liturgies in

our movement—some of which may shock people—but we want to avoid misunderstandings and misrepresenting ourselves. The more that we can self-define and accurately

represent who we are in a public way, the more we realize that there is room for all of us here!

Mathias: Thank you all. I love y'all more than words could express. It was a delight pulling together the data for my presentation in Vegas, and it was a delight seeing so many of your faces there in Vegas and with us virtually, through Zoom. The phrase that comes to mind is the title of a Dr. Seuss book: *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* I look forward to seeing where the Spirit will continue to lead and guide us and our movement, knowing that one day we'll all look back and say, "Oh, the places we've gone!"

## The Future of Inclusive Catholicism

*During the last “hive mind” think tank of 2021, participants discussed their visions for the future of Inclusive Catholics.*

Mathias: This is our last “think tank” conversation of 2021! Let’s pause and reflect on what we’ve done during the past year and what we look forward to in 2022. In 2021, we debuted ISMDB 3.0, our new wiki database of Independent Catholic clergy, and we are now working on a similar database of Independent Catholic eucharistic communities. In May, we debuted *Extraordinary Catholics*, a bimonthly magazine for the laity whom we serve in our ministries. We hosted semimonthly virtual happy hours, and we gathered for 12 virtual “hive mind” think tanks. We capped the year with our “Saints in Sin City” gathering in Las Vegas. So, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 was a productive year in our movement! As we look toward 2022, where do we feel the Spirit blowing us? When we come to the end of 2022, what would we like to say that we accomplished as a movement?

Abel: I see a movement towards convergence among people. I’d like to see us continue to meet and work closer together and build closer relationships with one another.

Banks: I’m very thankful for these conversations. I’d like to see some sort of interjurisdictional seminary where we can share some sort of common theological education. Our ordinariate has started a seminary, but it will take four or five years for us to become accredited. Perhaps we can pool our resources and work toward a new seminary together.

Mathias: I had a similar conversation with Bishop Mark Newman when he came to Austin in October for the ordination of Deacon Elsa Nelligan. One of my dreams is to establish an asynchronous platform, like Coursera, for the education of clergy and laity. We would have to formulate how we would standardize courses, with such questions as: What expectations will we have for those who post content to this platform? Of how many hours will each course consist? How will we make available the syllabus of each course and check for learning, so that ordaining bishops can have confidence in the education received by those who

participate in such a platform? I welcome thoughts on how we might continue to improve initial and continuing education in our movement in the new year.

Abel: Until we're able to develop an Inclusive Catholic seminary program, we should tap into universities for individual classes for accredited classes on the fundamentals of theology, the sacraments, ecclesiology, Church history, *et cetera*. Why not tap into things that already exist and combine them into an overall educational program for seminarians?

Brohl: Jayme, you refer to "our movement." I'm wondering if you might clarify what you mean by that.

Mathias: I appreciate the question. When I refer to "our movement," I'm referring to that which brings us together. Many of us self-identify as part of the Independent Sacramental Movement. As I had expressed in Las Vegas, I like to imagine the Independent Sacramental Movement (or ISM) as a circle that contains other circles. One such circle within the ISM is Independent Catholicism, or what I now prefer to call "Inclusive Catholicism." Many of us self-identify as "Independent Catholic," all the while acknowledging that this brand leads to the inevitable question: "Independent" of what? To date, there's certainly no formal organization for this movement of which we're part, though, in Vegas, Marek shared his hope of us coming together around certain *sine qua non* conditions of unity. Others in this conversation have more history than I in this movement and could better elucidate other attempts at unity in the past. Personally, I would love nothing more than to see us come closer together.

Brohl: Recognizing that there is no formal organization, and in light of failed attempts in the past, is there a consensus that such coming together is desirable?

Abel: There have been various attempts at aligning jurisdictions. One of the major flaws with that is that somebody or some group tends to get a "big head" and have grandiose ideas with respect to having authority over such a group. It seems the first step toward pulling us together is to acknowledge one another and the validity of each other's ministries. By

coming to know more about one another and our ministries, that will bring us closer together. I don't think we need a superstructure in order to do that. The establishment of hierarchy and structure is often the death knell of many movements. It

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becomes about the people in charge, rather than a convergence of individuals and ministries that come together to

support one another. We don't have to reinvent the wheel; we just need to find ways to support one another.

Mathias: When we came together in Austin for our first interjurisdictional gathering in 2019, we were hearing two possible directions. One was best represented by Father Mike Lopez of Ridgewood, New York, who urged the formation of a confederation or some meta-organization that would allow us to "come together." Another direction was expressed by Father Kevin Przybylski of Rabbouni Catholic Community in Louisville, Kentucky, who asked how, after that event, we might continue "coming together without coming together." In fact, we were tempted to use that play on words for the title of our proceedings—later published as *A New Way of Being Catholic*—except for the possible sexual reference contained in that phrase. For two years, our focus has been "coming together without coming together." The questions remains, as suggested in Father Marek's presentation: Is there some desire to come together interjurisdictionally through the formation of some meta-organization that might better unite us?

Brohl: I've been dealing with this issue for a very long time. When I first came into the Independent Catholic movement, I was with the United Catholic Church, founded by Archbishop Robert Bowman. He asked me to contact various jurisdictions, to see if we might come together simply to associate with one another—but outside any new legal structure. There would be no authority over this group, so there would be no authority issues. There would simply be a small group coordinating communications and activities.



We had a bit of success with that, and I'm not sure if it still exists or not. I think Bishop Tom is right: We'll never have a successful association if someone feels that they have authority over others. I believe in the autonomy of each

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parish, community and jurisdiction. People who are familiar with the failures of the past will not be attracted to any organization with power issues.

D'Arrigo: The Ascension Alliance has an incredible theology program that covers pretty much everything that any Independent Sacramental person might want to have in order to get an M.Div. in preparation for Holy Orders. I know because I've read their students' stuff, and I've looked at their course catalog. I brag on them not because I have anything to gain, but because it's a really good program. It was designed by a bunch of folks who have been in the Independent movement for a long time, and it's orthodox enough for an orthodox education, and it's progressive enough for a progressive education. They're very open about sharing, their syllabi and their books. I encourage you to utilize their curriculum in your jurisdiction; they'll be happy to share information with you. When I hear talk of a universal ISM theology program, I say, "It's been in place for a while!" The Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch also has Sophia School of Divinity, and Father Scott will be happy to give you specifics. I'm sure that they, too, would be open to a universal curriculum. They, too, are interested in producing really good clergy, which is what we really need in the ISM. Also, we keep saying that we need to create this loose organization of different jurisdictions. This group has been meeting on Zoom for nearly two years now. We represent vastly different jurisdictions with vastly diverse groups of parishioners, priests and bishops. We all consider ourselves as being under the Independent umbrella. Instead of reinventing the wheel, we should recognize that this group is literally rolling right now. We see a lot of the same faces over and over again. We're building relationships. We say, "How can we create this other group – which is exactly like us, but isn't us?" Instead, why don't we start utilizing ourselves? We don't need to invent another group. We

don't have any leaders here, except that Jayme volunteers his Zoom—but we could be using my Zoom or Alan's Zoom or Karen's Zoom. There's no one here who's saying, "I'm better than you are."

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*We don't need to invent another group.*

We're bishops, priests, deacons and laypeople who are interested in the future of the ISM!

Yell: I'll take us in a slightly different direction. I'm particularly interested in ongoing education. In the 21 years that I've been involved in Independent communities, I keep finding this surprising gravitational pull back to the theology that was around when I left the Roman Church. I believe we

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have to find a new language. So, my hope for 2022 and beyond is that we can take the great theological basis we all have in different ways of understanding the Christian and Catholic traditions, and that we find language and ritual that speaks to new generations. I work with

a group of clergy from six different denominations here in Oregon City: Lutherans, Unitarians, Episcopal, Baptists and others, and they haven't really changed in the 12 years we have been meeting. They are helpful to each other, they maintain their local communities, and still they lament that we can't move forward. Christianity is shrinking, particularly in light of COVID. Let's come together through Zoom and create new language, without all the baggage. I'm not really interested in perpetual communities; I want to find new ways of presenting the gospel! And if we can do that, the communities will come. Let's take Jesus' words, "If they're not against us, they're for us," and let's move on!

Banks: I want to thank Michelangelo: I was ignorant to a lot of the resources you mentioned. We've been talking loosely about having some sort of organization, and I see the validity in the fact that we're already meeting together. We all pull together small amounts of resources to run our local communities, so I really like Marek's idea of having some sort of free church model where we can pool the resources of Independent parishes like ours. If we pull together 25 or 30 churches our size, that would build a good resource pool – and that would be a huge deal. We need resources to build a more sound clergy. I started seminary with the Episcopalians, and they put a lot of resources at my disposal – so that I didn't even have to work when I started

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seminary. I would like to be able to form something like that for our folks. There are so many opportunities that come from having resources and being able to send people to different places to study. I'd love for us to address that as we work together.

Corbin: I have been in the Independent movement for the last ten years or so. I was a Roman priest for many years, with the Diocese of Brooklyn. Like Kevin, I don't want to reinvent that wheel. So many people have been hurt by it and are moving away from it. We're trying to imagine new language. We call ourselves a "community" instead of a "parish." We share our liturgy with our Reformed brothers and sisters, from whom we rent our space. We invite everyone to word and table. Part of our prayer during the week is mindful prayer, and that attracts younger folks who don't want what we have to offer. We know the depth of our tradition and our faith, but so many people don't want to hear it anymore. When I became a bishop, I suddenly became very popular with people who reached out to me, asking me to join their groups. I said, "Why do I have to join another group? Why can't we be collegial with one another and share our resources?" I lead through shared governance, so the people of the parish decide what's going to happen. We have developed an intercommunion statement for anyone who wants to be in communion with

us. We're not interested in being taken over; this isn't a war. Building on the Acts of the Apostles, we offer our resources. I have a program where people can be trained in Clinical Pastoral Education: I offer that to everyone. Various jurisdictions have signed an intercommunion agreement with us. All this means is that we respect and honor each other. There is no hierarchy, and, when we get together, we

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pray and share our resources. That's what I'm interested in. When you start setting up new jurisdictions, forget it. People will reject that. We need to build communities without

borders, that are universal and welcoming, with language that is consistent with the people you're serving. As we've gotten people asking for ordination, we've developed a formation program: with six months of getting to know us, we put the person through a psychological exam, we prepare them, and we want to know that the people call this person to ordination. I don't call anyone to ordination; that has to come from the people they'll serve and who see them as a spiritual leader and servant.

Furr: Kenneth, you're my hero. I have felt for a long time that we're not going to get far until we heal and purge the Roman-ness that we carry with us. All of us who have come from the Roman Church have that wagonload of stuff that

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How can we move beyond that?*

we bring, including our dreams for the future. If we're always comparing ourselves to Rome, thinking about how we might connect with Rome, then Rome becomes the center of our thinking. I hear that a lot. In 2022, I would love to

see a program that helps get us out of Rome, that helps us to move on. I think that the Inclusive Sacramental

Movement—a term I’m coming to use more than Independent Sacramental Movement—is the future of Church and of communal worship, but we won’t be able to move into the future that is drawing us, until we can absolutely let go of that Roman past. We haven’t done that yet, as a collective, and many of us carry that Roman connection that we’ve got to get rid of. I am so not in favor of any effort to connect with Rome until Rome changes its dogmatic teachings—because until it does, everything that Rome says is a lie. I feel very strongly about that. And if we align ourselves to that, we might create something different, but it will still have that Roman element. That’s my hope for 2022: that we might develop some programming to heal from the baggage that we carry. The “elephant in the living room” is Rome! How can we move beyond that? As to education, I love the fact that there are things already in place, but I love even more the idea of ongoing opportunities for growth. Let’s look not only at where we have been, but also where the Spirit is leading Jesus-path people today. Let’s look at how theology is shifting, and let’s take what we’ve known for the past 2,000 years to inform—or to be informed by—the unknown of the next 2,000 years!

Kemp: I was 71 years of age when I went back to graduate school, so the door to ongoing learning is open!

Furr: I’m 71 now—but graduate school costs money, and a lot of us in ministry today—because we’re outside of Rome—don’t have salaries. We have to be creative with how we nurture clericalism in the Inclusive Sacramental Movement, so that we don’t lean on things that are cost prohibitive.

Brohl: I’m on a different end of the Catholic spectrum from Karen. For me to get rid of Rome, as you have suggested, would be to divest myself of something that’s very deeply ingrained in me. As grandiose as it sounds, I see myself as a reformer of Rome, rather than as one who wants to get rid of it! We do well to ask ourselves who we are as members of this

<p><i>As grandiose as it sounds, I see myself as a reformer of Rome, rather than as one who wants to get rid of it!</i></p>	<p>group. What brings us together? How would we describe or identify ourselves as a group?</p>
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Furr: I'll attempt a response. We are on the road to Emmaus. We are on a journey, and we don't know the destination. We know from where we came, and we know that has changed. We also know that there's an encounter *en route*. Who do we encounter in this journey? I have absolutely no interest in reforming Rome. I really don't. I was a nun for almost 30

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*I've been there.*

*When I see what's going on in Rome & with Rome, I just have no desire whatsoever to try to reform them.*

*They have to reform themselves!*

years. I've been there. When I see what's going on in Rome and with Rome, I just have no desire whatsoever to try to reform them.

They have to reform themselves!

The thought of us reforming them is like inviting in the Greek Orthodox Church to reform the Inclusive

Sacramental

Movement. The change in the

Roman Church has to come from within the Roman Church. It won't come from without. It won't even be influenced from without because the power structure is too ingrained. The best thing we can do is acknowledge that the Roman Church is on its own spiritual path, and it has to work out its own baggage. That movement is already happening in the Roman Church—but we're not going to be able to fix that. And we don't need to.

Robison: As someone who was not raised Roman Catholic and who has never been Roman Catholic, I get intensely tired of hearing about it—to the point that, in my own jurisdiction, I said, "The first person who says 'Rome' gets muted! If you say it a second time, you'll get muted longer. And, if you say it a third time, I'll kick you off the call!" In 20 minutes, every single person was off the call. When we came back together, I said, "Do you now see why I bang my head against the wall? You all are still fighting your fights from when you were Roman Catholics! Get over it!" I'm tired of "We can't do that, because it's too Roman." I say, "That's not just Roman; it's what a legal entity has to do sometimes." I call it Post-Roman Disaster Syndrome, and I can be very sharp about it—because I get tired of hearing about Rome. Let them do their thing. And let's do ours. We've spent a lot of time fighting "the Man." If we define ourselves as not being something—as being "independent

from Rome" – rather than as being something, all we ever do is end up being the angry negatives! In 2022, I would

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love to see people let Rome go! We have work to do here. Let's stop carrying around the anger and baggage. Let's turn the page and go on. Let's separate the anger, trauma and projection from the work that needs to be done!

D'Arrigo: I'm going to go on a crazy tangent, but it has everything to do with my expectations for 2022. I'll speak through analogy. I have gone through a number of struggles this year in my personal health, and it's hard to get into the Christmas spirit now. For those of you not do not know, I was born intersex. I was not born XY-chromosomally male, or XX-chromosomally female. I was born XXY, neither chromosomally male or chromosomally female. It's a rare condition, but no more rare than being born with red hair. The hardest thing in my treatment is that no one treats me as an XXY human being: They medically treat me as an XY male, even though my body is not an XY male body. Now, when I go to my cancer specialist, I say, "You need to treat me as an XXY person, not as an XY male. It makes a difference. I will never be a healthy boy with XY chromosomes, no matter what you do to me. My own goal going into 2022 is to find doctors who will actually treat me based on the person I am, and not based on what I look like or what they want me to be. All of us here talk about the Catholic Church as a body, and yet none of us—except Bishop Jerry—calls ourselves Roman Catholic. We are part of Independent Catholicism or the Independent Sacramental Movement. Kevin and I come from an Anglican background, but neither of us answers to the Church of England anymore, despite the fact that they ordained us. No matter how good the Episcopal Church's

pension program is, there is nothing that makes me want to be an Episcopalian. I want to be an Independent Catholic. At the end of the day, I chose this for a reason. There's something about the Independent Sacramental Movement that made me intrinsically feel that this is for me. I'm not Roman, and Rome, despite claiming to be pro-life, literally says that I don't exist. Let's respect the good things that we got from Rome, Canterbury, Calvin and Wesley – but those things don't make us Catholic, Anglican, Calvinist or Wesleyan. Those things now make us Independent Catholic—and we move forward with that. Calling ourselves Catholic is like me calling myself Sicilian at the dinner table with gravy on Sunday. Use the analogy of my health to decide what type of person you are, and, if

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Yoegel: Michelangelo, you're a hard act to follow. I feel like the comedian after the Beatles on "The Ed Sullivan Show" some 60 years ago! I would like to point out that my Sicilian ancestors called it "sauce" and not "gravy." After our last gathering, I was rereading Jayme's article. What came to mind during this conversation was his paragraph on the fact that so long as we call ourselves "Independent," people will want to fill in the blank: "Independent of whom?" In our part of the world, Rome is the 500-pound gorilla in the

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to experience it.*

room. In other parts of  
the world, it might be the  
Orthodox or Anglican  
Church. Like John, I  
believe that we need to  
acknowledge the PTSD  
from which many of us  
suffer. That PTSD is real

for me, and I wasn't ordained by the Roman Church! You don't have to be on the battlefield to experience it. "Independent" raises more question than it answers. "Autocephalous" confuses people. Maybe "Inclusive" is it, but I believe one New Year's resolution needs to be our



coming up with a name that readily identifies who we are without any reference to the 500-pound gorillas in the room.

Brohl: Michelangelo, I identify as an Independent Roman Catholic. When I got involved in the Independent Catholic movement in 2002 and identified myself as an Independent Roman Catholic, I eventually had to leave the Catholic Church because of their non-acceptance of my statement that I am an Independent Roman Catholic. They said, "There is no such thing! You can't be that! Those words—'Independent' and 'Catholic'—just don't go together. I don't have any PTSD, because I don't have any bad experiences with the Roman Church. The Roman Church didn't do anything to me. I excommunicated myself when I accepted ordination from an Independent Catholic bishop. I did that to myself. Maybe we could think of ourselves as an "Inclusive Christian" community. I'm not sure if that covers all the bases that are most important for us, but I'd like to see us continue doing what we're doing!

Banks: I tend to think of us as diverse, but one layperson at our church was recently sharing her surprise at our "level of unique disorganization" within the Independent world. Her biggest concern was that she wants her grandkids to be able to go to a church camp. Whatever we call or don't call ourselves, we need to consider how we can best build resources and serve the people around us. Other churches have those resources: a place to go for a retreat, a place to send the kids to summer camp, a place to apply for scholarships. Why can't we have those, to help our people?

D'Arrigo: I've been calling myself a "Convergent Catholic" a lot, and I've been calling myself an "Emergent Catholic" a lot. We are the emerging Church, and we have a direct say in what the future Church will look like. Throw the word "Inclusive" in there, and you have an alphabet soup! Maybe in 2022 I'll have an answer on what we should call ourselves!

Robison One of my professors in seminary at Austin was involved in the Reformed/Roman conversation, which was chaired from the Roman Catholic side by Ratzinger. He said to her, "Professor, I will tell you a little secret: It drives some of our people mad when you talk to each other and don't include

us in the conversation! A lot of the people I work with like to see themselves as the center of the world. So, don't talk to the Lutherans, Utrechters or Anglicans without inviting them. It'll help with Christian unity, and it will drive up the wall those who drive me insane on a daily basis!" Some people in Rome would have considerable heartburn knowing that we are having this conversation. Take that with you to bed!

Kemp: In my experience, Rome would prefer to just ignore us and not pay any attention to us at all—and hope that we go away. To paraphrase the Holy Father, "Who am I to tell

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& hope that we go away.*

Rome what to do?" I don't know where I came from or where I'm going. All I know is that it feels like I'm riding on the top of a wave, and so my goal is to stay on top of the wave!

Furr: Like I said earlier, I was a nun in religious life for 28 years. I always admired how the nuns who had been in religious life for 50, 60 or 70 years still talked in our assemblies about how we could be better at what we did. Jerry, I absolutely love your spirit, and I absolutely honor the fact that you're willing to stick with it and try to find a way. I honor and admire that—and I want to be pope! Seriously, though, when I look at 2022, I'm also a practitioner in a healing modality, and in our conference call yesterday, we were talking about how we are moving into a time in this country and in the global human experience where we're facing many challenges that far exceed our conversations about what we're going to call ourselves. In 2022, how will we ride the wave, the tsunami of events and occurrences that we face? How will we find the necessary support for ourselves and our communities as we deal with what is coming?

Scarlett: I agree. Rather than worry about what we'll call ourselves, let's support one another. For the past 20 years, I've been involved in a local association of churches, where pastors get together to support one another. I also try to build bridges with other Independent Catholic and Independent Christian movements. I was born and raised Roman Catholic, and, like Jerry, I will never say that I'm not Roman

Catholic—but there are a lot of things with Rome that I don't agree with. And that's why I prefer to self-identify as a Reformed Catholic priest.

Abel: I'm very content with who I am, and I feel very assured of who I am within the Inclusive Catholic community. I take great joy in echoing who we are, where we are, and what we're about. The greatest thing that we can do for our movement is communicate and get to know each other, so let's continue that in 2022!

Corbin: I truly believe that we are a determinative Catholic community, and we have a lot to offer. In 2022, I'd love to see us become more collegial and more sharing of resources.

Loveless: My mentor in the monastery used to say, "Phil, you will become what you pray." As we talked today about our self-identity, I was thinking of a project that I've been trying to coordinate with people from different faiths. I wish we had more Independent Catholics here in San Diego. In 2022, let's continue to become more inclusive and to reach out in our communities!

Yoegel: It seems we have a lot of challenges for 2022. Instead of losing 20 pounds, I'll just take all our resolutions and make them my own! What kind of "community" should we have

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going forward? What should we call ourselves? How can we best represent our unity as well as our diversity? How can we help our local communities and each other? For me, the greatest challenge boils down to a question that has plagued me

for almost 10 years, since I got ordained: How do we bring Christ's message to a world that very much doesn't know that it needs it—and to people who have been so turned off to Christ's message as it's delivered in the primary Catholic church in the United States? I hope to spend a lot of time with you folks in 2022, wrestling with that!

Yell: Back when John Paul II went to Ireland, he suggested that the nuns go back to wearing their habits. Karen, you might remember that. It is said that there are more Irish nuns in Liverpool, than there are in Dublin. The apocryphal story is told that one of the Liverpudlians said the following Sunday, "Sister Mary Joseph, why aren't you wearing your habit after what the pope said?" She replied, "To be sure he's a dear man, but he has a lot to learn!" I love that story, because it reminds me that I have a lot to learn, and that, instead of telling other people what to do with their spirituality, I should listen. That story also encapsulate so much of my relationship with my Roman roots. I was born in the UK: I'm a gay, English Catholic, and I have a push-pull relationship with the Roman Church. I did consider joining the Episcopal Church when I worked for them, but I decided, "I'm a Catholic!" I now want to find a new way of doing that. Our roots are fabulous, and we all share in the

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great tree of Christianity. I want to find how we can say that in a way that is relevant again. Even if we're not joining together, let's speak with one voice for the benefit of the gospel and the world!

Brohl: We are on a path that is being led by the Spirit, and I expect great things from all of us in 2022—regardless of how we identify ourselves or our organization!

Carter: I find something to agree and disagree with in everything that you all say. I love the fact that we are all individuals in our own bodies, with our own gifts. That is the metaphor that works for me with this group. I believe that we are all part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, led by Jesus Christ. I do not believe that anyone can shake me out of it. I don't believe that I am any less Catholic due to the fact that I was effectively excommunicated by Rome as a result of my ordination as an Independent Catholic—the term that I use, since it seems the shortest, most descriptive, most honest, and least likely to be misunderstood. I am a Catholic, it's a fact, and I don't have a chip on my shoulder about it. I use "Independent" because it does lead to the next question: "Independent from what?" Let's be honest: If I say "Catholic," there's an association with an existing

group, and it's dishonest, or at best disingenuous, for me to pretend that I'm in communion with Rome. My shorthand message is that I'm administratively independent from Rome and from every other church – and yet we're all a part of that larger, mystical fact of the Church of Jesus Christ and the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I don't think a bigger organization, in a legal sense, is really going to happen, and I wonder whether it should. In the same way that the Church uses the metaphor of the body and says the hand should be a hand, the eye should be an eye, and the ear should be an ear, we all have charisms. We all have individual gifts. We are all ourselves: XX, XY, XXY and everything else! We need to be who we are. My hope for this group next year is that we find ways to support each other in "living our truth." To imitate Christ, we don't have to become Jewish or move to Nazareth. We just need to become the most honest, most truthful, most loving versions of who we are! Let's support one another in doing that next year! I don't discourage anyone from saying, "Let's get together and become a big Independent Catholic thing, and reunite with Rome and solve the Great Schism!" If that's your path, go for it. In the meantime, Jayme, thank you for making these conversations possible without us having to sign over our gifts or our identities! Our gathering here is a perfect example of exactly what Jayme is allowing us to do together, without attempting to control us. We're behind you 100% for bringing us together without trying to change us to become more like each other!

## Crucial Conversations in Inclusive Catholicism

*In the first “hive mind” think tank of 2022, participants reflected on crucial conversations that should be hosted within the Inclusive Catholic movement.*

Mathias: As we begin a new year, my question is: What are the conversations that we should be having in 2022? Are there any taboo conversations, any conversations that we’re less willing to have? Are there any conversations that we don’t need to have because we’ve beat those “horses” and they’ve dead for a long time now? As a conversation starter, for instance, I wonder whether we should have a conversation on etiquette. When I was part of the Roman Catholic Church, I knew that church’s etiquette. Now that I find myself in this new space, I’m sometimes unsure of the etiquette. We tend to drop titles in these conversations, but there is no one in my parish who refers to me without my title. I recently greeted a woman priest in our movement, and, as a sign of respect—and in the same way that we use the title “Father” of men—I referred to her as “Mother.” She immediately let me know that her preferred title is “Chaplain,” and I was happy to be corrected. How do we respect one another and our preferred titles? It also strikes me that our movement lacks a “finishing school” for bishops, such that we see and hear the darnedest things at times from our bishops. Other conversations that I’d love to have in 2022 are the piloting of a first-ever quantitative study within our movement, and conversations on the health of our movement. What conversations do you think we should be having as a movement in 2022?

Quintana: In the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, we have adopted the ancient title of Presbyter as the general title for each of us, and individual parishes might refer to their clergy as “Father” or “Mother” or “Pastor.”

Božek: In the professional world, it has become quite common in the last two or three years for people to introduce themselves with their pronouns. Perhaps when we introduce ourselves, we might share our preferred title: “Mother” or “Reverend” or “Doctor” or “Chaplain.” The

easiest policy is to ask each person which pronouns and ecclesial title she or he prefers.

Yell: The Episcopal diocese here is moving away from gender-based terms, such as “Father” or “Mother,” and is using “Pastor,” “Priest” or “Reverend.” The conversation I’d like to have, as representatives of people across the nation and

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different ideas of what it means to be a church or community. It would be helpful to hear of the different models of church within our movement. The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in America once wisely observed, “The Church does not have a mission; the mission of Jesus the Christ has a church!” That would be a great conversation starter!

Quintana: The most important thing that we need to discuss is the decolonization of the Church, and moving from a Eurocentric church, to a church that is more grounded in the pre-Constantinian Church, a church that was not Eurocentric and that adapted to each individual culture. For those of us who’ve been active in this movement for quite some time—I’ve been in this movement for nearly 50 years—I’d hope for an opportunity to gather us together as a consultative group. We’ve had a lot of experiences and could impart visions and dreams to the young men in our movement.

Leary: Having spent over 35 years in law enforcement, most of that as a police chief, I’ve been called every name in the book. We need to be less sensitive about our titles. When I was a police chief, everyone was worried about titles and how many stars they had on their collar. That’s not what the people out on the street are interested in—and those who come to our churches will respect you and call you whatever name you offer up to be called.

Newman: As I listen to Frank talk about the value of mentoring younger men, it struck me: Where are the older women in our movement? And where are the younger women in our movement? We need to engage them more in leadership roles! That leads me to the question of how our ministries would be different if we had the wisdom of women alongside the wisdom of men. Historically, we have deviated from the mission of the Church, and we have not

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listened to their voices and allowed them to guide us. It's a mindset that we've inherited that we don't even think of women! We have to be able to challenge that.

Quintana: I in no way meant to exclude women. Obviously, we need a more feminine perspective on the ongoing mission of our movement.

Mathias: We acknowledge that 80% of us on this call are men, and we want to acknowledge Leslie's comment in the chat box, that

*"It will take the men of this movement  
to dismantle the patriarchy  
of this movement."*

"It will take the men of this movement to dismantle the patriarchy of this movement."

Yell: All the topics we've heard so far can be easily solved in six or seven minutes. One of the problems I frequently encounter when introducing myself as an Independent or welcoming Catholic clergy is that I don't know if I can speak for anyone other than myself when I speak of theology. I would love to see a very difficult conversation about our stances on some very fundamental things in the psyche of how people understand being Catholic. For instance, I reject the concepts of original sin and of substitutional atonement. Am I out on my own? Or is that something the movement actually could gather around? If so, it would give us what marketing folks refers to as a USP, a Unique Selling Point. Perception is reality, and it's hard to wean people from the positions of the Roman Catholic Church. We'd likely agree



on various perspectives on the pope, but we could have some really interesting and powerful theological conversations on how we differentiate ourselves and have something new to say. It's more than saying, "we agree with this," or "we don't agree with that." Many communities in our movement say "we don't do that"—but then they continue to pray from a 16<sup>th</sup>-century mindset, using words that we no longer believe! With some strong leadership, we could present papers and have some really robust conversations on new Catholic theologies.

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Newman: I wonder if it would be useful at this point in our process of getting to know each other to discern uniformity of belief around certain dogmas and doctrines associated with the Catholic tradition. I'd like to think that those who have more conventional approaches and those who have less conventional approaches might be welcomed in the same

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tent. We don't have to fight each other over who's right and who's wrong. Instead, let's focus our efforts on how to meet the needs of the people of God, trusting that whoever comes to us, despite their individual

understandings of things, will be led to the right person. Those who are conservative and traditional will attract a conservative and traditional crowd, and those who are more liberal and progressive will attract a more liberal and progressive crowd. Why do we have to have uniformity around documents and doctrines?

Yell: I'm not urging uniformity. I'm simply urging a discussion. There's a difference. We don't talk about our differences!

Newman: That opens the door for a lot of potential tensions and disagreements. Is that really where we want to go? Maybe we do. Maybe I'm the outlier. But maybe not.

D'Arrigo: I'll respond to Kevin's question with my own experience in our community and in our jurisdiction. The Convergent Christian Communion is made up of a vast group of folks: inclusive Anglicans, recovering charismatics who have been known to pray in tongues and hold snakes, and pretty much everything in between. We have a priest of our communion who does not believe in the Holy Trinity. It blows my mind apart, and I personally find it extremely difficult to understand how one can be Catholic and non-Trinitarian—but he fits into our communion, and his theology seems to seep in, and we all seem to get along anyway. The priest who used to speak in tongues refers to himself as a Christopagan. He has pagan roots in his Catholicism. As one who was raised Roman Catholic, then went to the Church of England, then found my way to Independent or Inclusive Catholicism, I sometimes say, "Cristopaganism? Wiccan and Catholic? Hmm." But we all manage to get along, like one big family. So, I both want to have a further conversation, as Kevin does, but, in the same breath, I also know to be true what Mark is saying: that people sometimes clash! I don't know the best answer, but I do know that we in the Convergent Christian Communion have managed to talk about it—and not talk about it—for a number of years now.

Božek: Someone once said that all politics is local. I believe that all theology should be local as well. In my dream, I envision us as a movement of communities that have those very important theological conversations at the local level. We could discuss Christology and Trinitarian theology for next five years, but it will change nothing in our local communities. I very much want to discuss theology, and I

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do on a daily basis. One of our most important vocations as pastors and shepherds is to theologize with the people with whom we journey. Each community should define its theology. If one community has a postmodern, post-Christian expression of Catholicism, let them be. It works for them and their local setting. My friend, Father Robert Caruso, who is an

Independent priest in the military, recently reminded me that Old Catholicism as such came into existence as a result of multiple theological conferences in Munich, Cologne and other places. That's another route that, historically-speaking, has worked more or less in our movement. Old Catholicism as such is a result of very serious, profound theological conversations on the international level. Father Caruso suggests that maybe that's where we should start. These are two forces within me that pull in different directions, but, at this point, I still believe that all theology should be local.

Mathias: We heard Michael Angelo speak of an individual with Christopagan tendencies. Any thoughts on the difference between the theology of a community, versus the theology of an individual?

Bozek: As clergy, we are called to serve a community. It's not my right to impose my theological perspective on them. It's my vocation to journey with them and to share with them how

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Yoegel: I would like to see further conversations on how to promote further unity and communion among our groups. I understand the challenge of "herding cats," but I'm also not sure that I can imagine an umbrella organization bringing us together. The question I have is: Would I be welcomed as an OCCA priest in some of your churches? If I'm not, that's okay, but I'd at least like to have that conversation on how we might do more of that. That's the kind of unity that I'd like to see us get to. I'd like to explore that topic: How to create true communion among our jurisdictions?

Cheasty: With a diverse group like this, where we have certain things in common and we have our differences, we need to take what's helpful and what works, and leave the rest behind. It may not be worth getting bothered about the things we don't agree on. As a group, let's focus on the arteries, not

the capillaries. Let's focus on the most important parts, the things that bring us together. If you have a theology that's different from mine, that's great: There are a lot of people

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who have theologies that are different from mine! None of us has a corner on the faith, and there's a lot of grace in hearing other people's perspectives. In terms of unity, let's focus on the main things: the arteries, not the capillaries.

D'Arrigo: Let's concentrate on the things that we all totally agree on—and let's move forward with them. Let the "laundry" sort out the other things. Let congregations sort it out. As progressive, liberal and openminded as I like to think I am, I also know that the Beatles were the greatest band ever in recorded modern music, and that there will be no other band that will ever be as good as the Beatles as long as I or any of us lives. But I also know that when I play the Beatles, my friends asks, "What is this garbage?" We agree on the things we agree on, and we move forward from there. We agree on more stuff than we're aware of; we simply get into all sorts of weird semantic arguments, and we argue over

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terminology rather than ideology. What are the universals that we can agree on? Let's run with that! Jesus doesn't call us to disagree with others; he calls us to meet them where they're at.

Carter: I agree, John, that the conversation is worth having. We can't assume that we are welcomed to concelebrate in other communities—but most jurisdictions have ecumenical officers and are open to discussing possibilities. It's always best to talk through these possibilities in advance, rather than show up by surprise and spring it on people. I appreciate what Kevin is saying. No one here shies away from conversations on theology, and we would all learn from one another. But, as we would say in software, it's a feature and not a bug in Independent or Inclusive Catholicism that we disagree with one another! What I like and admire about this group is that we are not driving

toward one administrative unity. We can interact with maximum inclusion and participation, we can speak, interact, agree or disagree, but we don't try to convert that into an enforced unity or identity. We maximize participation and encourage maximal self-definition, but our goal is not to sign off on something that we all agree on. The ultimate goal is for us to be able to express who we are, who we serve, and how we do that with our own gifts and self-definitions, with the idea that we might assist each other more and more. If there are any Christopagans in our group, I just want to say: I love you and encourage you to

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do what you do, and, if anyone comes to me looking for a Christopagan minister, I'll now know where to send them! If you can honestly express who you are, and if you can participate with us, neither of those is a reason to kick you out!

Yoegel: I'm thinking of something more formal. From a public perception point of view, we are a disconnected group, and we're not going to unify under a single organization. We talk about being in communion in Rome—but what would it take for us to be in formal communion with one another? Wouldn't it be nice to list on our websites that we are in communion with 10 or 15 or more other jurisdictions? That would say something about the community of Independent jurisdictions.

Cheasty: I ultimately think that it would be very good for the Independent Sacramental Movement to have some sort of conference or collective of Independent groups, where we're not giving up our identities, but where we come together—much like we're doing here—to talk about things that are germane to our ministries and theologies, and to give support to one another. There's room for grace and difference. We don't have to be in lockstep. Are we willing to entertain such an idea?

Yoegel: I welcome anything that increases communication and participation, formally or informally, to our mutual benefit and more importantly to the benefit of those we serve.

Robison: In this month's issue of *Extraordinary Catholics* magazine, I write about forming a learned society within our movement. I see that as a way of moving toward a type of unity that isn't uniformity. We have a paucity of scholarship about our movement, about what we believe, and about the various strains of this movement. We plow the same field over and over again. One way to organize a non-jurisdictional body would be to coordinate study and the

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publication of articles to help us move forward. That would allow us to share intellectual resources and consolidate efforts to get stuff out, so that we can further the spiritual aims of the Church.

Quintana: Let's exploit and take advantage of the resource of our "elders" in the community—those of us who have been involved in the Independent movement for more than 40 years. And let's truly look at the ability of our movement to decolonize the Church by decrying the documents from the Vatican that allowed colonization to take place. Jesus was not a White, European messiah. He was from a Palestinian community. We need to help people to recognize this!

D'Arrigo: Perhaps we need an Inclusive Catholic statement on inclusivity, something that says what we can all agree on as an Inclusive Catholic body.

Lynch: We need to get back to basic Christianity, the two great commandments, and the Great Commission. We need a strong prayer life, a strong trust in God, and we also can't let ourselves get bogged down in political correctness. Clericalism, patriarchy and privilege are all trendy issues, but I will just not let myself get uptight or bothered by them. I take the ordination of women for granted. I take same-sex marriage for granted. Let's get back to the two great commandments and the Great Commission, and all the other issues will take care of themselves.

Yell: I really appreciate this group, and I really miss the wisdom-sharing of my seminary days. I had great teachers back in England, as well as at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Anything that we do that enables us to learn more from each other I find to be very sexy, very attractive. I love to know how people think and what moves them and how they use words. Words are incredibly important. Anything that leads to greater ecumenism is to be supported. When I came to America 30 years ago, ecumenism was very much on the back burner. In England, different Christian churches were very aware that they needed each other. In America, the churches are stronger, and there's a mentality that they don't need each other. The beauty of our community is that we need each other, and we know that we are better off with each other. So, I will support anything that helps to deepen our love, respect and mutuality.

Robison: This group is very fertile soil, and I really want to see what else we can grow out of this experience. I think we're at the start of something that we won't live to see the end of. We are Moses in the wilderness, and someone else will take over after we're all gone!

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Aguillard: Happy New Year to all of you. Away with patriarchy and racism! Let's love one another!

Leary: I want to ask a question: When you all gather as a large group in Texas or Vegas or Brooklyn, are all ordained participants invited to concelebrate mass, or do they run around get permission?

Mathias: We've only had two interjurisdictional gatherings. During our conference gatherings, we tend to have the presider, the homilist and the deacon at the altar, with all others being invited to vest and to concelebrate from the pews. During parish celebrations in Austin, though, I invite all clergy into the sanctuary. It's a beautiful symbol of our unity.

Leary: That's what I thought. In all my years in law enforcement, I learned that those at the top like to pontificate and let the rank-and-file figure out how to make it happen. It sounds

like the rank-and-file have come together to celebrate the Eucharist as a family and that you accept others' ordinations. We should cherish that spirit and hope that it grows across the country. Sometimes we get too hung up on certain things, but if we can agree on certain things and celebrate as a group—without lightning bursting through the ceiling or people dropping down into hell—that's beautiful, and it feels good and right!

Campbell: I believe that one of the crucial conversations we need to have is on the formation of clergy, which is helter-skelter and comes out in many ways. We need to take some responsibility for those who are in the process to be ordained. We can't just put our hands on their head the moment they raise their hand and say, "I want to be a priest!" Another peccadillo of our

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movement is our preoccupation with bishops. There are so many people who are made bishops, who really have no right to enjoy that title. As a group, we need to somehow address this.

Strong: My concern is not only the formation clergy, but also of lay people. How do we "make" more Independent Catholics? I hope we get to that at some point this year.

Ellis: I'm hearing a theme of diversity and integrity. There is

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nothing remotely resembling uniformity in this movement regarding doctrinal matters. There are things that have been published, and there is an appearance, but the learned theologians

who are writing are all over the place when it comes to their lived experience. It seems we incarnate our theology and live it with integrity, and that is something that we cherish. If it's true that the Holy Spirit reforms the Church every 500 years, it may be the case that She is creating mischief right now!



Cheasty: Collegiality and fellowship are important as we further our support for one another. The more that we can do together, to form and solidify relationships, the stronger our movement becomes!

Božek: Sexism and colonialism are real, and we cannot gloss over them. I say this with the utmost respect to anyone who thinks that we talk about them too much. White, cisgender,

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straight males don't want to talk about these, because we have benefited from them for centuries. We have to own these sins of our forefathers and our own sins as well. I do not want to skip over those subjects that are painful and challenging. They

should not be the center of our mission or preaching, but, in this context, we all need to recognize these realities. On the topic of formation, if I want to invite someone to preach at our parish, I would have the same requirements of them that I have for our seminarians: They need to have a degree from an accredited institution of learning. It's that simple. I would not go to a physician unless she had M.D. after her last name. When it comes to the well-being and care of my flock and the people who are entrusted to me, I need to know that the person who is presiding or preaching in my parish is qualified to preside and preach in my local community. Regarding Kevin's idea, I would love to have a lecture series where qualified persons speak on Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology or any other subject that they are qualified to speak on. Like you, I miss those seminary arguments about how many angels fit on a pinhead! I am all in favor of adding one or two intellectual meetings. I agree with Frank that there is a lot of wisdom in our seniors—our “presbyters” (which means “elders”). Learning from them would be beneficial. Not wanting to sound critical, it's funny that, 16 years after my excommunication, I still think of myself as a newbie in this movement. As a newbie, my question for Frank and others who have been in the movement for 40 or 50 years is: Why have we not succeeded? Why have we failed so many times

as a movement? I'd love to ask our seniors: What is not working? Why isn't it working?

Carter: I don't know that everything that we've talked about is a "crucial conversation," but I do hear that there are things that we could profitably talk about. I get the strong sense that Frank feels like he's not being heard and that he has something useful to share. I, too, would welcome the opportunity for a conversation with our "elders," with an emphasis on trying to include people who may have seen things throughout the years that we haven't noticed. I welcome conversations on the theologies that we bring to those we serve. I also welcome conversations on ecumenism, formal and informal, and ways that we can get closer together in ways that serve all of us. The final thing that comes to mind is that we might have a "pick-up" conversation on the heartfelt issues that are brought up in conversations like this, but that we don't talk about—a sort of "scoop-up squad," like those that come after elephants and horses in parades. There's something worth saving in all those "piles," in all those gems. I like the idea of revisiting some of the things that have intrigued us!

## The Mental Health of Inclusive Catholic Clergy

*In many places, mental health is taboo. In this conversation, clergy speak about various mental health issues that might affect Inclusive Catholic clergy.*

Mathias: Inclusive Catholic clergy are characterized in a number of ways—sometimes in less-than-positive ways. Can such observations be grounded in research and/or are they supported in your experience of our movement? That is, do Inclusive Catholic clergy, or clergy of the larger Independent Sacramental Movement of which we're part, manifest a higher incidence of any particular mental health challenge than any other religious bodies?

Cheasty: I was reading an article a few weeks ago about a person in the Independent Sacramental Movement who was defrocked by the Roman Church for molesting children, so we need to be careful with mental health issues. Some groups are very diligent about screening for mental health issues and other types of issues, but it seems that some screening processes within the movement may be problematic and even detrimental to our movement.

Corbin: I would tend to agree. Having been on both sides—in the Roman Church and now in the Independent Sacramental Movement, I don't see our problems as unique. There are mental health concerns in all denominations. The call to ministry attracts certain types of people. In the Catholic Diocese of One Spirit, we have a six-month period of evaluation, and everyone undergoes a psychological evaluation by one of our priests, who is a psychologist—not that we would reject anyone, because we do believe in healing and taking a wholistic approach. The fact that we are more accepting than others can be a cause for scandal. We need to maintain our credibility and really think before we act. That's what we try to do in the Catholic Diocese of

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One Spirit. More so than any particular diagnosis or personality disorder that stands out, what I find is a general lack of collegiality. A lack of groups like this, where we can talk honestly with one

another, leads to isolationism. We become Lone Rangers, developing our own ideologies and our own ideas of theology. From my perspective, that's not healthy.

Cheasty: I'd be interested to know how many larger jurisdictions require screening.

Ellis: It's required in my communion, the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America (CACINA). We require a criminal background check as well as a psychological interview with a person from outside of CACINA, so that there's no presumed conflict of interest.

Carter: The Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch also requires both a criminal background check and a psychological screening. Most bishops I talk to are insisting on it.

Corbin: In my experience, most larger groups have some formal screening process, but smaller groups may not.

Ellis: In my own somewhat-limited experience, with one notable exception, I have not experienced a higher incidence or preponderance of any kind of underlying psychological malady in the Independent movement that would raise an eyebrow. In stark contrast, the "elephant in the room" of the Roman Catholic Church, with its professional clergy with a vow of celibacy, are its hypocritically homophobic attitudes, which create a situation that is rife for acting out of all sorts—and I'm not referring only to the sex abuse scandal and the antecedents that have to be factored into that. As a result, we see Roman Catholic priests acting out or channeling in other ways. In 2000, Father Donald Cozzens was booted out of the Roman Catholic Church for writing *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*. He interprets a lot of raw data, including the psychological profiles of the people who populated the Roman Catholic priesthood. If

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anything, there's more psychological congruency in the Independent movement, given the fact that marital status, affectional orientation and gender identity don't bar people from ministry. It

removes situations in which shadows can be acted out.

Kemp: I've encountered a couple of individuals coming into the movement who have had social issues, challenges in their ability to relate to others, and who have a proclivity toward wearing a variety of very dramatic kinds of clerical apparel, like cassocks, in all the wrong places. They appear to want a great deal of attention. We've had a few candidates to our organization over the past 20 to 25 years with those proclivities. Sometimes we attract people who have not been successful in integrating into more mainstream denominations.

Furr: We had that in Roman Catholic religious life, too, and they never stayed very long. We had candidates who were more focused on the habit, than on the mission of the congregation. That was always a "red flag" for me. Before Vatican II, we had sisters who suffered the oppression of being forced to wear a habit from the minute they got up, until the minute they went to bed. For a lot of women religious, the habit became a symbol that it was never intended to be. For women religious, it's been an issue for years. Guys never had to wear their habits all day long, as the women did.

*It would be good for us to have a lawyer draw up a list of potential liabilities for accepting candidates from the Roman Church who have had psychological issues.*

It would be good for us to have a lawyer draw up a list of potential liabilities for accepting candidates from the Roman Church who have had psychological issues. It would be good for us to review the liabilities for communities that attract problematic people. I also advocate for psychological testing by objective psychologists. Our priests may be very capable, but they should not be doing the testing of new members. That should be done by someone outside our movement who is completely objective. Women religious groups have done this, with independent psychological services that perform a series of tests. I suggest this as a norm for us.

Kemp: In the past, the cost of psychological evaluations was cost-prohibitive. I'm curious to know which instruments are used in psychological evaluation these days, what they cost, and whether jurisdictions have candidates bear those costs.

Furr: I used to use the Hudson Scales with my clients. They were an old battery of tests that measured sense of wellbeing, depression, and other underlying issues that might be explored. I found them to be very simple and very effective.

Corbin: We have a licensed psychologist who performs our psychological evaluations. We have asked ourselves whether we should go with a full psychological testing, which could last up to three hours and cost \$250, or simply have a clinical person—a psychologist, psychiatrist or licensed clinical social worker—perform a mental status evaluation, knowing that we could do a full evaluation if something were to come up. If candidates are in therapy, I ask for a signed release for a statement or evaluation, so that they don't have to bear the cost of another evaluation. In my experience, once I say that I require a background check or the signing of a general liability statement drafted by an attorney, relieving me of anything that the person did prior to joining us, people start to back off—which is a “red flag.” We need to be credible. When potential candidates come to me, I let them know of our theology and our expectations, then I pair them with a mentor for six months. And, if they seems to be a bit more conservative or traditional, I let them

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know that there are other groups. I've been “burned” a few times and have had to remove faculties from priests, so there are certainly issues.

Furr: We need to be cautious about making referrals to other communities. If I'm interviewing someone who is interested in the priesthood in the Inclusive Catholic movement, and if I perceive during any “red flags” during the interview, I'm not willing to assume the liability of suggesting that they check out another group. I don't want anyone to say that I referred anyone to them who ended up abusing kids!

Corbin: I agree. I'm not talking about “red flags” that would put anyone in harm's way. I'm referring merely to theological differences.

Ellis: Father Scott and I had an unfortunate incident. When that meeting was over, I contacted our vocation director and let him know the person's name and my experience of him. Due to professional courtesy and best practices, we have certain obligations.

Cheasty: It seems that criminal background checks, psychological evaluations, and waivers of confidentiality are absolutes for anyone who is interviewing others for their group. If "red flags" come up, we can't further their progress in this group. It seems that problems occur because we're Lone Rangers, with no cohesive policy and with no umbrella

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screened. As  
Mike points  
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have the issues  
that the Roman

Church has, due to its imposition of the artificial requirement of enforced celibacy, but the people we minister to need to feel confidence in their shepherds. I'll admit: My daughter had her kids baptized in a Roman Catholic Church because they have a very good school, and I told her: "Do not let any priest be alone with your kids—my beautiful, wonderful grandchildren!" How horrible that there's such a lack of confidence in the Roman Church's screening process! People need to have confidence in the clergy who minister to them and their family.

Ellis: Your advice to your children is a best practice in such programs as Safe Church. I took that course as part of my formation. It might be a good idea to require this as part of formation, so that clergy can be informed of best practices.

Cheasty: There are certain things that we just have to do — like having glass windows on the doors of our offices. By having healthy people in the priesthood, we can hopefully avoid the dark cloud that hangs over the Roman Church.

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Kemp: The Roman Church does a good job with screening, with psychological evaluations and extensive background checks, and still they have problems. So, psychological evaluations and background checks won't guarantee that we won't have any problems. It's not the simple solution. We once had to reject a candidate due to a conviction for child porn. We didn't feel that we could take the risk to accept the person. The person could have been fine, but we couldn't put the "mantle" of our jurisdiction on the person without performing due diligence from a legal standpoint. It's a risk for the organization and for individuals in leadership. Without such due diligence, we're absolutely vulnerable — which includes the assets of our group and the assets of individuals.

Furr: Pedophilia is a progressive disease, for which there is no cure. If someone is tampering with child pornography, it will advance — so that's a very serious problem. It's like stalking: Without intervention, it will progress. If I allow a candidate into the priesthood knowing that there is an addiction, and if it's later discovered that he abused an altar girl, I'm liable. I wouldn't let such a candidate in.

Kemp: Celibacy involves a restraint from any kind of sexual activity — and human beings are, by nature, sexual. If you

<p><i>Celibacy involves a restraint from any kind of sexual activity — &amp; human beings are, by nature, sexual. If you tell people that they can't be who they are, then you are creating problems, &amp; such people can't mature &amp; have a healthy sexuality.</i></p>	<p>tell people that they can't be who they are, then you are creating problems, and such people can't mature and have a healthy sexuality.</p>
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Mathias: We could talk about the Roman Church forever. Let's draw the focus back to our movement. Alan had noted a variety of manners of dress by various persons who approach us.



Inclusive Catholic clergy are sometimes accused of “dressing up and playing church.” Without wanting to be judgmental, are there certain behaviors within our movement that might resemble the symptomology of various mental health challenges?

Furr: I don’t have a tolerance for bishops who dress to the hilt and walk ten feet to the altar. The extent to which clergy in our movement want to imitate Rome is problematic. Ministry is not about the brocade!

*The extent to which clergy in our movement want to imitate Rome is problematic. Ministry is not about the brocade!*

Cheasty: But it’s all so pretty!

Furr: It’s not, for me. It is not pretty in the least. It just reeks of opportunism.

Kemp: I know bishops who are perfectly competent, perfectly decent people, with great education and training – and they love their “drag”! They love their fancy chasubles and jewel-encrusted slippers and fancy, pointy hats and the whole nine yards. To quote Pope Francis: “Who am I to judge?”

Cheasty: The question it raises for me is: Why is all the regalia necessary? If you simply like fabric, that’s not a problem. It raises questions of the level of insecurity that a particular person is dealing with. What is the root of that insecurity? Because they’re not ordained in the Roman Church, do they feel that their consecration in the Independent movement is

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“less than”? Is it a lack of confidence in their own ordination or consecration? We would need to look at it within the context of the totality of the person. Does the person actually have a group of people over whom she or he is

shepherd? When three bishops celebrate mass with one congregant – who is the spouse of one of the bishops: That raises questions.

Corbin: At St. Francis Community of Faith for All People, we all have a different style of celebrating the Eucharist, and presiders choose what they want to wear. Our chasubles are too long for Reverend Kathleen, so she wears a stole. When candidates come to us and ask, "What do you wear?", I ask, "What does it matter?" There's a sense of insecurity that's attached to imposter syndrome. Not everyone in the Independent movement has received the education or been ordained by other denominations. Such people may not feel secure and might feel they need to dress a certain way. Going back to Vatican II, I say: Use a liturgy that speaks to the people you serve, and dress according to your community. I'm a firm believer in tradition and ritual: They're a big part of who we are as Catholics. We can't deny the tradition we come from. But we do have to ask: What's the intent behind the way we dress?

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Ellis: There's probably something that could be said about identity coordination in all this. People rely on different external and internal factors to create a cohesive, coherent sense of who they are. We also have to be conscious of "image armor." Medical schools have a white coat ceremony after two years: It's a big thing. When I wear my collar later today for a visit, I'm a better driver, and I'm more patient with people. So, to the degree that it helps us, it's fine. When it detracts, it may be problematic. It's like Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, who said, "You may not be able to define porn, but you know it when you see it." When the

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accoutrement of the priesthood starts to detract from the identity, you know it when you see it!

Furr: I like the idea of "image armor." There's a place for regalia: It draws in and focuses the energy of the group. I get

concerned when it's "over-the-top." The future of the movement does not lie in regalia. The future will be simpler, out of necessity and out of commitment to the people we serve.

Carter: What we wear can be "over-the-top" and a "red flag." My questions include: Why are you wearing it, what is its function, and is it appropriate for the people you serve? When I was first ordained, I didn't want to wear the collar. I was afraid it would separate me from people, and I was afraid that people would assume that I have some lofty ideas about myself. But my superiors insisted, "You will wear it when you're working." It's a great example of how I was wrong. My collar allowed people to identify me. As

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Mike suggests, it's a self-awareness tool that increases our own responsibility and care for others. For everything we wear, we simply need to ask: Is it functional, and is it appropriate?

Mathias? Our movement possesses a diverse spectrum of theologies and manners of dressing, celebrating the liturgy, and referring to one's self—think of all the titles within our movement! From a mental health perspective, are there certain words and/or behaviors to which Inclusive Catholic clergy and laity should be alerted? That is, from a mental health perspective, is there anything that might be concerning about what we see amid the diversity within our movement of theologies and ways of dressing and celebrating the liturgy and referring to ourselves?

Furr: We need to be cautious not to over-psychologize people. We all go through rough times. We exist within a dysfunctional global system, so we will see dysfunctional responses. We need to be careful about putting people in "boxes" when they're simply going through life's challenges.

Ellis: No one wants to be diagnosed in a crisis.

Kemp: And diagnosis outside of the clinical relationship, outside of a professional context, is inappropriate, because we don't have enough information. Professional organizations all have ethics and standards about assessment, diagnosis and communication. We need to be clear about our boundaries. Our religious jurisdictions would do well to have such standards.

Mathias: Clergy who are not skilled, professional mental health practitioners may wonder about certain terms and how they might manifest themselves in a movement like ours. Such terms include "narcissism" or "spiritual bypass." Is there a simple way for clergy and laity to understand how symptoms of these and/or of other challenges might manifest themselves within our movement? And is there any way for us to talk about such matters, even though we are not skilled, professional practitioners?

Kemp: One of the things that I was taught as a clinician, with respect to personality disorders, was to identify the strong, emotional responses that I felt. When we feel such strong reactions, something is going on that we might want to look at. Those feelings alert us to "yellow flags" and "red flags" — things to pay attention to.

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Focus on the behavior: If a person is doing something inappropriate, the label doesn't matter. It may be something to take a look at, to be concerned about, or to pay attention to.

Cheasty: Trust your gut when interacting with people. When the hair stands up on the back of your neck, you know that something is just not lining up here. You don't have to name it. You don't have to say: "That guy has Bipolar II." But you

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*But you do have to trust your gut*

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do have to trust your gut when it tells you that something isn't right. Boundary issues can also be big warning signs that we should pay attention to. As clergy, we need to have clergy boundaries,

and we need to pay attention to attempts to breach those boundaries. Boundaries are essential in ministry.

Furr: That brings up an important point: We need to do our own inner work. If something triggers me, it may be a cue that something's going on with that person, or it could be bringing up something within me that's not healed. It's really, really important that we do that inner work.

Kemp: That's why we need to be careful about listening to our "gut." Our "gut" can be wrong!

Ellis: In abnormal psych, we learn about the "Four D's": danger, deviance, distress, and dysfunctions. Those are a narrative, descriptive way – rather than a diagnostic way – of talking about sensing that something is going on with someone. That might have utility for people who are wanting to move off the diagnostic continuum. We also want to be charitable: When we look at the lives of the saints, some of the were pretty far "out there"! You read their biographies or

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hagiographies, and you think, "There was something going on with this person!" Saint Francis was naked, and we say, "You made your point there" – so we need to be charitable.

Cheasty: If you're hearing voices, you've got to be careful!

Ellis: The issue isn't "Are you hearing voices?" It's "What are those voices saying?" If they're telling you to take your medications or to love your neighbor, that's fine. But if they're telling you to go and save France, that's different.

Corbin: People are people, no matter who we are or where we are. When talking about symptoms, illnesses or problems – or

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*When talking about symptoms,  
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"concerns," as I like to call them – the continuing education of clergy is so important. Some groups require spiritual direction or continuing education

or clinical training, so that we do no harm. It's not our role in ministry to diagnose other. We're not their therapists. As clergy and leaders of communities, it's our role to make sure they do no harm. That sometimes requires us to have conversations with others to explore our feelings. It often comes down to connection: Can we make a connection with people, and, if not, why not?

Mathias: Ken previously mentioned imposter syndrome. It seems that some clergy within our movement employ this phrase, "imposter syndrome," to characterize feelings of inadequacy, often rooted in a lack of theological education and/or pastoral ministry experience. This phrase "imposter syndrome" has specific meaning for mental health professionals. Does this phrase accurately capture the phenomenon of unprepared clergy and their mental states, and/or are there other ways of articulating such feelings of inadequacy?

Kemp: I've not heard that term in a clinical context, and Imposter Syndrome is certainly not a term in the *Diagnostic & Statistical Manual*. If it doesn't exist in the DSM-5, it's not a recognized mental health

*Imposter Syndrome is certainly not a term in the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual.*

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disorder. If a person always used that term, I would want to explore why it's an issue for them. I would want to ask why they are interested in this particular thing. I would ask: Is there some reason

that you're concerned with imposter syndrome? It would simply be an exploration, with nothing to do with diagnosis.

Corbin: I've heard the phrase in chaplaincy programs, in the clinical context, particularly with those who don't feel equipped, even though they possess

*We did have a member of our clergy who left due to feelings of imposterism.*

*It seems connected to security, particularly if one feels a sense of judgment or questioning by people.*

the skills. There's a certain level of professional insecurity that we all have, but we can't let it stop us as we learn and grow

ourselves. We did have a member of our clergy who left due to feelings of imposterism. It seems connected to security, particularly if one feels a sense of judgment or questioning by people.

Ellis: I understand “imposter syndrome” as a felt sense of insecurity when people don’t match the job they’ve been given. When I was a psychologist, I supervised interns, and it was sometimes hard for them to see themselves as valid.

Kemp: There may also be a sense of “compare-and-contrast” by those who use the term. They may feel less “authentic” because they didn’t receive their formation from the Roman Catholic Church.

Ellis: It may be the case that people within our movement are using the phrase in an inaccurate way.

Kemp: Sometimes we hear phrases like that, and we use our imaginations to come up with our own definitions!

Furr: We do well to inquire into our role in creating that professional insecurity. As long as we keep identifying ourselves in comparison to Rome, we are setting people up for feelings of inadequacy. If we’re going to address “imposter syndrome” – and I agree that it’s not in the DSM-

<p><i>As long as we keep identifying ourselves in comparison to Rome, we are setting people up for feelings of inadequacy. If we’re going to address “imposter syndrome” ... we need to think about our own role in it.</i></p>	<p>5—we need to think about our own role in it. As long as we compare ourselves to Rome, we’ll feel inadequate. We need to own our role and heal ourselves.</p>
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Mathias: This question springs from a member of Holy Family whose sister accused her of belonging to a “cult.” Our movement often struggles with issues of credibility. For lay persons who might wonder whether Inclusive Catholic laity are involved in “cultlike” behavior. Are there any warning signs with respect to cult behavior, and, presuming Inclusive Catholicism is not a cult, what distinguishes what we’re doing from cult behavior?

Furr: There we go again, comparing ourselves to something else! We don't need to do that.

Kemp: Cults often involve the excessive use of power and control, the presence of a very charismatic person, and extreme narcissism on the part of the leader. My experience of the Independent movement is that we lack any kind of control over anyone! If we had a group within our movement that were interested in controlling what people thought and what people did, then we would have reason to be concerned.

Mathias: Clergy who are not skilled, professional mental health practitioners may possess a lack of knowledge regarding mental health issues. What resources might we recommend for those interested in learning more?

Corbin: Once again, it goes back to continuing education. I offer an entire unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) for clergy and the people in our faith communities who want a basic clinical education on disorders, how they affect us and our ministries, and basic modalities of treatment. Folks within our movement might invite us to give talks or workshops.

Kemp: Jurisdictions might do well to require people to undergo one or two units of CPE. So long as the program is not old-fashioned or abusive, it could be a very good "boot camp" for being a good therapist—which is little more than knowing when to shut our mouth, turn off our judgment, and listen to the person in front of us.

Corbin: We have clergy and seminarians in our program, and I presume that they're all "starting from scratch." I provide the clinical supervision for them, so that they're able to integrate their own learning process, and we see how it plays out as they encounter people. It's an intensive program, with genograms, personality testing, and all that.

Cheasty: It's also important for people in ministry to have a basic understanding of addictions. There are plenty of materials out there, starting with *The Big Book* as a primer. Because so many people are addicted to alcohol, drugs, sex, food,

*Having a basic understanding  
of addictions is critical in ministry.*

shopping or whatever, having a basic understanding of addictions is critical in ministry. And many



people connect with the Divine not in churches, but in 12-step programs!

Corbin: 84% of Americans self-identify as “spiritual but not religious.” They think of God in old, traditional, institutional ways. If they were to experience our

<p><i>84% of Americans self-identify as “spiritual but not religious.”</i></p> <p><i>... If they were to experience our communities, they would realize that being “spiritual but not religious” is about community &amp; social justice. It’s about connecting with people &amp;, through that process, with the Divine.</i></p>	<p>communities, they would realize that being “spiritual but not religious” is about community and social justice. It’s about connecting with people and, through that process, with the Divine.</p>
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Kemp: I have a great reverence for the 12 Steps, and I believe they are absolutely consistent with the message of Jesus Christ. They’re totally consistent with what we’re trying to do, and they help a lot of people. They give people hope!

Mathias: As we conclude, what final thoughts might we share on the mental health of our movement?

Carter: I’m left thinking about the question on cultlike behavior. Many of the things that we are sensitive about in Independent or Inclusive Catholicism lessen the likelihood that we’re going to be involved in cultlike situations, which involve the oppressive or abusive use of power. Clergy frequently change jurisdictions in our movement. The fact that people can go somewhere else because their conscience tells them to, without the fear of being exiled forever or of losing their entire way of life and being is a positive. We also lack the Roman, top-down control over an entire institution, culture or geographical area. The threat of kicking someone out of our movement—a significant element of cult behavior—is not a great threat for us! On the subject of impostor syndrome, actual impostors don’t have impostor syndrome. In common usage, “impostor syndrome” describes the feelings of inadequacy or fear of being exposed as a fraud that many people experience despite being objectively qualified. Those suffering from impostor syndrome feel like, but are not, impostors. In

general, Independent Catholics joking about our clergy suffering from impostor syndrome seem to be acknowledging feelings of self-doubt in the face of external

*In general, Independent Catholics joking about our clergy suffering from impostor syndrome seem to be acknowledging feelings of self-doubt in the face of external criticism.*

criticism despite actually being qualified for and adequate to the job. Finally, I want to say that it makes me happy to know that we have so many people within our movement who are resources on mental health.

Furr: A lot of what we're talking about is the exception, and not the general rule. We're talking about a very small percentage of the Inclusive movement that might struggle with issues of mental health. I could see this group offering resources and ideas for those who need them.

Kemp: To paraphrase the 12 Steps: I believe that a Power greater than myself can restore even me to sanity!

Cheasty: The awareness of mental health issues within the Church and its clergy is critical, but we need to be careful not to

*Sometimes a bad day is just a bad day, & the awareness of it is important within its context. Sometimes we just have to say, "It is what it is."*

over-diagnose everything. Sometimes a bad day is just a bad day, and the awareness of it is important within its context. Sometimes we just have to say, "It is what it is."

## On Reconciliation and Responsible Pastoring

Rev. Scott Carter  
 Rev. Dr. Patrice Cheasty-Miller  
 Most Rev. Kenneth Corbin  
 Rev. Mike Ellis  
 Rev. Karen Furr  
 Most Rev. Alan Kemp  
 Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

*As a result of the previous conversation, seven clergy came together as part of the "Inclusive Catholic Psychology Resource Group" to co-write the following article that was submitted to, but never published by, Convergent Streams magazine. It is printed in its entirety here.*

Many clergy within the Inclusive Catholic and Independent Sacramental Movements find that fewer laypersons are taking advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Contemporaneous with this phenomenon, a significant number of clergy may, themselves, feel less favorably disposed to the sacrament than before. This should come as no surprise, since our movement, in keeping with modernist theological trends, is cautious in its handling of the often misused or misunderstood concepts of sin and guilt. It is also consistent with the observations of contemporary Swiss-born British philosopher Alain de Botton, who, in his work *Religion for Atheists*, notes how increased secularization diminishes the number of people receiving the psychological benefits of religion, such that the Church's sacraments, in many places, are being replaced by secular alternatives.

This presents a challenging and perhaps even sad reality for pastoral care, since penitents who approach the sacrament often derive real psychological benefits, including the self-reflective practice of the examination of conscience, collaboration with a pastoral care provider, and the assuaging of excessive or inappropriate "Catholic guilt." The latter is an especially important element for Latinx populations, who approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation and abstain from the Sacrament of Eucharist at higher rates than many other churchgoing populations.

Older Catholics likely possess memories of more-frequent confession. As children, many of us took advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis, taking with us our little handful of "sins" as we understood them through lenses of less-sophisticated

knowledge: “I hit my brother,” “I didn’t listen to my mother,” “I didn’t do my homework,” etc. Even without necessarily recognizing it, we were repeatedly participating in true self-reflection—at least when we were truthful. Pause and consider how those confessors helped you—or failed to help you—in those early, brief encounters.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, confessors employ opportunities to help people understand the difference between sin—our choice to isolate ourselves from ourselves, from others, and from God—and perfectly normal human development. Confessors are also able to help penitents shift their focus from a future afterlife (which often motivates them to approach the sacrament), to the human experience they presently live, with all its challenges and its attendant call to love, help and support others in ways that ensure eternal life (Mt. 25:31-40).

In his classic, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, Karl Menninger reframed notions of sin through the lens of psychiatry, attempting to demonstrate that the concept of sin has the potential to be therapeutically helpful for various persons, including those who suffer from addictions. Twelve Step programs would seem to demonstrate this in their call for a “fearless moral inventory” of the things that control our lives, their focus on the consequent detriment wrought on relationships, and the appeal to a Higher Power for help in transcending these challenges.

In our ministry of connecting with and serving others, we, as confessors, do well to think through a number of issues that might arise in the context of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For example, in places where the practice of therapy is stigmatized, penitents may feel much more comfortable approaching a confessor than a therapist or counselor to discuss the things that bother them. Further, various studies conclude that for many people who self-identify as Christians, the first point of intervention in psychological crises is their church. People are looking for someone who will listen and help, and local clergy are often their first choice.

This places clergy at the sacred crossroads of spiritual and psychological health, challenging us to ask how we might best be of help and service. We cannot speak of spiritual health without addressing psychological health, the course of normal human development, and the ability to both navigate and regulate emotions. Humans have the innate capacity to relate to God in healthy ways. We can also choose to do so in ways that are neurotic, obsessive and destructive. As clergy and candidates for the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we do well to focus on our preparedness to embrace and assist others in time of psychospiritual need. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) programs are especially useful in helping clergy and pastoral ministers to identify the symptoms of such

common human phenomena as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and various psychoses.

Clergy should also be able to distinguish between the roles of confessors and pastoral counselors. While there may be certain points of contact between sacramental ministry and pastoral counseling, there ought also to be a healthy boundary between the two. For example, pastoral counseling is often more lengthy than sacramental encounters *per se*, and may involve long conversations over time. While psychiatrists have largely turned to the dispensing of medications and therapists are often driven by insurance companies to help people find speedy interventions, the role of pastoral counselors as helpers assumes new relevance. In keeping with accepted professional standards, some U.S. states require advanced training and/or licensing for those who refer to themselves as counselors of any type, including pastoral counselors, particularly if the services are fee-based. For their part, pastoral counselors typically maintain professional liability insurance to protect against accusations of malpractice.

In addition to maintaining clear boundaries with those we serve, we also want to be clear about the role in which we are functioning at any moment: Am I serving as a sacramental minister now? Am I functioning as a pastoral counselor or licensed professional? The rules for each are different.

By contrast, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, confessors typically have only brief opportunities to formulate responses to the very personal issues of penitents. As confessors, we can sometimes assist a person's personal self-growth in real ways, but are less likely to resolve long-standing behavioral issues. Curiously, this stands in sharp contrast to the lived experience of repentance in the early Church—a “para-therapeutic” process of ongoing interactions often stretching over months or years.

While the Sacrament of Reconciliation may be psychologically helpful for many people, confessors must acknowledge that serious mental health issues require more than a sacrament. We may have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to help a person who is navigating a painful divorce, but when confronted by a person suffering symptoms of schizophrenia, for instance, there may be little in our training as priests that equips us to offer psychological treatment. Like medical professionals who do not operate outside the scope of their practice, clergy need to thoughtfully consider when venturing beyond the realms of offering spiritual advice and administering the sacraments of the Church. Clergy who are not mental health practitioners do well to recognize the limits of their knowledge and skills, to hone their ability to

listen and summarize what they are hearing, and to equip themselves with the necessary tools to distinguish whether people simply need a little extra support as they face life's challenges or whether they are in serious need of professional help. Clinical Pastoral Education programs, internships and residencies can be extremely helpful in this respect. Thus, we, as clergy within the Inclusive Catholic and Independent Sacramental Movements, recognize the importance not only of a solid theological education, but also of an adequate foundation in pastoral care.

In closing, in our embrace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we, as confessors, have the opportunity to administer grace-filled spiritual and pastoral care. We may also have occasion to discover in the sacrament an avenue to needed psychospiritual help. Knowing when to refer a penitent to other helping professionals is an essential skill that clergy ought to possess. It can also be a very real extension of our pastoral desire to effect healing and restore health.

## Racial Equity in Inclusive Catholicism

*In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., lay and ordained leaders discussed how Inclusive Catholicism might help to dismantle institutional racism and speed our world toward the realization of King's "Dream."*

Mathias: We were going to speak on intercommunion agreements this evening, but, since this is a national holiday in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., we received feedback that it smacks of White privilege to discuss such pie-in-the-sky ideas as intercommunion agreements on a day on which many people in our nation celebrate the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and recognize the many racial injustices that continue to ravage our world. So, we pivoted. All of us here tonight are White, and the feedback I received was that it's up to White people to ask themselves how they are overcoming issues like racism and how they are working toward equity, diversity and inclusion. As a movement, we are not so extremely diverse in many ways, so let's talk about how we might be failing to realize Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Dream." As a movement, we're doing great at helping to bend the arc toward sacramental justice, but, when it comes to racial justice and other issues, I suspect that we might all look in the mirror and find ways in which we are not living the Dream as we might.

Yoegel: How many of us have read what Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"? In it, he calls for the participation of White churches and White clergy in his movement.

Carter: I just snagged a copy of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*, and I haven't had a chance to crack it open yet.

Ellis: There are two other books that are dated but are still very relevant. One is *Black Priest, White Church*, a memoir of an African-American priest in the Roman Catholic Church. The other is a jewel of a book, *Jesus & the Disinherited*, written by a mentor to Rev. Dr. King—a book that Rev. Dr. King carried with him. I'm interested to know how many of

us have had courses in African-American Church Studies. That was required of us at Duke 40 years ago.

Cheasty: When I was at Duke, we took a course on the Black Church with Dr. Bill Turner, but I don't think it was required.

Ellis: It was required when I was there, and it was taught by an African-American professor at the Duke Divinity School. Upon reflection, he may have been the only African-American professor at the school.

Cheasty: That had changed by the time I got there, but it was not nearly as diverse as it should have been. I grew up in a White neighborhood, which, by the time I was five, had transitioned to an African and African-American neighborhood, so I was one of the few White kids on the block. I remember a couple of incidents where people would say something about race. I wanted to invite my friend to our beach house, for instance, and my grandmother said, "She wouldn't be allowed down there." That totally flipped me out, because my world didn't work like that. My grandmother said, "You'll understand when you get older." I was just a little kid, but I remember saying, "I will never understand that!" I remember going to St. Ignatius Catholic Church in Brooklyn. It was a very mixed parish: one-third American (White and Black), one-third Haitian, and one-third Puerto Rican. Then we moved to the South where 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in America—and that was within the Church! My experience of the Roman Church was one of more inclusion. When I think about Jayme's parish, Holy Family, it's a very inclusive church, and our isolation only results from our limited linguistics which keep us from interacting with the Spanish community. What I see at Holy Family is consistent with what I saw in the Roman Church as a child. The best Christmas Eve mass that I ever went to

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was done in three languages: English, French and Spanish! All these years later, I remember feeling so enriched and touched by the Spirit in that particular mass. I



encountered real racism in the Protestant Church, in the Methodist Church. I had active members of the Klan in the first church that I served in North Carolina! As a kid from Brooklyn, I thought the Klan was a thing of the past, so I grappled with the question of how to commune with people who didn't repent of that.

Carter: My father came from a Protestant background and converted to Roman Catholicism for my mother. Eventually, they were divorced. I hear what you're saying, Patrice. The Catholic church that I grew up in was an ethnic church. I associated Protestant churches with a very specific Anglo way of looking at the world. The Roman Catholic Church, to me, was all the rest of us: Poles, Hispanics, Filipinos and so many others. I always saw that as a positive aspect of the Roman Catholic Church. As imperialistic and top-down as it was, at least it had the political savvy and sociological awareness to always adapt itself to wherever it was locally. I always associated the Protestant tradition

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many places, were oppressed, marginalized or ghettoized in some way – the kind of people that Jesus would stand up for! My father was in the Navy, so I was born in Hawaii and moved all over and experienced different parts of the country. After I moved back to California for a second time and graduated from high school in Vallejo, I lived in Oakland, where I worked for two years as a substitute teacher in schools in which I was an ethnic minority. In many ways, it was a very positive experience for me.

Cheasty: Those experiences begin to break down the barriers that keep us focused on people's color, and color stops becoming a major factor in how we relate to people. That only comes from continued exposure to people who are not like us. The Methodist churches I ended up serving were like a mayonnaise sandwich on white bread! When we moved to

North Carolina, we intentionally moved to Durham because it was a mixed community, where Raleigh was not. My father, who died at age 96 in 2004, would always say, "Who the hell cares who you sit next to in church? You go to church to pray!" It was a radical thing for someone his

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age to say. In my experience, the Roman Church had a much better handle on inclusivity, and my experience of Independent Catholicism has largely been through Holy Family, which is pretty inclusive.

Carter: My wife grew up in a very affluent and ethnically-mixed community in Sacramento, California, so I realized many years ago that she thought that America is a country where everyone ethnically gets along and where racism is a very rare aberration. I think the opposite: America, even when it's being its best, has far too often had very limited contact with people who are different. That conversation was a big breakthrough in our relationship, and it made it easier for us to understand where each of us comes from on the issue. Conversations about race often bog down in miscommunication and misunderstanding, and it really is beneficial for us to go into these conversations assuming that other people have different sets of experiences on this issue, as on any other issue, than we do. Mike, you've been through some very difficult conversations with folks who were unwilling to hear that we had problems yet to be addressed in America, and you did a remarkable job of standing up and representing this group of folks. You didn't immediately dismiss people as evil, but you said, "This person has a misunderstanding based on their limited experience and some of the conclusions they're drawing

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from that." We're not living the Dream. Racial harmony is always down the road, but we're not there—and understanding that fact is a positive, because you can't solve a problem you don't

admit exists. When I hear people object to having White privilege, they say, “I didn’t own slaves,” or “I did not oppress Black people!” That may very well be true, but they refuse to admit that other people suffer from disadvantages based on their skin color or ethnic group or language group. Refusing to admit that other people suffer from things that you do not have to suffer from is itself proof that you are exhibiting a privilege! It’s hard to get people to hear that.

Cheasty: People don’t hear it because they don’t want to hear it. If they were to hear and embrace it, that would necessitate a response, it would necessitate change, and change is difficult!

D’Arrigo: Today is a feast day in the Episcopal Church for all who follow the “Holy Women, Holy Men” calendar, so I always speak of Martin Luther King, Jr. on social media. This year, I was feeling tired, so I was looking to repost someone else’s video on MLK. I searched high and low, through as many Independent Catholic churches as possible, and I couldn’t find a single mention of MLK, not even in my own jurisdiction! I found it so upsetting that I was the only one to post about MLK on Facebook or YouTube. So, it seems a little ironic and weird that we’re having this conversation when no one seems to be having this conversation in their churches or communities. I am supremely lucky: In 1998, I ran for New York State Assembly while Bob Zellner ran for the New York State Senate. Bob was one of the first White Alabama kids to get volunteered by Martin Luther King, Jr. for SNCC, so all the Freedom Riders endorsed Bob’s campaign, and I received a really thorough education about the civil rights movement that I wasn’t a part of. Today, I read the last two pages of MLK’s “I Have a Dream” speech. When you read his words, you have no choice but to emote. I felt like I was channeling: I was so on fire with the words coming out of my mouth!

Carter: I did see your post. In recent years, I’ve noticed a lot of pushback and criticism of people for putting out the least offensive, least challenging quotes by MLK—and they take heat for that. I thought you did a remarkable job of not layering on your own impersonation. You showed a lot of

restraint in terms of not coloring it with yourself. I thought it was respectful and great.

Marsh: I wholeheartedly agree. You didn't put any of yourself in there. You didn't try to impersonate MLK either. I have the unique experience of having a best friend who is big, Black and beautiful. We have communicated on a daily basis for almost 30 years. I once dragged her with me to an Episcopal church in a predominantly White neighborhood, and she said, "Girl, I ain't going back to that church again—the way those people looked at me!" My Episcopeeps are overloaded by White folks who look funny at Black people and anybody who walks in the door who ain't White. It ain't right. It's been a personal lesson on White privilege. I've

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never had to tell my kids, "You better be nice to the popo [police], or you could wind up in jail," yet she continues to say that to her kids. I see

my White privilege, and it frightens me that my best friend has to have those conversations with her kids. Newsflash: In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have still not achieved racial equality by any stretch of the imagination! I was raised to see everyone through Jesus-colored glasses. All two-legged mammalian species bleed red—it doesn't matter what "gift wrapping" they come in. We need to put aside our differences and learn from each other, listen to one another, and treat one another with kindness, respect and dignity.

Yoegel: I grew up in a very Italian parish in Brooklyn in the 1950s and 1960s. We didn't have a Black face in the church, but I think they would have been welcomed. The Roman Church, though, has a lousy record on civil rights. I was in a Catholic high school and Catholic college during the height of the 1960s, and I can't remember a word—not in a class, sermon or conversation with a priest or nun—on the civil rights movement and the struggles we were seeing. As

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Independent Catholics, we don't have a problem with inclusivity. We have a problem taking stands on civil rights. What statements can we

make? Who can we support? How can we make our voices heard in the overall civil rights movement? Americans think that “equality” will result in a loss on their part of power or economics. I prefer to focus less on White privilege and more on the large segment of the population that feels underprivileged. We hear so much about White privilege, particularly in the media, and we see the resistance to critical race theory. Many Americans think that they’ll need to give up something in order for all people to enjoy equality.

Božek: I’ll share an experience of how I was forced to do an examination of conscience. For almost three years, I have been dating a Black man, an African-American man. After the death of George Floyd, he asked me why our church was not participating in any demonstrations or events of the Black Lives Matter movement. He said, “You go to the Pride parade. You marched for women after Trump was elected. You support the Race for the Cure. You and your church do all these social justice events, but you haven’t once been present at a BLM event. That struck me. It was true. We care about the issues closest to our hearts. So many of us, as Independent Catholics, go to Pride parades and march with women. And we are vocal about those issues. But when it comes to Black Lives Matter, as Michael Angelo points out,

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we are dead silent. We wave our rainbow flags, but we are missing in action when it comes to racial injustice. I hope that some of your churches will prove me wrong. It took that very brutally honest

conversation with my partner for us to start organizing a presence of St. Stanislaus at those events and demonstrations. We can’t be present and visible only in the protest movements that involve us. That’s our privilege. If it hurts me, I will be for gay rights! If it hurts me, I’ll be for women’s rights! But I wasn’t impacted by the death of George Floyd, so I don’t even think about going and protesting in the streets. Many of you talk about your

Roman Catholic experiences, which is laudable—but many of the saints of the civil rights movement were on the streets. They were loud and obnoxious, and we are not. Thanks to my boyfriend, I had that very brutal and honest examination of conscience. We all need to ask ourselves how involved we are in the issues that affect us, and how absent we are in the issues that don't personally affect us. There is something very self-centered about our ministries. We care about certain rights—like women's rights or LGBT rights. Maybe it's time for us to care about others' rights as well. Maybe it's time for us to demand the rights of our siblings of different colors.

D'Arrigo: I find it upsetting that, less than two years after this massive, most recent racial upheaval in our country, White America has forgotten it. I live in Madison, Georgia, which is in the middle of a White county, but is 40% Black and has a Black mayor. After those events, we, as pastors, met with folks from Black Lives Matters, and we actually held a parade/march here. Jayme's question is: What can we do, as inclusive Catholics, to propel ourselves not just into social justice, but into racial justice? The answer is much easier than we all think. Each of us knows a primarily African-American church in our community: It's as simple as reaching out to them and asking, "How do we get involved? What can we do?" It could be as simple as bringing a couple of cases of water to a protest. It could be starting a conversation within your parish or ministry. You don't have to get arrested. You don't have to be a protester. We simply have to say to ourselves, "Jesus would have shown up for this, so I will, too!" Instead of showing up and saying, "We're here to do this for you," we need to say,

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"You're doing this. How can we be of assistance?" Just as we do in our parishes, let's allow them to tell us how they'd like us to serve them!

Mathias: It strikes me as an element of White privilege that we can be here, discussing this topic on Zoom in such a theoretical way. My question becomes: What do we do as a result of this conversation? How will the world be any different as a result of this conversation? Will *we* be any different? Will our movement be any different? Any thoughts on the

implications of this conversation for us as individuals, for our communities, and for our movement? Is there any way for us to more quickly bend the arc toward racial justice in our movement?

Carter: As MichaelAngelo is suggesting, we need to be vocal. We need to stand up and speak the truth—in venues like this, but also with the people we serve. We should also look to persons of color in our movement, to ask how we can best support them.

Cheasty: One book I suggest is *We Are Called to Be a Movement*, by Reverend Doctor William Barber, II, a 1989 graduate of Duke who headed the Poor People's Campaign. We're called to be a movement, and we're called to be vocal. Think of all the times that we hear subtle racial comments, and we just let them go without saying anything. We are called to speak the truth and to call things what they are, even when we step on other people's toes. Paul speaks of the Church as a body with all different kinds of parts that are necessary

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for the functioning of a healthy body. We need to do whatever is necessary to protect and foster the health of the body! If you're the ankle, and the shoulder is hurting, that affects you, too!

Mathias: One of the challenges that I would like to see us tackle is the recasting of language within our movement. In the invitation to this conversation, I spoke of "persons of pallor." We reinforce and normalize White supremacist thinking every time we refer to the dominant culture as

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such labels of people, reducing them to a very limited box of some five crayons! For the past few years now, every time I'm tempted to say "persons of color," I follow the model of a friend in Maryland who flips that phrase and instead speaks of—as derogatory as its sounds—"persons of pallor." We are programmed to think in certain ways and to use certain words and phrases that are not helpful for advancing future paradigms of race and ethnicity that respect the fact that we are all members of the same beautifully-diverse body!

Carter: Jayme, I've heard you reference that in one of your sermons. Within my lifetime, there was a crayon labeled "flesh," which looked a lot more like us than it did anybody else!

Yoegel: I'm old enough to have grown up at the tail end of African Americans referring to themselves as "Colored." To use the term "Black" was an insult. This morning, I heard Reverend Al Sharpton use the word "negro" in reference to one of the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. In recent months, I've noticed how the history of "slavery" has become the history of "enslaved people." To some degree, most minorities are controlling the language, and we have to be cognizant of that and respect that. As off-putting as I find "White privilege" to the White majority, possibly for legitimate reasons, I think we're stuck with it and have to navigate around it. We're seeing a wholesale renaming of sports teams and school mascots involving Native Americans. I went to St. John's University, where we were the Redmen for 100 years and are now the Red Storm.

Carter: Language has the power to hurt people, so our response certainly has to be sensitivity. My conversations with people about race improve when I recall that within many of our lifetimes the actual definition of "racism" has changed. When many of us were growing up, Webster defined a "racist" in individual terms: as a person who believes in the inherent superiority of their own race, or in the inherent inferiority of particular races. That definition has expanded to include social considerations, so that you can exhibit racist beliefs without being a "racist" in that earlier sense. Understanding that helps me to communicate with people who are usually a little bit older, who think of



themselves as good people, and who think of racists as villains. They don't believe that someone is inherently inferior because of their race, and they might be open to a conversation about the ways in which our social structures inherently are unfair to particular, ethnic groups. We can have a profitable conversation with people just by recognizing that we operate with different definitions.

Mathias: "Institutional racism" is certainly a new concept for many of us, as is the language of "social sin." We saw the power of words in Sunday's first reading, from Trito-Isaiah, where God calls us by a new name (Is. 62:4). I like to imagine a world in which we call others by new "names," not based on such externals as skin color. I'd also like to think that, in the same way that we've said in past conversations that the Church is one generation away from extinction, racism might also be one generation away from extinction. I think it's fair to say that many of our children and grandchildren are being raised in a world that they are coming to perceive through different lenses. In three generations, my family went from the deeply racist words of both my

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grandmothers, to the racism inherited by my parents, to me—one who has never had a White boyfriend. Psychoanalyze that: I've had Filipino, Latino, African-American and African boyfriends, and my husband is Chinese, but I have never had a White boyfriend. I'd like to think that our society is evolving in the same way that I have

seen my family evolve. That's what I cling to for hope: that we, as a Church and nation, might be evolving toward that Omega point of MLK's Dream!

Cheasty: I recently took Patrick to Hershey Park in Pennsylvania, and I said it out loud: "This is amazing: It's the 'browning' of America—and it's beautiful!" I'm 70 years old. When I was a kid, the thought of an interracial couple was shocking. Now, nobody gives a damn. Sometimes things just really slap me in the face and make me realize how different things are now. When I was growing up, I went to the wedding of Paul, an old, White Freedom Rider, who was

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marrying an African-American girl. She was late to her own wedding, and I can remember the hopeful whispers on Paul's side of the church: "Maybe she won't show up!" Interracial couples are now common, and nobody cares. How great is that!

Yoegel: I'm older than you, and, when I was a kid, mixed couples were illegal in many states. I hope that I'm wrong, but it seems that only a certain segment of society seems to be more accepting of things like mixed couples. I have a White, well-educated friend who, if his son brought home an African-American girlfriend, he would absolutely die. I remember a wedding I celebrated some ten years ago: The bride was African-American, and the groom was, what Jayme would call, a "person of pallor." I could feel the tension in the room, so I tried to inject a bit of humor. I'll never forget the thank you note they sent: "Thanks for the humor and your attempt to 'break the ice.'" It was the saddest note I've ever received after a wedding! I hope those are the exceptions!

Cheasty: Things are changing. How different the people at Hershey Park were, from when I was a kid, really struck me. It was dramatic, different and beautiful. It was really nice.

Yoegel: Walter Brueggemann speaks about how clergy are called to be prophets. When we hear of "prophets," we think of seeing into the future, of fortunetelling—and that's not what a prophet is. A prophet simply speaks truth to power. The other part of prophecy is collective memory—it's not forgetting that only 50 or 60 years ago, mixed-race marriages were illegal in some places. To use Jayme's

phrase, racism was so institutionalized in so many aspects of our lives, and Jim Crow was alive and well in the South. As prophets, we need to remember that for other people!

D'Arrigo: My son has a way of seeing things that sometimes cuts through B.S. When he was in the fourth or fifth grade, his best friend was African American, and our families did a lot together. He said, "Why do people say that Eric is Black when obviously his skin is brown?" I thought it was a brilliant observation for a kid his age. Then he said, "Dad, God created the human race, so how can we possibly be racist if there's only one race?" That has stuck with me ever since. We talk about how words have power and how we need to create new language. There was absolutely a time when the intention of all of creation was *one* human race: We might have been ethnically different, because we had ethnic backgrounds that were different, but we were just one human race. Now, apparently, we're not. Now we're all of these different races and ethnicities. The other side of that is that my wife, Claudia, was driving home from a client 25 minutes away from here, and she saw a Confederate flag. She said, "How can anyone possibly be willing to fly a Confederate flag today? Don't they know what that represents? Don't they know how that affects the people who see it? I just don't know how anybody in this day and age can still be waving a Confederate flag!" And I said, "Because it's a deterrent. When you see that flag, you're not going to bother them. You'll just say, 'they're racist,' and you'll stay away. For others, it will be an attractor of people like them, and they can get together and grow their community." I really want to believe it's better today, and it

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probably is in the Northeast and on the West Coast—but in the South it's still really hard to be Black, and it's really hard to be White and to support Black allies. It can be dangerous! That's why we, as a community keep showing up and defying this social norm.

My son is right, and St. Paul tells us there is no Black or White, no male or female; there's just humanity in Christ, but some days it is so hard not to be jaded.

Ellis: Thank you, John, for talking about prophets. Paul tells us that we are called to be ministers of reconciliation, that we have a ministry of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us by God. When I think of that, I think of right relationship. As persons who have access to power, the only way that we can be in right relationship with people who do not have

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access to power is by listening. They are the experts. We then need to align ourselves with them, which will probably cost us something. But it should cost us something because, without that, these relationships are worth nothing.

Božek: I hope that we keep upsetting people, all the while knowing, as Michael Angelo says, to be an ally is dangerous and will upset people who feel guilty for doing something wrong or for not doing anything.

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got the finger during a sermon was  
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The only time that I ever got the finger during a sermon was when I preached on George Floyd, and a woman gave me the finger and walked out of church—and I thought, “Good! I am still upsetting someone!” Let’s continue upsetting people!

Cheasty: Things are changing, and it’s progress, not perfection!

Yoegel: A long time ago, I heard that we need to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. As a function of age, I find myself looking back and reflecting on my life: What did

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& afflict the comfortable.*

I do? What could I have done differently? I’m reminded of the story of the little boy who, after a storm had washed up thousands of starfish onto the beach, was throwing them back into the water. A man derided him, “You’ll never make a difference!” And the boy threw a starfish into the sea and said, “I just made a difference for that one!” Let’s do the

small things. Whatever our particular calling or charism,  
let's do that small thing!

D'Arrigo: We need to keep making the next right, best choice and trust  
God in the process!

Marsh: We need to continue to listen to one another and see what  
we can do to help fellow communities, rather than run over  
them. Rather than approach them with an imperialistic  
attitude, we need to say, "We're here to help. What can we  
do for you?" Part of that is listening, and then comes action.

Carter: I keep hearing the voice of that great North African  
Christian, Saint Augustine, who admitted that we're not  
there yet. We're making progress, one right step after  
another. But, as he would say, we need to "love and do what  
you will." We need to keep doing what we're all trying to  
do: Speak up, articulate Jesus in the world, and find ways  
to directly support the efforts of others. It's a very difficult

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thing to be out there, speaking  
on subjects that affect other  
people so directly, when I  
don't feel authorized to do so.  
That's one specific thing that I  
would love to see happen from  
this.

Mathias: Let's continue to embrace and realize the Dream!

## Intercommunion Agreements

*Because some clergy wonder what it would take to be allowed to preside, concelebrate and/or preach in other Inclusive Catholic communities outside their own, this conversation explores the possibilities for deeper ties between jurisdictions as expressed through intercommunion agreements.*

Mathias: Tonight's topic is that of inter communion agreements. Inclusive Catholicism (or Independent Catholicism) possesses no meta-organization or umbrella organization to bring together the "micro denominations" that comprise our movement. But some jurisdictions have entered into a relationship with others through intercommunion agreements. This topic arose from a previous conversation where the question was raised: What would it take for any member of the clergy of another jurisdiction to be able to concelebrate or preach in a community of another jurisdiction? My questions today include: How have these intercommunion agreements come about? What successes have we enjoyed? What lessons have we learned? And what are the *sine que non* conditions for jurisdictions to cooperate with one another and to allow the clergy of other jurisdictions to concelebrate with them? What would it take for us to multiply goodwill and the forging of relationships that might be formalized in intercommunion agreements?

Nicosia: In the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, our constitution says that all intercommunion agreements have to be ratified not only by the Council of Bishops, but also by the entire Synod, the House of Laity, and the House of Pastors—so intercommunion agreements are not something that we treat lightly. They require a lot of holy conversation, involving our entire communion. In our local agreement with the Rocky Mountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, before we had a local bishop, Bishop Frank Krebs, our presiding bishop, entered into a liturgical agreement with the local Lutheran synod and their bishop, allowing us to share liturgical ministers—not counting presiders or co-presiders—among our Lutheran and Catholic liturgies. It allows us to have an ECC lector or communion minister at a Lutheran service in this region, or

vice versa, while upholding the integrity of the traditions of both communities.

Quintana: Let me add that Lutherans and Ecumenical Catholics can receive communion together at those liturgies.

Nicosia: In our discussions with the ecumenical officer of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America on the national level, there's a recognition that some relationships percolate from the ground up, and not from the top down, with formal agreements. So, relationships are built—though they fall short of full communion, which would be more on a national level between the denominations.

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Cavins: In my previous jurisdiction, we entered into an intercommunion agreement with The National Catholic Church. That arose from a need of a bishop to provide one of his priests a place to celebrate mass with a congregation. He later pastored one of our parishes. In constructing that agreement, he didn't get into a lot of heavy detail. We reviewed each other's canons, to make sure we had no objections with certain areas, particularly with respect to clergy sexual abuse. We do have a jurisdiction here in Florida that permits pedophile priests to function, so we were very cognizant of the fact that we needed to spell that out as not being permissible. Our agreement was very simple. We recognized each other as equal partners, and we agreed not to interfere in each other's jurisdictions. Our priests could minister in their area, and their priests could minister in our area. We also agreed to ordain candidates for each other's jurisdictions. The synods of both churches ratified it very quickly.

Giblin: How was that agreement received by the people in the pews? Was there any objection there?

Cavins: We had one objection from our Hispanic community, which is radically conservative for an Independent group, but our Spanish-speaking bishop answered those questions for them, and it moved ahead. One of our deacons, who joined us from the Traditionalists, also objected. He finally realized that we weren't his "cup of tea" and just left.

Yoegel: The folks from CACINA may be able to shed more light on this, but we had a bottom-up situation at St. Mychal Judge Parish in Manhattan, where we were frequently joined by Bishop Willard Schultz of CACINA, who celebrated with us. In the OCCA, Bishop Lynn Elizabeth Walker is responsible for our ecumenical activities, and that led to a formal intercommunion agreement with CACINA. That lasted for a short time, until Bishop Willard moved.

Ray: John, you are correct. CACINA does have two agreements: with the OCCA and the Apostolic Church in America. I am familiar with Bishop Lynn. I remember trying to figure out how we would get these agreements to work. Everyone is afraid that they will lose their authority or jurisdiction. I have found that people are very "tight" with their jurisdictions in Independent Catholicism. We are exploring diverse ways in which to collaborate with communities in the movement. We want to expand our presence in the

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United States with parishes that we could recommend even if they do not belong to our jurisdiction. Bishops have been cautious about "giving up" their people, thinking that they own

their people/congregations and do not want to share them with other communities. I have been collaborating with Father Mike Ellis of CACINA to promote a working relationship with several parishes. We have independent priests and bishops who are looking for a church family. In CACINA, our bishops make the final determination on agreements, and we want to ensure that people are in communion with us concerning our canons. We are not looking to water down our Catholic faith, and we want to stay true to our Catholic identity. I want to work with several jurisdictions and put it on our CACINA website so that we can recommend other jurisdictions or parishes throughout the country when people come to us. I realized that there are many fiefdoms and, therefore, communication barriers. To be recognized as a Catholic community, we must join hands. We must unite. I do not know how to do it, but I will keep trying. I was part of the ECC before it became the Ecumenical Catholic



Communion. Bishop Peter Hickman had a vision to call together like-minded communities and bishops to work together to build our Catholic faith. Our brothers and sisters of the Roman Church look at us and say, "They are not that big of a threat. They cannot get it together themselves!" I wish there were a way for us to get it together. We need to if we are going to survive!

D'Arrigo: This is our official spiel. "The Convergent Christian Communion considers itself in communion with all those who strive to witness to the life, ministry and teachings of Christ. We recognize that, for some, formalized agreement is necessary due to faith tradition or custom. Therefore, we're happy to formalize such agreements. Communion partners listed here are those worship communities, parachurch ministries, networks, denominations, and communions that have established a formal, full-communion agreement with the Convergent Christian Communion." Some of you can speak to how this has gone, since we are in communion with official, formal agreements with St. Francis Community of Faith for All People, the Catholic Diocese of the One Spirit, the Apostolic Catholic Church of America, the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, and most recently, the Anglican Church USA. We have a dream in the CCC that all of this Independent Church thing is eventually going to converge into the future Church. We're all on the same path and heading toward the same goal. The more that we can connect and unify behind that, while remaining true to our own identities, the stronger we are as a whole. If we look at creation as our model for the Church—since people are part of creation—creation is so exceptionally diverse: There's room for every imaginable "flavor" in creation, so there should be room for every kind of jurisdictional existence in the Church! What is attractive to me is the idea of having an association or union

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to get there, with  
universal standards  
for ordination. Most  
of us have some  
version of "M.Div.  
is preferred, but  
equivalency is

accepted" – where "equivalency" is the most vague notion known to humankind! You and I may not agree on what is "equivalent." Wouldn't it be nice for an association of Independent jurisdictions and churches to agree on what "equivalent" is? Imagine a universal pre-ordination exam to prove that a person is qualified to go from church to church, in and out of jurisdictions. That's my dream. I hate drama, but two very different priests from very different jurisdictions tried to drag me into their mutual drama today – basically over whether one of them is qualified to do their job. It's not my drama, but I want to be part of the solution. We all believe in certain universals. Can we all agree that, if you don't have an M.Div., you should participate in "reading for Orders," where you read these ten units of graduate-level reading and respond with an essay or video, to show that you are prepared for ministry? I keep meeting people who have been ordained but who can't tell me really basic things, like how many councils there have been, or why councils are important, or why the Church no longer speaks Latin.

Quintana: That might be a beginning point for all of us. If we all have open communion, then we're almost there as far as intercommunion is concerned. Another starting point is our Eucharistic theology. I don't think we want to have communion with someone who thinks that the Eucharist is

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only a symbol, emblem or token. In my mind, that might almost be blaspheming the sacrament. Open communion might be a starting point for us.

Mathias: Anyone who has come to Austin, Texas knows that we are very open to welcoming clergy from other parishes and jurisdictions. Father Mike Lopez likes to tell the story of his

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less-than-positive experiences with clergy who  
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first visit to Holy Family, when, even though we didn't know one another, I knew him as a friend of a friend, and I said, "Here's an alb. Here's a chasuble. Join us!" To

be honest, though, we've all had less-than-positive experiences with clergy who didn't know how to vest or concelebrate or preach. Their presence at the altar creates cognitive dissonance for the people of God, who wonder, "Don't they know how to preach or be a priest?"

Cavins: Bishop Chris Carpenter is our presiding bishop, and he is of the opinion, too, that open communion means "All are welcomed." We should be welcomed in one another's communities!

Nicosia: I have to point out that some of our ECC communities do have radical hospitality, where they totally welcome to the Eucharistic table those who don't fully appreciate our understanding of the Real Presence. Like Michael Angelo, we, in the ECC, have dreams of union with everybody. We've made steps in relationship with a lot of the mainline Christian denominations, particularly with our membership in the National Council of Churches, where Bishop Francis is on their governing board. He has constantly been focused on building relationships. It is eventually one of our hopes to enter into a full-communion agreement with one of the mainline denominations—though perhaps not during our lifetimes, since it takes tens of thousands of dollars to pay for the transportation and lodging for committees to get together and meet for decades to hash things out. We certainly don't have that time or money. Building relationships from the ground up is a recognized way to go, so we would like relationships with the Lutherans and the Episcopalians. That said, Utrecht has always had a problem with overlapping geographic jurisdictions. They understand dioceses to have geographic boundaries. The overlapping jurisdictions that we have in

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*They understand dioceses to have geographic boundaries.*

*The overlapping jurisdictions that we have in America create a challenge.*

America create a challenge—unless we follow Marek's suggestion that we get rid of all bishops and start over again! I don't know that we're ready for that sort of sacrifice.

Quintana: There are many bishops who certainly would not be willing to give up their episcopal see or jurisdiction!

Ellis: The concern about what's happening at the altar during the mass is jumping into the deep end of the pool, and we're also conscious of the variations of beliefs. CACINA is quite orthodox, as am I, on the Real Presence, although a recent study indicated that fully 60% of U.S. Roman Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence – and they are still admitted to the altar. When I was in my discernment committee, I was asked that question by a very discerning priest: "What would you do if someone came to you and said, 'I don't at all believe in the Real Presence'?" My response was, "Until such time as you can believe it, I'll believe it!" I believe

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there's value to us getting together, praying together and building relationships as we think through the implications of going into the deeper end of the pool.

D'Arrigo: In the Convergent Christian Communion, we have eliminated geographical bishops, and we now have relational bishops. It has been the finest decision we have ever made, because we are such a dispersed jurisdiction, and now no bishop has more than ten ministries to deal with. Jayme asks about negative experiences. I've had two negative experiences during the past two years. A bishop from another jurisdiction had a conversation with a young man in the Southeast, and he agreed to provisionally ordain him before he completed his formation because it would be difficult for the bishop to return for the ordination at a later time – and two weeks after his ordination, the priest left the jurisdiction and began jurisdiction shopping! We picked up the priest, and he understands that he was prematurely ordained – but it could have been much worse: A jurisdiction could have said, "You're a priest. You're good to go. Have at it!" Beyond education, we have two major requirements: a background check, which includes sex offender charges, and a psychiatric evaluation. I know clergy in the ISM who do not meet educational standards, do not meet psychological standards and have probably never had a background check. We desperately need to address the "monkey" in the room, through things like psychiatric evaluations and background checks. All the

education in the world isn't going to stop a borderline personality disorder person from completely "screwing the pooch" across the ISM. All of the greatest education in the world isn't going to stop a child molester from molesting children. Open table is a step toward intercommunion, but if we're really going to trust these intercommunion documents, we have to agree to run background checks and to do psychiatric testing, when needed. Until we can address those things, it's premature to talk about anything else. To my knowledge, our intercommunion partners are all on the same page with background checks and psychiatric evaluations, on top of the education. In my experience, 90% of the drama in the ISM has to do with

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Božek: We have a good working role model to look at and to learn from, and it's been in existence for 91 years: In 1931, the Old Catholics of Utrecht entered into the Bonn Agreement, a full-communion agreement with the Anglican Communion. Now when a priest of the Czech Old Catholic Church moves to the U.S., she can apply for a job in the Episcopal Church, and vice versa. We are always tempted to reinvent the wheel, but the wheels exist! A very down-to-earth question for each of us is: Where do you go to church on Sunday, when you happen to be outside your parish? Your answer will tell you who you trust and who you don't trust. If there are a CACINA church, an ECC church and an Episcopal

church in Key West, which  
would you choose? When I  
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church in Key West, which would you choose? When I vacation, nine out of ten times I go to an Episcopal Church, because I know they won't preach fire and brimstone, and they'll probably have good music as well and good coffee afterward. Such decisions likely shape what we say to our family, friends and parishioners as well.

If you get a sore throat and end up in an emergency room in Key West, how do you know that the nurse taking care of you is a good nurse? Because they are board-certified to practice as a nurse! They have had a psychological evaluation, they probably have annual evaluations, and they are trained. Some are RNs, and some are licensed nurses, so maybe we don't need everyone to have an M.Div.—but everyone should have something. We also need to have a frequent evaluation system. The fact that you passed an evaluation ten years ago doesn't tell us whether you've gotten better or worse during the past ten years. Based on my vacation experiences, how do I trust parishes, and how can I trust nurses? When it comes to nurses and lawyers, we know that they have been certified and tested frequently. We should have similar steps. To address Father Nicasio's comments, my idea is not so much of eliminating bishops, but to follow the historical precedent of the Council of Constance of 1414-1418, when the Western Catholic Church had three popes, each claiming to be the one, right pope. They solved the problem by deposing all three, and they elected a new pope to restore order to the Church. If it worked once, perhaps it could work again.

Fremont: I hear a desire not to reinvent the wheel. The Protestant tradition has a long history of full-communion agreements, most notably, the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), which would have united much of the Protestant mainline; what we know today as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the International Council of Community Churches, the Moravian Church (Northern Province), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church. The theological groundwork was laid for that union, and most would say it was ultimately rejected at the judicatory level. You can read about it in Keith Watkin's work, *The American Church that Might Have Been*. You can also find a lot of the theological groundwork that led up to that failed merger. The work continues on through a covenant relationship among 11 Christian communions called Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC), a

body which I serve, representing the United Church of Christ, and as the Vice President of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations for the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC). Ultimately, one of the major points of disagreement was the reconciliation of ministries or orders, and reconciliation of orders continues to be a sticky issue for much of the mainline Protestant traditions today. The Formula of Agreement, an agreement between the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Reformed Church USA, and the Presbyterian Church USA, is an example of a mainline Protestant agreement that was successful in relation to reconciliation of orders. This agreement allows pastors of any of those traditions to enter the “search and call” process of any of the other church traditions. I, as a United Church of Christ pastor, can serve an ELCA, Reformed Church, or PCUSA congregation, and vice versa. I have witnessed the Formula of Agreement growing in popularity as many of us, like our Roman Catholic friends, are now experiencing a decline in vocations.

Božek: The UCC, in its foundational understanding, is mostly a congregational structure. The original UCC moderators here in St. Louis have told me that, in theory, there would be room in the UCC structure for the national body to unhesitatingly receive a congregation with a Catholic flavor. Is that correct?

Fremont: Speaking for the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC), which is less of a denomination and more of a community church movement, I would say yes to that for us. We do have Independent Catholic churches that are part of our movement. And as the former moderator in the United Church of Christ here in the Southwest Conference, I would say that that would also be very true for the UCC. The United Church of Christ is made up of five historic streams. In the St. Louis area, for instance, the church was more evangelical. In the Southwest, it was more congregationalist. We had the German Reformed Church among us as one of those streams, and the Hungarian Church recommended that its immigrants in the U.S. enter into a communion agreement with the Germans, who supplied them with pastors. The Hungarian Reformed

Church is now known as the Calvin Synod, and they are the only non-geographic synod of the United Church of Christ— they also have bishops, which is anomalous for the UCC's polity, but more importantly, works. The Calvin Synod is an excellent example of what could be within the United Church of Christ structure. I am not here speaking for the United Church of Christ, but I do know that there are conversations happening between the United Church of Christ and several churches of the Reformed Church of America. There are many churches that are trying to figure out exactly how they can survive, especially as their national denominational structures continue to erode. They're asking deeper questions: What can we do to serve our communities in a more meaningful way? What makes sense for us to retain our autonomy, but also provide a place for our pastors to continue to retain their benefits? Those conversations are happening among a lot of structures. Having an inside ear to many of our denominational officers, I hear people question the wisdom of spending massive amounts of money on full communion agreements. Several questions are raised: How can smaller denominations enter into full communion agreements? What happens after full communion? And what, really, is the result of full communion agreements?

Mathias: Rock, what has been the “secret sauce” to bringing together the churches that participate in Churches Uniting in Christ? Is there anything that we can learn there?

*Several questions are raised:*

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*What happens after full communion?*

*And what, really, is the result of full communion agreements?*



Fremont: Most of that work began right after the Second World War, culminating with the formation of CUIC in the 1960's during the peak of the ecumenical movement, which was a response to societal turmoil and conflict. We had prophets in the U.S. at that time: Rev. Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, for

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instance, who really saw that we were better together than we are apart, and they agitated to unite churches. Now, as we continue to dwindle in numbers and face our own set of challenges, it makes sense for so many more reasons.

Giblin: It seems that a lot of time, money and heartburn is involved in formulating intercommunion agreements. Do intercommunion agreements extend across the board, or does each jurisdiction have to negotiate its own intercommunion agreements?

Carter: The short answer is no. Intercommunion agreements are not like logic or math. They're not commutative. If I have an agreement with you, you're not necessarily in communion with someone else that I'm in communion with, so we have to work all our stuff out. I'm that weird version of idealist and pragmatist, so I want to start this from both ends. On the top level, we are all part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge your catholicity and the value and validity of what you do, and I would love to be in communion with any of you. On the bottom end, it's sometimes important for people to work out specific agreements to make themselves feel more comfortable when they are visiting each other. Just as in daily life, you might still need to ask whether you can concelebrate mass with me. You might have a standing invitation to dinner at my house, but you wouldn't show up, knock on the door, and say, "Feed me now!" So we work from a mixture of

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idealism and practicality. On the bottom-up, practically speaking, I would like to be in communion in a more formal way with those who have, as a bare minimum, criminal background checks and psychological testing for their

clergy. I can agree with those who have expressed that those are deal breakers. We need to know that we're not putting at risk the people we're responsible for.

Giblin: From a lay person's point of view, I don't want a presbyter who has not been educated or background checked. That doesn't do me any good spiritually, and it doesn't do good

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for anyone else in the congregation. I fully support having educational requirements, background checks and psychological exams for any ordained person in the Church.

Leary: In 35 years in law enforcement, I've gotten stuck doing an awful lot of background checks and psychological exams. Now, as a justice of the peace and as a bail commissioner, I'm required to do full background checks. I'm also an adult trainer for a youth organization that has an annual background check, with a medium dive every third year and a deep dive every five years. It seems that's a minimum today. The lawyers are out there waiting: We need to have the ability to show that we've done the background checks and psychological evaluations. Education is a greater concern. We have people who've been in our movement for

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30 years who are still celebrating their first anniversary for the 30<sup>th</sup> year because they've had no continuing education. I don't care how well trained you are, the day you stop learning is the day you should be dead. If you claim to be a leader in the Church, you need to continue your education.

Mathias: I'm sensing that the Spirit may be pulling us in the direction of some sort of accrediting organization or agency within our movement—perhaps a conversation to come!

Rounds: There's also an element here of what's in a person's heart. I'm an associate chaplain at our hospital, and we had a cool Episcopal priest who had a great resume and was zooming

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to go, but who refused to minister to non-Christians. Your seminary degree, background check and psych eval don't necessarily speak to what's in your heart. Our informal relationships with people will sometimes tell us just as much as those formal elements of our relationships.

Quintana: Our history as an Independent Catholic movement is filled with a lot of dysfunction and bad history. It's important that we know that and begin to distance ourselves from that. We need to demonstrate that we're starting to get it together.

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Until we do, a lot of people will hearken back to that history. Utrecht is very familiar with that history, and they will measure us against that history. So, let's recognize that history and find ways to move beyond it!

Giblin: Many of our intercommunion agreements in the ECC have been with non-Catholic jurisdictions. This conversation has

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me wondering whether we need to shift our focus, to enjoy better relationships with other Inclusive Catholic jurisdictions with which we have so much in common. Together, we could be more powerful at spreading the gospel in the world!

D'Arrigo: The agreement that we hear today is really encouraging. It makes me feel like there's a reason that we all continue to get together. We are legitimately becoming a "hive mind," which is really cool. The Holy Spirit is the thread that weaves everything together, including all of our

relationships, and I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is completely responsible for leading this group!

Yoegel: When I approached this conversation, I was very clear on how I felt about intercommunion. I want to thank you all for confusing the hell out of me in this conversation, which has been extremely worthwhile. There are many threads, including the question of whether we want to pull together under an umbrella of intercommunion. Do we need to be in formal intercommunion to recommend a church to someone who's going on vacation? We had no formal relationship with CACINA when Bishop Will joined us for mass once a month. Then he took a monthly rotation in preaching and saying mass. The intercommunion agreement came much later. I don't know that we'll ever have a priest of another jurisdiction operating under the umbrella of our jurisdiction. I can't imagine a circumstance where we would become responsible for a priest of another jurisdiction beyond the liturgy.

Rounds: Our intercommunion agreements in the Church of Antioch are relational. They happen because of relationships. We don't go shopping for them; they happen. We can get too heavy on the rules. We have to always ask: What's the

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purpose of this agreement? Is the purpose to switch back and forth between jurisdictions, or to concelebrate together and do that sort of thing?

Leary: We've all seen clergy with all the fancy degrees but who can't preach their way out of a wet paper bag. So, it's not always the education. It's how a person uses their skill sets and whether they've truly been called and are open to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we get hung up on details, and sometimes pieces of paper don't mean anything. We can't give people a pass just because they have a degree or a piece of paper. When I worked in the restaurant business, I hired a chef who graduated from the Culinary Institute of America, the gold standard, and I fired him in three weeks. When we give a pass to those with the "credentials," it comes back to bite us. As we move forward,

*As we move forward, I foresee the challenge of balancing formal education with life experience, as many college are doing now.*

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I foresee the challenge of balancing formal education with life experience, as many college are doing now. The big churches require an M.Div. of their clergy, but I've known a lot of clergy for whom that wasn't enough!

Ray: This conversation has caused me to take a step back and reflect on how we can make this work. I like the idea of clergy that has been vetted with education and through psychological evaluations. I want to take it one step further: What makes me cringe is when a priest is consecrated a bishop within two or three years of ordination. We have too many bishops who do not understand what it means to be a priest, much less what it means to be a bishop. I have been a priest in the Independent movement for 33 years, and

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every year I am told, "You have to be a bishop!" I say, "Absolutely not. I come from Wisconsin, and the only 'miter' I am going to wear is my cheese head!" We must take those things seriously.

Ellis: I'm in complete agreement about the background checks and psychological evaluations as a minimum. It's indefensible not to have these in any profession these days. Catholicism is a way of being Christian, and the institutional church exists to support more deeply that way of being Christian. As Catholic Christians, as humans who have a Catholic relationship with the world, we surely ought to be able to come together in prayer, especially since prayer is the foundation of all ministry!

Nicosia: Along with the professional evaluations, the background checks, and the psychological evaluations, it is our practice in the ECC that candidates for ordination or incarnation

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I think that applies to intercommunion  
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must be a member of one of our communities and develop a relationship with the community. That community provides another lens from which to evaluate that person's call, since they are calling forth one of their own members. I

think that applies to intercommunion agreements, too. Let's journey together, since that's the ground from which intercommunion blooms!

Božek: The more that I think about intercommunion agreements, the more I realize that they are about legal issues and about paychecks and benefits for ministers. I sense that most lay people in our parishes don't really care about who we have intercommunion agreements with, and we are getting closer to a post-denominational reality where people can migrate from one denomination to another more easily than they did before. I love Linda's example about the hospital chaplain: CPE programs are a great example of how to find qualified and educated people who have healthy relationships and people skills. Maybe we should require all candidates for ordination to complete two or three units

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of CPE — because then we know they won't be such a pain in the neck! You can have a Ph.D. and still not know how to deal with a dying Muslim or a sick Buddhist. The CPE system seems to be finding a way to equip its chaplains with those human skills that many seminaries don't.

Carter: I love you all, and I feel close enough to trust all of you and to feel confident in sending my folks to visit you or to be

visited by you. Bishop Linda is right: It's about relationships. I am the ecumenical officer for the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, so, with zero pressure and recognizing that ultimately we are all part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, if anyone feels inclined to enter into intercommunion with us, so that your people feel closer to our people, I'm happy to speak with you. We would be delighted to create a more formal arrangement, if that helps you. I really love Mike's stress on us coming together in prayer. When I hear that, my heart expands and imagines that including our liturgical prayer together. I remember how wonderful and welcoming it was for all of us to come together at Holy Family in 2019 and celebrate together. It was profoundly moving!

## A Response to “Invalid Baptisms” in the Roman Catholic Church

*This conversation was convened to discuss the implications for Inclusive Catholicism of a current event in the Roman Catholic Church: of a priest whose baptisms in the name of the community – “We baptize you...” – were deemed invalid by the Roman Church.*

Mathias: We hadn’t planned on a conversation today, but then I received a call from Bishop Thomas Abel, who is here with us, who asked: Are we having any conversation on the latest – and this is my word – “scandal” within the Roman Catholic Church? Many of us self-identified as Roman Catholic as some point in our lives. The current kerfuffle in that church centers around a priest in Arizona who baptized people for years in the name of the community, saying, “We baptize you...” rather than the prescribed formula of the Roman Church, which is “I baptize you....” Hierarchs of the Roman Church are now suggesting that all those baptisms were invalid. We’ll look in the direction of Bishop Tom to get the conversation going, then we’ll look toward others who are closer to the epicenter of the controversy in Arizona, like Bishop Leonard, Bishop Mark, Reverend Kathleen and Reverend Karen.

Abel: I was speaking with another bishop about this fiasco of we-versus-I language in the baptismal form, and I find it, quite frankly, ridiculous. We know that we are acting *in persona Christi* when we are celebrating the sacraments, and I find it unbelievable that Rome has decided to make an issue of this. These baptisms were celebrated with proper form and intention, so I’m feeling very up in arms!

Walker: Bishop Olmsted has announced his retirement, so this is his final act against Holy Mother Church and against the people of Arizona. It is a scandal, and the Roman Church is placing the burden on the faithful to rectify a mistake by a

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priest. It is really ridiculous. The bishop could have spoken with and corrected the priest and applied *ecclesia supplet* to the matter: Everything was done in good



faith, and “the Church supplies!” What a theology: to think that God’s grace could be blocked or prevented by a single pronoun! The pope, too, could have easily resolved the matter.

Furr: I have to be honest: I wonder why we’re obsessing once again over what the Romans are doing. The Roman Church is rocked by scandal from head to toe. Why is anybody surprised? Second, why are we giving it energy? It’s not our denomination. This matter just reiterates that we’re so obsessed with what the Romans are doing, that we forget that we have our own jurisdictions and our own paths as Catholics that we could be really nurturing and growing, instead of going on about yet another scandal in the Roman Church. It borders on gossip. On the next clear night, go out and look at the stars, and notice the immensity of the universe, then ask yourself: Does the Creator of all that give

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a diddly-squat what pronoun people use? We need to move on from being Rome’s watchdog. It’s disturbing that we’re spending a lot of energy on this.

Abel: My perspective is that this has nothing to do with Rome itself, but rather with how we minister to the people who are infected or affected by this. We should be out there, making sure that people know that we experience the Spirit in a different way. We welcome them to be part of our movement, to be part of the Independent Catholic Church that responds to the Holy Spirit in the way that we do.

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“You are welcomed!”*

That’s why I raised the question. I don’t give a diddly-squat what happens to Rome. It’s their own issue, but it presents us the opportunity to be a positive voice, saying, “You are welcomed!”

Furr: Let's do that! As soon as we start talking about Rome, you can feel the energy of this group go down.

Jess: I would suggest that we do need to talk about Rome. This is a pastoral issue. It's about the people who are being told that they are no longer baptized, because of a word. That is serious, and it's against the intention of any baptism I've ever done as a Catholic.

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Maybe the priest felt that "we" was most appropriate in the moment. We can't just take a hatchet to the baptism that people have held dear for decades, and say, "All these people are no longer baptized!"

Furr: As Inclusive Catholics, we're not saying that. We're not saying that we're hung up on pronouns. The Roman Church itself has to figure this out. That's their path. Yes, we can be pastoral and open our arms with compassion and love to those who are coming from that abusive experience, but I don't see a need for us to hash out the scandals in the Roman Church. The karma of that institution is catching up with them, and they have to work it out. We're talking again about how to affect somebody else's denomination. How engaged are we in analyzing the Roman church?

Newman: Karen, you tend to read my mind This is not our issue. This is an issue of the Roman Catholic Church. They need to work through it. They need to come to an understanding of what they've done and the implications of it. To use a perhaps-trite phrase, I have no dog in this fight. It does give us an opportunity to examine our perspective on the sacrament, and what language we should use in our jurisdictions. That's the positive consequence of this. A

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secondary positive consequence is that the Roman Catholic Church has once again highlighted the issue of clericalism. We need to examine our attitude about the status of ordained clergy in relation to the people, and the role of the people in the

sacraments. They have to solve this issue; I won't attempt to solve it for them. They've done what they've done.

Božek: On the one hand, I want to echo what Karen and Mark are saying. On the other hand, it raises the question: Do we have our own sacramental theology as a movement? In my experience, we don't have any cohesive theology whatsoever. Each "denomination" has its own canon laws

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and attempts to theologize according to its experience. That may be why we keep referring to Roman Catholic scandals and trauma: They come with a well-defined theological language and understanding. We may agree or disagree with them, but they

have a framework within which they operate—and that framework apparently is not working as it should be right now. But notice that, in the Detroit case, where the poor, young priest was declared to be invalidly ordained after almost three years of ministry—because his baptism wasn't valid—they declared all his sacraments invalid. They recognize that unbaptized pagans cannot perform legal baptisms in the Roman Catholic framework. My question is: How do we treat sacramental theology and formulae? Tom talked about matter, form and intent. From the Roman Catholic perspective, the baptism formula is *ego te baptizo*, just as the words of consecration are "This is *my* body," and the words of absolution are "*I* absolve you...." The first time that I read this news, I was fine with the priest saying, "we"—but then I was led down a rabbit hole. What if he said, "This is *our* body"? Or, what if he said in the confessional, "We absolve you of your sins." As a canonist, I ask myself, would I be okay with plural pronouns in other sacraments, when people are inspired to use them? That's my uneasiness when it comes to our sacraments and sacramental theology.

Quintana: I've been in this movement for 46 years, and we've spent too much time kissing the feet of Rome and trying to conform ourselves to the Roman Church. Let them deal with their problems. We are a young movement that is trying to evolve and come together and formulate our

theology and our perspective on things. I also agree with Leonard: The theological principle of “the Church supplies” could have taken care of that. Back in the early days of the movement, bishops would whip out their apostolic succession, just to prove that they were valid. I don’t need Rome to affirm my validity. Rome would not consider so much of what we do—like the ordination of women—as valid. Let’s let Rome go, and let’s come together and bolster each other up!

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D’Arrigo: I see things from a very similar perspective to Marek. I was raised in a very Sicilian, very Roman Catholic church. When I hit my teen years, I found it really hard to believe that the pope was infallible, and I decided to search for another religion. That sent me literally all around the world, to come back to Christianity again, where I was ordained in the Anglican Church. I’m not a Roman priest, but, as someone who writes liturgies for my jurisdiction and is now the *de facto* ecumenical officer of my jurisdiction, advising our presiding bishop, I think that this issue that Rome is experiencing can be really helpful for us as a community of leadership in the Independent and Inclusive Catholic movement. As Mark was saying, let’s make sure we never find ourselves in the position that they’re in. We can also take advantage of the situation, to let folks know, “Even if Rome doesn’t see your baptism as valid, these are the reasons we believe it was!”—and we don’t think that you need to jump through hoops to get back into the Church’s good graces. The website of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix now tells people: If your baptism was invalid, you can’t receive Holy Communion anymore—until you’ve

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been baptized! We have a massive opportunity to be extremely pastoral, especially y’all folks who are in Arizona, where people are being told: You can’t have communion anymore because of what someone said 16 years ago! Each of you in Arizona can walk

up to them and say, "Here is the Body of Christ for you, with no strings attached!" Language is really important. Our jurisdiction has Eastern and Western expressions, so our presiding bishop flew down to Texas last week to celebrate diaconal ordinations in one of our Eastern churches. He had to develop a liturgy that was workable from a Western perspective and from an Eastern perspective. Suddenly, words really mattered! So, my Episcopal/Anglican side says, "I'm totally okay with 'we.'" My universalist Catholic side says, "The Church will supply whatever I screw up as a failing human." But there's also a little voice in my head that says, "You're a priest. You're the Vicar of Christ. The Church may be his hands and feet, but you are his vessel, so, when you're sitting in a sacramental office, you are Jesus. This is valid stuff to talk about, as long as it's within the context of Inclusive Catholicism, and not in the context of the Roman Catholic Church.

Yell: The opportunity that I see for us is one that I've seen so many times in my ministry: A couple comes to me and says, "We've had a baby, and her grandparents want her to be baptized. We're not Christian, but we believe in God. Will you do it?" I'm sure many of us have had similar situations, where we find ourselves saying, "my jurisdiction requires this," or "the gospel requires that." In a previous conversation, I spoke of the need for us to talk about theology. That tends to establish boundaries, which inhibit communication, which is not my intention either. In the general population, maybe half of all people might understand the nature of baptism: This is a great opportunity for us to review how broad a definition we can give people of baptism, and to affirm that we don't limit

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God. If the Church is about pastoral reality, we need to inform our formal theology with our pastoral experience, rather than the other way round – which, I suspect, is the whole essence of being an Inclusive Catholic.

Cheasty: In order to have a valid baptism, a person has to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and you need a little bit of water thrown in there. The emphasis is on the “you” — *You* are baptized! — and not on the minister, which is why anyone — even Joe the butcher — can baptize in extreme circumstances. Regardless of *who* baptizes you — “I” or “we” or the guy next door — *you* are baptized, with water, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The

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question arises: Which baptisms will we accept as valid within the Independent Catholic tradition, or will we get hung up on pronouns? Will we focus on the arteries or the capillaries?

Robison: In seminary, we learned about matter, form and intent, but “I” versus “we” is a secondary issue to *who* is baptized. I understand the disciplinary issue of a priest who decided to go “off script” and is now in “hot water.” That’s a separate issue, and most of this is typical of bureaucracy. Patrice asks: Do we accept baptisms from other groups? For me, it depends. Mormons believe in three separate divinities, so they are not Christian in the same way that we are. They say that they are, to avoid friction.

Ellis: There is value in our talking about this. These are things that interest us. If we were in a divinity school class on sacramental theology, one would expect the professor to bring this up and ask, “What do you think?” This gives us the opportunity to advance our thinking about sacraments in real time and in the real world. There are times when we stand “in the gap.” Last week, I was called by a family whose loved one had just passed, and, knowing that they were lapsed Catholics, I was sure that they would ask me to celebrate the Last Rites for him. As a matter of principle, I thought: I can’t do that; the sacraments are for the living! I

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thought through what in the rite might prevent this, and, finding nothing, I called my bishop. After I made my case, his advice

was, "Do what the Holy Spirit is guiding you to do." It was an instance in which I stood "in the gap." I suggested that I might celebrate the sacrament with the hope and steadfast conviction that God, in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, would be present. And I said, "We really stand 'in the gap.'" My bishop said, "We stand with Jesus." That response opened me up.

D'Arrigo: Our perspectives depend on our experiences and seminary education. If you came through a Protestant seminary, you probably rely on *sola scriptura* and the Holy Spirit: Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Bible, Bible, Bible! If you're Roman Catholic, you probably look to church councils, and the history of the church, and what Saint So-and-so said about this in a certain year—and you'll probably argue that words are important because this or that person said so. We all share our liturgical and theological understandings of what is and isn't sacramental—and whether or not there are necessary words for sacraments. If you come from a hardcore Roman or Orthodox background, there is a recipe for how you do everything. In my hippie way of doing things, though, it's all about intent and the Bible. There are so many layers to this topic, and we need to be open to all of them!

Krawczyk: No matter what faith-based service we do, we need to distinguish between what is manmade and what is actually from Jesus. Sometimes we focus so much on the manmade, egotistical things, that we lose sight of the true spiritual nature of things. No matter what happens, if God wants something to be holy, it will be holy. Regardless of the matter or the form, it will be holy! I'm watching a TV show called "Evil," where, before an exorcism, a non-believing psychologist emptied the priest's bottle of holy water and

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filled it with tap water. The priest found out and was angry, but then concluded, "What God wants holy, God wants holy!" Many of us were baptized as infants, so I

certainly see the value of finding ways to reaffirm our baptism in ways that are meaningful to individuals!

Quintana: I like the Anglican perspective: When we look at or adjudicate something, we need to use the three-legged “stool” of scripture, tradition and reason. If we look at things in that way, we’ll always come to a reasonable conclusion!

Abel: It’s important that we talk about these issues that bring us together, in ways that help us to know and love one another. And Father Kevin, thank you for reminding us of how gracious and big God is!

Buffone: I really rely on the Holy Spirit to guide me in the moment, and I’m changing words all the time, so I appreciate this conversation. I appreciate, value and respect formulas to

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some extent, but I also believe that all is good and holy, and God continues to work in us and the sacraments we celebrate. I agree: Enough with Rome! Our Polish sisters and brothers have

created their own lectionary and prayers, drawing on scripture, tradition and reason. That’s the direction we’re called in: To allow the Holy Spirit to bring to birth a new creation through us!

Walker: I really appreciate this discussion. Our goal is not to trash Rome, and we recognize that Olmsted has embarrassed practically every other bishop in the world through his actions. But this provides us the opportunity to reflect on our own sacramental theology and to present a contrast in what we affirm. We affirm the power of the Holy Spirit as

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being greater than any word or formula. We affirm God’s grace. And, as an ecclesial body, we look more at intent than at legalism and potential errors. Intention is a very important element of sacramental theology!



Robison: We started this conversation with the debacle of Rome, but we got around to talking about our own sacramental theology and our tradition. We need to continue that second part of the conversation!

Furr: When I was a nun on the Navajo reservation, I visited an elderly man who boasted of being baptized many times by many missionaries. Baptism made him feel good! If I have to choose between rules or compassion, I will choose compassion every time. The sacraments aren't for us. They're for others. I have probably broken some rules in my celebration of the sacraments, but if it was meaningful to the person and if it touched them profoundly, that's what the sacraments are all about! Sacraments aren't about rules and formulae. They're about God, and we are just the vessels. If we put the rules in front of compassion, we may as well go

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back to the Roman Church—and I have no desire to do that. I'm glad that we moved the conversation beyond what an ogre Olmsted might be, to talk about what we, as a movement, are doing. That's what I want to focus on. Compassion!

Ellis: The Church absolutely ought to be a place where we can exchange ideas, as we have tonight!

Božek: As "vessels," as Michael Angelo and Karen point out, we should always "read the room" and serve others during our celebrations of the sacraments. We are not ministering for our own needs, or for our own glory. When we are in a community where formulas are important, we should respectfully use their formulas. And when we're in

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communities that are more flexible, we should serve those communities. We are not ministers of our own selves and our egos. We are members of a community, and everything we do—how we celebrate or preach, or the music we sing—

should be focused on serving the congregation, not ourselves. As long as we are responding to the real needs of the congregation, and not our imaginary perceptions, I'm fine with flexible formulas that serve particular congregations!

Carter: I have learned in these conversations that if I keep my mouth shut and listen long enough, I'll hear what I was thinking. When I give marital advice, I tell couples, "When you argue — and you will argue — make sure that you argue long enough to know what you're actually arguing about." I felt that happen here: Many arguments are just unfolding conversations! I agree that the conversation is worth having because each of us has a pastoral responsibility, and we all serve people who have been hurt within Christianity and within humanity. I serve a lot of people who either were Roman Catholic, or still in some way consider themselves tied to Roman Catholic teaching and practices, so I do what matters to them. Because I love and care for them, what matters to them matters to me. This conversation has been so deeply moving for me personally, that I would love to have a conversation about each individual sacrament, one at a time, and what they mean to us!

Mathias: Long before I went to a very progressive Roman Catholic school of theology, I was raised in a very conservative environment, so there is something within me that respects this desire to want to conserve the tradition that has been passed down for centuries. The word that really rings in my heart this evening is "legalism." When we get hung up on a single word and believe that that word could somehow keep the Spirit from working in the wonderfully mysterious ways in which the Spirit wishes to work, then that's

<p><i>When we get hung up on a single word &amp; believe that that word could somehow keep the Spirit from working in the wonderfully mysterious ways in which the Spirit wishes to work, then that's probably a problem.</i></p>	<p>probably a problem. Paraphrasing Mike's bishop, we'll be standing in good company if we stand on the side of Jesus!</p>
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## A Response to the Roman Catholic Synod on Synodality

*In this conversation, participants discuss the possible benefits of sharing with the Roman Catholic Church their perspectives, as part of the Roman Church's Synod on Synodality.*

Mathias: Tonight's theme was suggested by Bishop Jerry Brohl, so we'll look in his direction first. I want to acknowledge upfront that sometimes when we talk about the Roman Catholic Church, a heavy energy falls over this group. If we start feeling that or sensing that we're going down that path, let's pause and consider if there's a way for us to reframe the conversation. Statistically, according to the Pew Research Center, 13% of Americans are former Roman Catholics. Let that sink in for a moment. Many of us self-identify as former Roman Catholics. As we say at the beginning of every episode of "Extraordinary Catholics" podcast, if former Roman Catholics were to come together, we would form the second-largest religion in the nation, second only to the Roman Catholic Church. In Mexico, 1,000 Roman Catholics leave the church every single day. In light of such factors, Francis, the bishop of Rome, has called the Synod on Synodality. Jerry's question to me was: Is there some way for us to provide Rome the input and perspective they seek from those outside the Roman Catholic fold? Hence, my question for all of us: Should we, as individuals

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and/or as a group,  
offer a perspective  
or various  
perspectives to the  
Roman Church? If  
so, what might that  
look like?

Brohl: I'm a cradle Catholic, and, during my 20 years within the Independent Catholic movement, I've always identified as an Independent Roman Catholic, which, as you might imagine, does not place me in good standing with some within the Independent movement. Many of us somehow continue to identify with Catholicism, and Pope Francis

mentions the “periphery” and the “margins” of Catholicism as being important to the conversation for this synod. I would very much like to see us make a contribution to the synod, because we have many valid and valuable things to say about Catholicism. We all have been touched by Catholicism, and we all have something to say to the Roman Church, which is collapsing from within and is in need of reform. It is hurting, and it is aware that it is in decline. This synod seems an attempt by Francis to resurrect the Roman Church and infuse it with life, spirit and grace. I have no horror stories to tell you about my experience within the

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Roman Church. Considering some of the stories I’ve heard, this is a blessing. So, I encourage us to give some serious consideration to making a contribution to this synod.

Barry: Hans Küng used the term “catholicity,” and I see myself as part of a catholicity that humankind longs for. Perhaps one day we’ll discover a “catholicity” gene that people either have or don’t have—though I don’t think such will happen. My take on the word “Catholic” is “wholeness,” so I’m living the spirit of a Catholic yearning for the wholeness that we all seek.

Abel: Does anyone here have any regular, formal or informal communication with anyone in any type of leadership position in the Roman Catholic Church here in the U.S.? I sure don’t. They stay as far away from me as possible! And I suspect that’s the case with most of us.

Barry: I have one friend who is rector of a major seminary in the U.S., and I have a good monsignor friend in an arch-conservative diocese in the Midwest. Underneath the veneer, this monsignor might be trying to “save” me somehow—though it doesn’t always feel like that. I like to think that the more that I can keep my wits about me, the more I can entice the two of them to try to understand the God that moves through my life—because I think that the God who moves through their life is the same God.

Abel: I'm personally at a loss as to what type of avenues we would use, should we decide to have some communication with the Roman Church. That's my main question: What types of connections do we have?

Mathias: The Roman Catholic Church has entered a phase of collecting input at the diocesan level, through April of this year. It might take a bit of research for us to figure out who in our local dioceses is receiving such input.

Brohl: I am in communication with several of my seminary classmates, some of whom are active as parish priests, and, over the years, I have had some fairly close relationships with pastors in the town where I live. My seminary classmates occasionally provide me some "insider information" on what's going on in the Archdiocese of Detroit. The synod has a mechanism whereby any individual or group can directly communicate to the synod any comments or proposals.

Robison: I have a cousin who works in the Vatican press office. I also have friends through the Carmelites, who are in Rome, and in the hierarchy of the order. The word that I get from my cousin is that all hell has broken loose, that the various parts of the Curia are hoping that they can use the synod as a way to leverage more power for themselves. What's chiefly going on underneath the surface is that they're hoping to beat each other up within an inch of their lives, and take control of the Church away from the pope and the bishops, and put it back in the hands of the bureaucracy where it belongs. The Carmelites are hosting "mini synods" of friars, nuns and third orders, and are preparing to send a bunch of comments. That seems also to be the way the Benedictines are handling it.

Yell: Jerry speaks of resurrection. When people ask me why I'm an Independent Catholic, as opposed to a Roman Catholic, my usual response is, "Unfortunately, Rome seems to proclaim the paschal mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only path to salvation for everyone and everything – apart from itself." The reality is that Pope Francis has asked Roman Catholics to go through a hospice experience, and you have to be very brave to voluntarily go through a hospice experience in order to

engage in resurrection. Why should we participate? Some 20 years ago, a higher-up made a comment about conversations of the Roman Church with our sisters churches, and then-Cardinal Ratzinger corrected the man, saying, "There are only two sister churches: the Orthodox and the Old Catholic Church." For those of us who claim apostolic succession through the Old Catholic Church, that might be an avenue to explore. According to the retired

pope, that avenue gives us the in-family connection of being a "sister church." Let's dig up Ratzinger's definition of sister churches and use that in our dialogues with the ecumenical offices of our local diocese.

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D'Arrigo: I'm noticing on the synod's website that "Pope Francis is inviting all the baptized to participate in this synodal process, which begins at the diocesan level." Many of us who are Independent Catholics were actually baptized as Roman Catholics. If we have not been excommunicated, we are just considered "fallen Catholics." We're still part of that baptized group! The website suggests that anybody with any claim to the Roman Catholic world has a voice in this. It seems that we could also involve ourselves in the fourth phase of the process, which is a universal phase that involves "other Christians in the world." If we want to do this on a large level, we need to decide on a document that we all can agree upon. "These are some tenants that we all agree need to be reformed in Rome, and, as former Romans or people who are part of the universal Church...." It seems we could address it to the secretariat of the synod. This could be something that brings us all together as Independents to define some of those universals that we all agree on and that can help bring us together as a community. It's a double blessing: We can send a message to Rome, to state how we feel, which is good and helpful, but, in that same process, it can bring us together as Independent clergy to have a deepening understanding of what we all agree upon as things that are important. I

would argue that there are probably five or six things that every single one of us would agree upon that need to be reformed. After our recent retreat experience in New York, I know what we, as Independent Catholics, are capable of. We can come up with some really extraordinary ideas in a very short period of time, that we could all agree on. We can provide them some input, but we could also use it to our advantage.

Mathias: I want to point out that seven of us recently came together and co-wrote an article for publication. It was a very positive experience, so I'm willing to suggest that we think in the direction of forging some document that all of us, to the extent that we're willing, could sign, with our titles, names, eucharistic communities and jurisdictions. We could send a strong message that this diverse group, comprised of many people who enjoyed former ties to the to the Roman Church, is sharing a united message.

Furr: I look at the whole synod from a slightly different perspective. There's a bigger picture going on with the Roman Church: They are hitting rock bottom, and they need to do their own inner work as an organization. I can understand why they're wanting input from outside the Roman Church, but I have a hunch that they already know what they need to do—and the more input they receive from outside their organization, the easier it will be for them to not do that inner work. I would maybe respond as an individual who was once in that dysfunctional system, but I don't know if an organization outside of the Roman Church is going to be as helpful to their inner work and their growth, compared with them falling flat on their face and rebuilding themselves. The Roman Church is like an addict in an intervention: Everyone is giving input and is hoping for a change, but the person who really needs to do

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something about it may not be paying attention to what's being said. It's why I left, and it's why many other people are leaving. The Roman Church is now faced with its own karma, and the power of the Holy Spirit is amazing. It's one thing to sit on

the outside, looking in and saying that the Roman Church needs to change, but the change needs to come from within. The Roman Church needs to look in the mirror and see itself. I don't know that it's helpful organizationally for us to share our responses. Are we really helping them, or are we enabling them?

Abel: Responding to this call for input in Christian charity seems to be relevant. It's relevant to me, and I imagine we could easily pull together a cohesive, manageable response to this call for input. Why not? Why should we limit the Holy Spirit that wishes to work through us for the benefit of our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. We are all one, even if we at times feel separated from our brothers and sisters. Let's respond to the call of the Holy Spirit!

Mathias: I'm a big believer in collective wisdom, which is why I'm thinking that, if we were to meet through Zoom one day later this week, for 60 to 90 minutes, we could provide quite a statement—but I also take seriously Karen's challenge to us as well. We are perceived as outsiders.

Yell: I entirely agree with you, Karen. One of the things that we can say to the Roman Church is that we have proven for decades that clergy can be married, that clergy do not need to be male or straight, and that clergy and people of various ethnic and sexual backgrounds can joyously worship and move forward together. So, while I agree with Karen, I also think it's important to speak to the "addict," even if it chooses to ignore us and remain in its "addictions." We might say, "If you choose to stay in your addiction, you need to know it's your choice—because everything that you're worried about doesn't exist. Your fears are not based

on facts!" Our lived experience tells us exactly that. When I was finishing my time as a non-ordained associate pastor in a Roman Catholic parish in Oakland, I said at the farewell party, "I'm not just leaving this job; I'm leaving the Church—because I believe in the ordination of women, I believe in the ordination of married people,

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and I believe in so many structural things that we, as a parish, have tried to work around for years." We invited women to preach, we invited pastors from other churches, including women, to concelebrate with our priests, and the bishop hated it—but we were one of the most generous parishes in the diocese. We represented a lot of money to him. I told them, "I can no longer do this, and I look forward to the day 350 years from now when the Roman Church will be doing everything I think it should be doing now—but I will be dead and won't be able to participate, so I'm going to stop doing it now. You know where the Church is going: You're welcome to get on the bandwagon, or to just get on with it, but I'm jumping off this boat!" There was a wide range of responses from the parish, but nearly all of them turned up at my ordination!

Leary: Many of us have dealt with addicts, and we know that addicts will never figure out how to help themselves until they hit rock-bottom. But I also recognize the universality of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, to which we all belong and which gives us a right for several reasons to go to them and give them information that may or may not help. Advice is freely given to any addict; it's up to them whether they hear it. I remember how the Anglican Communion reacted when Barbara Harris was consecrated as suffragan bishop in Boston, and how people reacted when Gene Robinson was consecrated a bishop in New Hampshire. You would have thought it was the end of the world! They've retired now, and the world goes on. Karen is right: The power of the Holy Spirit is immense! I've also found what Kevin said to be true in police work: The "higher-ups" screw everything up because they can't agree or because they all have their own way of doing things, but the "boots on the ground" pull things together and make it work! Change for the Roman Church will come from the bottom-up, not from the top-down. People come to us to tell them what they want to hear. A comedian said, "I love being an Episcopalian: It's Roman lite, with half the guilt!" A lot of people know that the Roman Church has so many rules and regulations that aren't supported by scripture, that are manmade and have come in over time—and if they're manmade and came in over time, that means they

can be undone by people over time! The only problem is, as Kevin points out, we, septuagenarians, will never see it. I'm hopeful: They have a whole army of priests, sisters, deacons and lay people who love Christ and people and who are

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willing and able to assist—but they also have a lot of sheep that aren't being taken care of. Having been a cradle Catholic, I understand Karen's skepticism: I don't know if they'll listen. I don't know if they're ready—but Francis is telling them, "Let's do this!"

Jayme: I'm hearing that the Spirit may be moving us in the direction of pulling together some sort of statement. Michael Angelo noted how effective we were in pulling together ideas during our recent retreat. I'm thinking that a small group of us could pull together some ideas for others to respond to, so that, by the end of the week, we could have a draft statement for review by those who are interested, and we could solicit signatures of those who want to sign on and support the statement. We could then share that statement with our own comments or amendments with the appropriate persons in our local dioceses. I'm looking in the direction of Frank and others who have more history in this movement: I'm personally not aware of us, as a movement, creating an interjurisdictional statement with a large number of titles and names and eucharistic communities and jurisdictions attached to it, that would make others say, "Look at this!"

Quintana: I'm skeptical that Rome will listen to us. I have a feeling that they'll simply dismiss us.

Buffone: I support the idea of us pulling together an organizational letter. Frankly, I could care less if they respond or not. If we do this, we're doing it for ourselves and for our communities. Let's put out a statement regardless of whether they read it or throw it out or condemn it!

Vanni: This is a service to God's people, and it will have an impact. It'll be seen by frustrated and resigned Roman Catholics who need to know we exist, who need to know we're

credible, who need to be able to pray well in this era fraught with isolation, fear and difficulty for so many people. I'm a big fan of us doing something. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis is being very controlling about how they're gathering their data. Things are going a little better in Germany and a few other countries, but we have a very conservative, controlling

episcopacy that is hostile to Francis. I'm totally where Rosa is: We should absolutely craft a statement, try to get as many people signed on as possible, and, if someone hits the lottery, it should be a full-page in the *New York Times*. Seriously, let's get noticed!

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Quintana: Have we been issued an invitation from the Roman Church to submit something?

Vanni: This is an invitation to reform movements, and we, in the ECC, are members of Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR). Future Church is hosting six listening sessions. The reform movements are gathering data, so we should speak, and it really doesn't matter if they listen to us. It's about the greater faithful hearing about the option we offer.

D'Arrigo: This is an opportunity for legitimate healing for some of us. First, if we come up with a universal document for our movement, it is a full legitimization of who we are, and just how large we are in this country, and, for the naysayers in the world who say how tiny the Independent Catholic movement is, this is a big flip-off in their face! Many of us may hold on to guilt and unresolved issues from our Roman path: Doing something like this is a way of healing for us as individuals. We have the opportunity as Independent Catholics to truly stand up as a community in the name of

Christ and the Holy Spirit and say, "We, as a united people, know that these things need to

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change!” Whether or not Rome listens, this is for those who have ears outside of Rome. This could be so empowering and healing and worthwhile. Even if a single bishop or cardinal in Rome doesn’t comment on it, just the fact that we’ve gotten together in an organized way and made the statement will be empowering for all of us.

Gray: I suggest that any statement we make should begin with the data that Jayme shared at the start of the meeting. The Pew Research Center data speaks volumes and ought to be right there, at the beginning of a statement about needed change!

Robison: That Pew data represents our hemisphere, the Western Hemisphere. It doesn’t represent where the Roman Catholic Church is actually growing. This Synod on Synodality could signal a shift from the Northern Hemisphere to the South. Roman Catholicism is growing in Asia. It’s growing by leaps and bounds in Africa. The Roman Church may be reaching rock-bottom in the West, among Europeans, but there is sizable growth in other places. We can’t write off that growth. The Roman Catholic Church is dying in North America, but, in other places, it’s growing faster than it’s dying.

Abel: This conversation has been rewarding for me, and I look forward to this healing exercise for us and the product that we put forward!

Brohl: This is not only potentially healing, but it’s also an opportunity for us to come together. I think it’s going to contribute to our unification. I’m very excited and anxious to get the show on the road!

Yell: A brief note on the English and Welsh response: Because the laity there felt that the bishops in England and Wales were not listening, they formed their own synod called “Root and Branch.” They created a synodal process for themselves in the U.K., and it has gotten a lot of press. We each could maybe host a local synod of our own, from which we might be able to get editorials in our local newspapers throughout the nation, to let people know who we are and what we do. This is an opportunity for us to say that Catholicism and catholicity are bigger than just the Roman version!

Quintana: Our discussion brings to mind “Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street,” where the Santa Claus who was taking requests from kids at Macy’s was sending their parents to Gimbels—not that we want to send people to “Gimbels,” but, as Rosa and Trish were saying, so that people will know that there are other Catholics out there. If we’re able to share where we are as a movement, we’ll be doing a work of charity—just as Macy’s was for Gimbels!

Cheasty: Drafting a letter is a way to say, “Look, we’re more than you think we are!” We have siphoned off people from the Roman Church in a number of ways, so this is a chance to affirm who we are. The exercise of writing a letter like that would be very beneficial to us, as a group, in terms of focusing on what we have in common and what binds us together, as opposed to the things that separate one Independent group from another. It’ll give us a chance to hammer out the things that we may disagree on, to find our points of commonality, which are going to be our strength. The process of hammering that out could be extremely beneficial for all of us. This is not about the Roman Church. It’s about us. It’s about who we are and what we have to offer. I was a married woman clergy, raising five kids, coming home and getting dinner on the table, doing laundry, and helping the kids with homework. I’d like to think that the Roman Church might say, “They’re on to something!”

Furr: I like the idea of writing a statement that reflects who we are and the blessings that we have experienced in the Inclusive movement, and not so much focus on how Rome needs to change—because they don’t care about that. Those who need to hear this statement are the laity: We need to put this document in local papers and in the secular press, so that everyone has access to it. Let this be a statement about who we are, not about what Rome isn’t!

Cheasty: An abused child will always look for the parents not to be abusive. The most liberating thing for a child in that situation is to realize that the parent isn't ever going to change—and to let it go and not hold on to that. Some say, "We want Rome to recognize us!" Screw Rome! If they recognize us, *mazel tov*, wonderful, terrific! But if they don't: Ask me if I really care. Rome has been and continues to be an abusive parent to so many categories of people. The

only way to really deal with that is just to say, "Enough. I give up. I'm not going to spend my time or energy in that direction anymore. I'm going to spend it on trying to build up who I am and who we are!"

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Furr: Years ago, Joan Chittister used the analogy of a domestic violence relationship to characterize the relationship of religious to Rome—and she was spot-on. The leadership in Rome is so insulated: They don't care what anybody else thinks or says. I say that as a statement of fact, not an accusation. If the input they receive doesn't fit their agenda, it's not going to make a difference. Rome protects its agenda—and it will not change until that agenda hits rock-bottom and completely fails. They may give lip service—we've heard that for years. We don't need to fix Rome. Rome, as it is now, doesn't want to be fixed. Its leadership is too insulated in its own dysfunction, to change as a system.

Robison: One of the things that we can do to help Rome the most is to remember it and hold it collectively in prayer. If there were ever an organization that needed an injection of people earnestly praying for its own well-being, it would be the Roman Catholic Church. A first step for all of us is to earnestly pray for its renewal!

Buffone: Let's create and distribute a letter to all laity far and wide!

Carter: I'm in! I would like to see us focus first on a limited letter of response, rather than on a larger, universal document summarizing who we are and everything we agree on. I would love to see a smaller, more focused letter of response.

I would also love to see a group of people, or a rotating group of people, with or without a website or some focused way to present it, but a team of defenders of Independent/Inclusive Catholicism, so that we have a set of resources for when we get attacked. It might be worthwhile to think about that!

## An Open Letter on the Roman Catholic Synod on Synodality

*As a result of the preceding conversation and a subsequent sharing of ideas, the following open letter was published as a paid advertisement in the April 15-28, 2022 issue of the National Catholic Reporter. The names of all who signed this statement are shared at the conclusion of the document, in alphabetical order by state, then by surname.*

As lay and ordained leaders of the Inclusive Catholic movement, we esteem our spiritual siblings of the Roman Catholic Church for their courage in attempting to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit in advance of the 2023 Synod on Synodality. In a spirit of humility, we share this letter as “a reciprocal exchange of gifts in the light of truth” (Synodality in the Life & Mission of the Church [SLMC] 9), believing that, in the words of Pope Francis, “to walk together is the constitutive way of the Church” (SLMC 120).

If the Roman Church is the largest barque in the Catholic sea, our communities are the smaller, nimbler vessels that rescue many of those who have jumped ship—faithful people who continue to self-identify as Catholic but who no longer in good conscience can call themselves Roman Catholic. Most of the people in our movement welcomed the Spirit-inspired aggiornamento of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Vatican II). We celebrated the “inverted pyramid” ecclesiology that recognized that the Church is the People of God (LG 9-17, SLMC 54) as well as an institution that is structured, ordered and governed by servant leaders, not hierarchs and “princes” (SLMC 57).

Saddened by the retrenchment that produced a “reform of the reform,” the faithful that comprise our movement grieved the silencing of voices, the exclusion of modern-day Phoebe (Rom. 16:1), the loss of moral authority by U.S. bishops, the attempts to suppress women religious, and restrictions on the liturgy, including the imposition of a Roman Missal translation that did not include input from the lay faithful. In time, and despite our deep love of the tradition, we could no longer support the institutional abuse, sexism, misogyny, racism and ironic homophobia that plague the Roman Church.

We now exercise “creative fidelity to Tradition” (SLMC 9), reimagining and reinventing Catholicism for contemporary Catholics. Our lived experience inspires us to offer these contributions to your process:

- We have seen firsthand in our communities that honoring the *sensus fidei fidelium* and operationalizing synodality leads to growth



and vitality (SLMC 9, 38, 56, 64, 72, 94, 100, 108, 117). We urge you to embrace the esteemed dictum, *Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet* ("What affects everyone should be discussed and approved by all" SLMC 65). We pray that this experience of synodality might energize the faithful for future synodal experiences.

- We urge you to reclaim the inclusive leadership paradigms of the first three centuries of Christianity. We treasure the diversity that characterized the early Church before alignment with empire and subsequent colonizing forces fractured the Body of Christ, disinterpreted the scriptures, misread Church history, and marginalized the gifts of our sisters, of married persons, of divorced persons, and of so many other members of the Body of Christ. Like the early Church, our experience has shown no incompatibility between the sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders, nor any need to restrict women from the sacrament of Holy Orders, as grounded in Jesus' discipleship of equals (Mk. 2:15-17 & 14:3-9; Mt. 9:10-13 & 28:5-8; Lk. 5:29-32, 7:44-50 & 8:1-3; Acts 1:14; Jn. 4:7-15) and Paul's radical vision of equality in Christ (Gal. 3:28, Rom. 16:1).
- We urge you to demand a systemic reform of the epidemic and sinful clericalism that has characterized centuries of the life of the Roman Church. This task requires the participation of both laity and ordained. Clerical culture preserves destructive relationships, underpins the unequal treatment of the baptized, and upholds a culture of privilege and secrecy. We understand the challenge of this task, as it is a legacy from which we are recovering as well.
- We encourage an end to the homophobia in the Roman Church's teaching, and the sharing of the sacraments of the Church with all couples, regardless of the gender or gender identification of spouses. Vatican II encouraged "scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (GS 4). There are facts of history, biological science, social science and technology that, if met with continued dismissal by the leadership of the Church, will continue to undermine her credibility.
- We appeal to the Church to examine its demand for Eurocentric uniformity and to believe in the value of allowing local churches the freedom to express their unique cultures and identities. Vatican II recognized the importance of "full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations" by the faithful (SC 14). It is our experience that honoring particularities of language and culture is life-giving in liturgical prayer.

- Finally, a majority of our jurisdictions have embraced synodality from their founding as a response to the Council of Constance and Vatican I and as offshoots of the 19th-century Old Catholic renewal in the Netherlands. We believe that the Roman Church will be profoundly energized by a true willingness to engage in conciliarism and synodality, and to atone for its sin of imposing as *Ecclesia docens* teachings on God's people (SLMC 35) without meaningfully consulting the *sensus fidei fidelium*.

There is no doubt in our minds that many Roman Catholic faithful, genuinely engaged, have shared similar thoughts to those we have articulated during this synodal process. In accord with the vision of St. Ignatius of Antioch, we walk beside you in synodos, as "companions on the journey" (SLMC 25, Lk. 21:13-27) and, though you may not recognize us at present (Lk. 24:31), you are always welcome to break bread with and experience the risen Christ with us (Lk. 24:29-33).

We conclude in prayer with and for all our siblings of the Roman Church: "May Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, who 'joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit' ...accompany the synodal pilgrimage of the People of God, pointing the way and teaching us the beautiful, tender and strong style of this new phase of evangelization" (SLMC 121).

- Most Rev. Theodore Edward Feldmann, Sanctuary of Divine Providence, Birmingham, Alabama
- Rev. Karen Furr & Our Lady of the Angels Inclusive Catholic Community, Kingman, Arizona
- Most Rev. Leonard Walker, The National Catholic Church of North America, Kingman, Arizona
- Rev. Barbara Sherrod, Ascension Alliance, Mesa, Arizona
- Very Rev. Kevin Columba Daugherty, Convergent Christian Communion, Phoenix, Arizona
- Rev. Kate Lehman, St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Community ECC, Phoenix, Arizona
- Most Rev. Mark Elliott Newman, Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, Phoenix, Arizona
- Most Rev. John Gregory von Folmar, Convergent Christian Communion, Phoenix, Arizona
- Rev. Elaine Groppenbacher, Guardian Angels Catholic Community ECC, Tempe, Arizona
- Most Rev. Jorge Rodríguez Eagar, Shrine of Holy Wisdom, Tempe, Arizona

- Most Rev. Raymond L. Niblock, Old Catholic Church of the Americas Missionary Province, Fayetteville, Arkansas
- Rev. Dr. Ryan A. Rush, San Damiano Ecumenical Catholic Church, Little Rock, Arkansas
- Rev. Kelmy Rodriquez, Celtic Cross Old Catholic Church, Laguna, California
- Most Rev. Paul M. Clemens, Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch-Malabar Rite, Nevada City, California
- Most Rev. Mark R. Earl, Catholic Church of America, San Diego, California
- Very Rev. Dr. Ben Janzen, San Diego, California
- Rev. Phil Loveless, Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, San Diego, California
- Rev. Cynthia Yoshitomi, St. Anthony Catholic Community, Santa Barbara, California
- Rev. Michael Weil, Church of the Holy Family, Aurora, Colorado
- Gregory Yonker, St. Paul Catholic Community ECC, Aurora, Colorado
- Rev. Leslie A. Aguillard, Ascension Alliance, Denver, Colorado
- Rev. Joseph Tung Dang, Catholic Apostolic Church International, Denver, Colorado
- Rev. Michael Nicosia, St. Paul Catholic Community ECC, Denver, Colorado
- Christopher Yonker, Denver, Colorado
- Rachel O'Neill, Fort Collins, Colorado
- Rev. Kim Nuzzo, Good Shepherd Companions, Fruita, Colorado
- Rev. Teri Harroun, Light of Christ Ecumenical Catholic Community, Longmont, Colorado
- Rev. Alice A. Bradley, Church of the Beloved ECC, Northglenn, Colorado
- Most Rev. Kae Madden, Rocky Mountain Region of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, Northglenn, Colorado
- Rev. Francis Anthony Quintana, Ecumenical Catholic Communion, Westminster, Colorado
- Susan Sobkoviak Gray, Church of the Beloved, Thornton, Colorado
- Bro. Daniel, Bethel, Connecticut
- Rev. Dr. John A. Yoegel, Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, Greenwich, Connecticut
- Most Rev. Christopher M. Carpenter, Reformed Catholic Church, Manchester, Connecticut
- Rev. William Bradley, American Catholic Church in the U.S., Stafford Springs, Connecticut
- Most Rev. William R. Cavins, Abiding Presence Faith Community, Winter Park, Florida

- Rev. Joseph C. Spina, Ss. Francis & Clare American National Catholic Church, Wilton Manors, Florida
- Rev. Victor Ray, St. Teresa of Calcutta Catholic Community, St. Petersburg, Florida
- Most Rev. Thomas Coover, Ecumenical Catholic Church+USA, Sun City Center, Florida
- Very Rev. Canon Michael Angelo D'Arrigo, Convergent Christian Communion, Atlanta, Georgia
- Michael Scott Green, OCCA, Alton, Illinois
- Brian Bullock, Chicago, Illinois
- Most Rev. Kristina Rake, American Apostolic Old Catholic Church, Chicago, Illinois
- Rev. Tom Pels, Missionary Benedictines of the Poor, Chicago, Illinois
- Rt. Rev. John F. Newbauer, Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, Fort Wayne, Indiana
- Most Rev. Michael Adams, Ascension Alliance, Fairfield, Iowa
- Dr. Tara Tuttle, Lexington, Kentucky
- Rev. Kevin Przybylski, Rabbouni Catholic Community, Louisville, Kentucky
- Dr. Lawrence Gilmore Lewis, Order of St. George, New Orleans, Louisiana
- Most Rev. Dr. Rosemary Ananis, Old Catholic Communion, Wells, Maine
- Rev. Msgr. John W. Sweeley, St. James Catholic Community, Baltimore, Maryland
- Rev. Giovanna Vannall, Ascension Alliance, Beltsville, Maryland
- Rev. Prior Michael Kieran Seger, Benedictines of Holy Wisdom ECC, Brunswick, Maryland
- Rev. Melina Frame, Apostolic Catholic Church of America, Waldorf, Maryland
- Rev. Alex Oneto, St. Frances Cabrini New Catholic Mission, Boston, Massachusetts
- Most Rev. Doreen C. Noble, Reformed catholic Church International, Boston, Massachusetts
- Most Rev. Filipe C. Teixeira, Diocese of Saint Francis of Assisi CCA, Brockton, Massachusetts
- Rev. Rosa M. Buffone, Holy Spirit Catholic Community ECC, Newton, Massachusetts
- Sandra Rice, Holy Spirit Catholic Community ECC, Newton, Massachusetts
- Rev. Mike Otero-Otero, St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Community, CACINA, Peabody, Massachusetts
- Most Rev. Michael Scarlett, Reformed catholic Church International, Taunton, Massachusetts

- Rev. Rick Klaich, Benedictines of Holy Wisdom, Watertown, Massachusetts
- Rev. Brian Ashmankas, Good Shepherd Companions, Worcester, Massachusetts
- Samantha Leuschner, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Worcester, Massachusetts
- Rev. Bob Johnnene, Reformed Catholic Church, Upton, Massachusetts
- Most Rev. Jerry Brohl, Independent Roman Catholic Church, Wyandotte, Michigan
- Alissa Burginger, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Alexandria, Minnesota
- Bram Burginger, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Alexandria, Minnesota
- Wayne & Deb Carlson, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Alexandria, Minnesota
- Mary Battista, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Carol Coburn, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Karen Nelson Goon, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Dale E. O'Brien, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Jean Curtiss, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Diana Rohlfesen, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Sheila Sullivan, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Mary Ann B. O'Reilly, Pax Christi Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
- Thomas John Klein, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Edina, Minnesota
- Erin Bryan, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Ramon Lavandero, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Beth Mary Rademacher, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Rev. Rory Rafferty, Pass Christian, Mississippi
- Rt. Rev. Edmund "Anthony" E. Kubiak, Jr., Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, Ellisville, Missouri

- Dr. Mark Schmidt, Reformed Catholic Church, Kansas City, Missouri
- Most Rev. Carl Swaringim, Old Catholic Confederation, St. Charles County, Missouri
- Rev. Jonathan Batchelor, St. Louis, Missouri
- Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek, St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church, St. Louis, Missouri
- Rev. John Higgins, Benedictines of Holy Wisdom of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, St. Louis, Missouri
- Kathleen Higgins, St. Louis, Missouri
- Most Rev. Francis Krebs, Ecumenical Catholic Communion, St. Louis, Missouri
- Rev. David Louis Jacobi, St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church, St. Louis, Missouri
- Rev. Donna Nachefski, St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church, St. Louis, Missouri
- Rosalie Seiler, St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church, St. Louis, Missouri
- Rev. Annie Watson, St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church, St. Louis, Missouri
- Most Rev. Thomas E. Abel, Santo Niño Catholic Church, Las Vegas, Nevada
- Rev. Anjun Factor, Santo Niño Catholic Church, Las Vegas, Nevada
- Carmen Lim Tsai, St. Marguerite Faith Community, Henderson, Nevada
- Rev. James P. Morgan, St. Marguerite Faith Community, Las Vegas, Nevada
- Al & Louise Rauckhorst, St. Marguerite Faith Community, Las Vegas, Nevada
- Most Rev. Brian Spencer, St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church, Las Vegas, Nevada
- Rev. Paul M. Leary, Reformed catholic Church International, Franklin, New Hampshire
- Maureen & Peter Tauriello, American National Catholic Church, Glen Ridge, New Jersey
- Rev. Thomas R. Driber, Order of St. Mary Magdalene, Los Lunas, New Mexico
- Most Rev. Richard Roy, National Catholic Church of America, Albany, New York
- Rev. Msgr. David Murphy, St. John the Evangelist Pastoral Center, Brooklyn, New York
- Sr. Gillian Navarro, Missionary Benedictines of the Poor, Brooklyn, New York
- Rev. Dr. Owen Borda, Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, Cortlandt Manor, New York

- Most Rev. Denise Donato, Mary Magdalene Church, East Rochester, New York
- Rev. Lori Vail, Mary Magdalene Church, East Rochester, New York
- Rev. Grace Wilgefortis Ferris, Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, Glenville, New York
- Most Rev. John R. Mabry, Hannacroix, New York
- Rev. Dennis Klinzing, Sr., Church of Immaculate Mary, Medina, New York
- Rev. Seamus Campbell, Ecumenical Outreach Partnership, New York, New York
- Rev. Mike López, Missionary Benedictines of the Poor, Ridgewood, New York
- Rev. Angel Lugo, Missionary Benedictines of the Poor, Ridgewood, New York
- Rev. Marianne Melchiori, All Saints Priory, Ridgewood, New York
- Bro. Peter Veitch, Benedictines of Holy Wisdom ECC, Rochester, New York
- Rev. Victor Desantis, Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, Schenectady, New York
- Most Rev. Dr. Anthony W. Green, St. John of God Parish, Schenectady, New York
- Rev. Dr. Patrice Cheasty-Miller, Ecumenical Catholic Church of Australia, Bahama, North Carolina
- Hannah Vanorny, Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community, Bismarck, North Dakota
- Rev. Michael J. Smith, Advent Church, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Rev. Joshua Shawnee, Parish Church of St. Jerome, Tulsa, Oklahoma
- Very Rev. Scott Carter, Pilgrim Chapel of Contemplative Conscience, Ashland, Oregon
- Gregory F. Sandritter, Medford, Oregon
- Rev. Kevin Yell, American Catholic Church, Oregon City, Oregon
- Most Rev. William Gameson, Order of the Sacred Heart, Portland, Oregon
- Rev. Dr. Kerry Walters, American National Catholic Church, Montandon, Pennsylvania
- Sr. Rita Yeasted, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Most Rev. Andre L. Gregoire, Reformed catholic Church International, Narragansett, Rhode Island
- Rev. Jonathan Jones, Greenville, South Carolina
- Rev. John Aqua, The Lindisfarne Community, Austin, Texas
- Teranie & Ashlee Bardin, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Margaret & Shirley Bruch, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas

- Terry & Jerry Caballero, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Mario & María Cruz, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Louis & Rita Cuevas, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Jordan Dickenson & Stephen Rodríguez, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Bobby Duhon & Michael Stroder, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Frank G. & Teresa C. Estrada, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Rev. Roy Gómez, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Tony Gómez, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Leonard & Waldine Gonzales, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Jennie Kennedy, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Alfred & Irene Lafuente, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Rafaela Leal & Christopher Pierson, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Heather Lucas, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Vincent Maldonado, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Lynett Martínez, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Eva J. Montes, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Rev. Elsa Y. Nelligan, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Mary Raigosa, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Rebecca Saenz, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Dr. Gary Yorke, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- John & Estela Zavala, Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin, Texas
- Rt. Rev. Stephen F. Duncan, Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, Galveston, Texas
- Laura Hayes Marsh, Ascension Alliance, Montgomery, Texas
- Rev. Frank Bellino, St. Michael's Catholic Parish, San Antonio, Texas
- Rev. Jossh Carmen, San Antonio, Texas
- Most Rev. Jordan Morgan, Anglican Free Communion, San Antonio, Texas
- Most Rev. Reg C. Richburg, Christ Catholic Church, Norfolk, Virginia
- Most Rev. Lyle Wilson, Apostolic Celtic Church, Winchester, Virginia
- Most Rev. Dr. Alan R. Kemp, Ascension Alliance, Gig Harbor, Washington
- Rev. Constance Hanser, Emmaus Ecumenical Catholic Community, Olympia, Washington
- Most Rev. Kedda Keough, Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of the Pacific Northwest, Olympia, Washington
- Rev. Canon Thomas L. Artist, Jr., Holy Sacrament Convergent Catholic Mission, Chapmanville, West Virginia



- Most Rev. Jeffrey Montoya, Church of Christ the Healer, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Rev. Mary Hartjes, Emmaus Ecumenical Catholic Community, Oshkosh, Wisconsin
- Paula Hayford, Emmaus Ecumenical Catholic Community, Oshkosh, Wisconsin
- Rev. Michele “Mimi” Maki, Emmaus Ecumenical Catholic Community, Oshkosh, Wisconsin
- Most Rev. Frank Bugge, Australian Church of Antioch, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
- Natalia Vasakova, Kosice, Slovakia
- Dr. Wayne Barry
- Gary Don Thacker
- Angela Zito

## A Response to the New Catholic Community

*As the result of a conversation during a pre-Lenten retreat, lay and ordained leaders created the New Catholic Community. Now four weeks later, they shared their ideas for such an “umbrella organization” within Inclusive Catholicism, and they responded to questions and concerns.*

Mathias: We’ve been talking about whether there might be a way for us to come together into some more formal arrangement, harkening back to the ideas that Marek shared during his presentation in Las Vegas, such that we might dream in the direction of potential unity with other entities outside ourselves. In August, we saw the Roman Catholic Church and the Philippine Independent Church sign a concordat, agreeing to recognize one another’s baptisms for the first time in the 119-year history of the Philippine Independent Church. None of us who recently gathered for our retreat in Huntington, New York is so naive as to think that the Roman Catholic Church is going to come running toward us tomorrow saying, “We want to be in communion with you!” But, what would it look like for us to pull together the best of our tradition and take baby steps in that direction? We have documents that have pulled others together, including the Declaration of Utrecht and the Bonn Agreement. In Huntington, we brainstormed other points that might bring us together. After our retreat in Huntington, those who attended that retreat gathered three more times to continue to hone those ideas. I presume that most of us have read the various materials that we’ve already shared online, and we have incorporated this new entity, the New Catholic Community, in the state of Texas. The initial incorporators are with us here this evening:

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Marek, Mike and myself.  
I’d like to invite those who  
were present in  
Huntington to share a few  
words, to kick off the  
conversation, and then  
we’ll see where the Spirit  
leads.

Božek: Father Mike has been gracious enough to organize this pre-Lenten retreat for all Old/Independent Catholic clergy for at least five or six years now, and every year we gather together in Brooklyn. It's a very prayerful and spirit-filled time, and some great conversations emerge as well. I think many of the documents that emerged from Huntington speak for themselves, but I want to give Mike credit for so faithfully organizing these retreats for so many years.

Lopez: Our parish in New York City is surrounded by many churches of the mainline denominations, and we have been blessed with a fairly robust community that is very involved. We have recently joined our Benedictine community of eight monastics to a larger community, known as the House of Initia Nova, which is a certified Episcopal religious community. For those of us who don't accept or feel that we should simply be pushed by Utrecht into a mainline denomination like the Episcopal Church, the question arises: How do we maintain our identity as Independent Catholics, while coming together and seeking

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to join a larger community outside of Rome? That's where the Spirit brought us in creating the New Catholic Community. I want to thank Jayme for his phenomenal organizing. He's an expert at organizing,

putting things on paper, getting ideas out, and disseminating information. This was not born out of three or four or five people's minds. It's part of a much larger conversation. I really hope that we can come into this conversation with a spirit of charity and love, and also with a spirit of obedience to what the Holy Spirit is creating for us as Independent Catholics in the diaspora here in the U.S.

Mathias: Mike, I appreciate your kind words, and I appreciate you bringing to mind the Missionary Benedictines of the Poor. What our friends in Brooklyn are doing is extremely innovative: By being recognized by the Episcopal Church, which is in union with the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic

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*& with the Philippine Independent Church,*  
*they've essentially come in the back door*  
*to a deeper union than any of the rest of us*  
*with the Union of Utrecht, the Episcopal Church,*  
*& the Philippine Independent Church.*

D'Arrigo: I can't wait for next year's retreat because I had more profound spiritual realizations during those three days than I did during the year leading up to the retreat. It is not ironic that within three weeks of returning from the retreat, I had emergency surgery to save my left arm and neck. I am profoundly grateful for the community that gathered and for the way that the Holy Spirit functioned within our community, since I see that retreat in direct correlation to my health. I had the most unique experience being a part of the founding of this new community, because I come from a very unique position within its organizing body. I probably pastor the smallest congregation, of some 12 people on a regular basis. I'm right at the bottom of the requirement that a member of the clergy serve at least 12 people. I pastor a community that, for the most part, has run away from evangelical Protestant Christianity, to our liturgical Catholic form, but with people who are still not quite ready to fully say to themselves out loud that they are Catholic — despite the fact that they attend a Catholic parish with a Catholic ministry. While we are very liturgical, we're also very "low church," and I am not sure that any of you would walk in on a Sunday and completely relate to the liturgy that we offer every Sunday. My background is in liturgics, canon law and church history, but my ministry to my local community involves very little of that. In my own parish, I am "Pastor 101," with very little Catholic or anything: It's just straightforward "this is what the Bible says" kind of stuff. So, my approach to our conversation comes from a very different parish setting than anybody else in the room. I also have a fantastic jurisdiction, with bishops who totally do their jobs. We have no *episcopi*

*vagantes*, no crazy bishops who are out doing nothing in the world. We have a very small group of bishops who totally do their jobs really well. I love my bishops and would never ever want to walk away from them. One of the great things about the NCC is that there's no need to walk away from our bishops or jurisdictions, to be a part of what we've created. You need to read the documents really well to come to that realization. If you read the documents from a place of fear or paranoia, you might say, "The NCC wants people to leave their jurisdictions and be in union with mainline

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Old Catholics!" That is not what they say. If they did, or if that was their intent, I would not have signed on because I love my jurisdiction, I love my bishops, and I love serving my bishops, and I would never imagine leaving them. I

hear from bishops who feel this is a call for people to leave their jurisdictions and to become a brand new, independent jurisdiction that will create a whole new thing. If the NCC were to grow exponentially in ten years, there would be no need for any other jurisdiction, because we'd all belong to one Independent jurisdiction, which might or might not be the NCC at that point—but for right now, that's not what this is about. So, I just want to clear the air and help everybody to feel the way I do about it, because I feel very confident. This is cool. This is good. This is awesome. It's a great opportunity!

Dang: The retreat was a beautiful experience. We all get busy in our ministries, so we all need a "time out," to gather with other clergy, to pray and celebrate mass and eucharistic adoration. When we gathered one night, we began to discuss how we could come together as Independent jurisdictions and be linked with one other, so that, wherever we go, there's a relationship among us. I would love to see the NCC unite us. As Michael Angelo suggested, being part of the NCC doesn't require us to leave our jurisdictions.

Nachefski: Like others, I, too, had a wonderful experience at this retreat in New York. And Jayme knows, I was “selling” the retreat in Las Vegas, trying to get everybody to come, because I know how special it is. I’m very thankful to Father Mike for doing this for us every year. I was really happy to hear the rumblings in Las Vegas first, and then in New York, about coming together. At Saint Stanislaus, we’ve been pretty much on our own since 2004. We have felt like an unloved stepchild, and I felt bad for Father Marek who no longer had the fellowship of fellow priests and seminarians. We were all raised in the structure of a community of churches that

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we could relate to, so it’s been tough being a “lone wolf” for so long. I’m really happy that we’re working on the NCC, and I hope that everyone will be as excited as we are!

Jacobi: Being on this retreat was an absolutely moving encounter with the Spirit. Every aspect of the retreat just seemed Spirit-filled and Spirit-led, and being in that room on that Monday night and into the early hours of the morning, eating pizza and enjoying the community that we had built by being on this retreat, I was inspired. Things came together, bringing the fruits of Las Vegas into that room in Huntington, and it literally exploded into the New Catholic Community during the last three weeks. I describe the New Catholic Community as a big umbrella, with everybody underneath. You bring your jurisdiction with you and are

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part of something bigger than your jurisdiction—something that’s big and moving and Spirit-led. I’m grateful to Father Mike for organizing these retreats, and I can’t wait until next year!

Mathias: And for those who can’t wait until next year, our next interjurisdictional gathering will be in Austin, Texas on May 19-21!

Cheasty: I'm very excited about this new development. To everybody who's been working on it and who put it together, thank you. I have been hoping and praying for something like this for a long time. When I reviewed the documents today, I did the happy dance. I was thrilled. This is a great step forward for the Independent Catholic movement, allowing us to have unity without uniformity. This will allow us to come together in a way that can only

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strengthen this movement and increase opportunities for people who are seeking an alternative to a church that doesn't always accept everybody. I'm thrilled to death and definitely on board with it!

Jess: New York was a stretch for me, but I enjoyed our time in Las Vegas. It was good to connect with each other and to share as we did. Let's grow into our future and not be intimidated by the challenges that lie ahead!

Vanni: I really appreciate what everyone is saying with such enthusiasm and passion. I'm really confused about what this is. Jayme had shared that you all might be beginning a new sort of "religious order," for union with other ecclesial bodies. When he shared the placeholder name you all were using, the Society of Saint Cecilia, I suggested that it be the Society of Saint Sebastian, given how many arrows we have all taken! Now it has shifted. It's got a name. I'm understanding that it's not a jurisdiction, but that maybe one day it'll be an "umbrella" of various jurisdictions. It's very amorphous, and I don't really understand what you're doing. Is it a membership association? Is it an affiliation of some sort? Is it just formalizing what we've already been doing informally during the past few years?

Mathias: The Spirit is still working in all of this, but I might describe the New Catholic Community as a membership organization, where the annual synod would be the primary governing agent on an annual basis. I also think of it as an accrediting agency for clergy in our movement, a way for us to know that the clergy who are part of it have met certain standards and have passed certain bars, including, as we have suggested in previous conversations, a criminal background check, a psychological evaluation, and the possession of apostolic succession. I was clearly

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hearing at Huntington a desire for us to strive for unity with other organizations, which is why the Declaration of Utrecht, the Bonn Agreement and the Lambeth Quadrilateral are mentioned in our founding documents.

D'Arrigo: David Jacobi wisely described the NCC as an umbrella. I like that image. It's very descriptive. We have all talked on these Zoom calls about greater unity. I tell people that the NCC is like an accrediting body. In the same way that the American Dental Association tells you that you can feel safe with the dentist who's about to perform oral surgery on you, or the American Medical Association makes you feel safe about the surgeon who's cutting into your neck or spine, the NCC speaks to an idea of national accreditation. Our dues could go toward educational series and summer school options and continuing education credits—all the things that people want but that their jurisdictions may not have the finances for. I also like the idea of a union or association like the AMA or the ADA. None of that

currently exists in our movement. Right now, there's no mechanism that vouches for an individual who comes to you from another jurisdiction, with respect to their criminal background or psychological health, and this is something that all of our

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jurisdictions could take advantage of.

Perez: The Catalans have a saying that expresses how everyone is independent, which makes it difficult for us to come together in groups. We start talking about jurisdictions, and what's mine and what's yours, and what we need to give up and what we're going to receive. It's very hard to bring together the ideas of individuals. Now that we have a legal corporation, what is its purpose, and is there a way to belong to the corporation? I have been part of three jurisdictions before forming my own jurisdiction now – so I

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know how difficult it is in this movement. You mention Utrecht: Utrecht is more narrowminded than Rome and does not accept us. I don't think it's going to happen that we'll ever be part of Utrecht.

Božek: You “hit the nail on the head” when you speak of your experience of being in three different jurisdictions. In the 16 years since my excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church, I have heard at least 16 times that I should be a bishop in the Independent Catholic Church. The whole idea of the fragmentation of our movement has been on my heart for 16 years, and it came to my attention a few years back that several of the bigger parishes in our movement have remained independent of any jurisdiction – perhaps, Joaquin, because of experiences like yours. Jurisdictions appear and disappear. They and merge and divide and merge again. Perhaps there is a reason that our parishes in St. Louis, Austin, New York, Louisville and Denver remain independent. None of the existing structures fit our process of being a parish. Another question I have is: What are the

*What are the impediments for Utrecht to take us seriously?*

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impediments for Utrecht to take us seriously? We're trying to address those impediments head-on. Trish, I'm not married to any definition or idea of whether we are a religious order or a member organization or

something else. On purpose, we are not a church. We choose not to have bishops. We choose to function as Catholics in the diaspora for the time being. There are valid bishops everywhere – Roman Catholic, Orthodox and

Episcopal—so whether you live in Miami or Denver or anywhere else, adding another bishop with apostolic succession solves nothing. For the time being, a member organization may be the best way to explain what we're trying to do.

Quintana: I'm with Trish. I'm not sure exactly what's going on. We speak of our problem of affiliating with Utrecht: when I joined the Independent movement 46 years ago, it was a bunch of foolishness! I began my parish ministry through the Anglican Catholic Church, but that was unsatisfying because they were not willing to ordain women. The resentment I have is that I've brought up several times that I've got experience in the Independent movement that goes back decades, and yet nobody asks me anything. I'm part of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, and I'm glad to hear that we don't have to shift our allegiance from one jurisdiction to another. But, with my experience, I have some advice to give, and yet I've been ignored. Please forgive me for sounding a little bitter about that, but I think I have some experience and some ideas to contribute to all this. Y'all are young bucks with all sorts of ideas, but I have ideas, too!

D'Arrigo: Frank, I love you, I hear you, and I want you to know that all of this NCC stuff came out of that retreat in Huntington, to which we were all invited. No one was consulted outside of the people on that retreat, and all of these ideas came out of a conversation that lasted until 3:00 in the morning over Mario's Pizza in Huntington. This is a living document that is only three weeks old and could get changed over and over again during the coming years. Your input on the NCC tonight will have an impact moving forward. I'm sorry that you weren't there to share your opinions that night, but your opinions are wanted, and tonight's meeting is specifically designed to hear your opinions.

Quintana: As a Franciscan with a vow of poverty, I didn't have the funds for this retreat. Perhaps it might be the charity of the group to say, "We ought to consult those who aren't able to be here."

Walker: I feel that the NCC is consistent with what I've come to experience over the last two years of meeting in person and

through Zoom. Rather than seeing this document as a result of one night at a retreat, I see it as the result of a couple of years of discussions. I'm grateful for what you've done. I just have one very selfish question: What are the membership dues? Many of us pay dues to our jurisdictions, and people like Frank and I are retired and live on smaller incomes.

Mathias: Part of the initial vision was for the NCC to be a "community of communities," bringing together eucharistic communities that meet on a regular basis for worship. It sounds a bit high, but we had suggested that the initial dues would be \$250 per year for clergy, \$125 for non-clergy religious, and \$52 per year for laity, but that we would find some way to make scholarships available for those who cannot afford membership but who have a deep desire to be part of us while they continue to build their communities to the 12 persons who could vouch for them and chip in for the cost of membership.

Buffone: I definitely know what it feels like to be swept by the Holy Spirit, so I want to acknowledge the experience that the group had in New York, and I celebrate your enthusiasm and openness to the Holy Spirit. Having said that, I still don't understand what the group is either. I'm hearing that it's an accreditation board. I'm hearing that it's an umbrella of sorts on a national level. I'm hearing that it's akin to a professional association, like the American Psychological Association or the American Mental Health Association. I'm wondering: What happens to the groups in the Independent Catholic movement that don't affiliate or align themselves with the old Catholic lineage? Are they excluded in this New Catholic Community? I relate it to our Ecumenical Catholic Communion, and the efforts that we make in intercommunion relations: During the courting and the relationship-building, there's an acknowledgement, acceptance, affirmation and alignment with the other group. I hear the enthusiasm of those of you who are independent and not affiliated with a jurisdiction, so I can really appreciate your desire to be part of something, to belong to and be associated with something. I totally get that. I celebrate the Holy Spirit and its inspiration, and each of you in the group as a community on retreat – and I'm still

confused as to what this is. I want to share in your excitement, but I also want to hear more details—and I know that details and the Holy Spirit don't always go together!

Lopez: I understand everybody's concern and confusion. I hear and respect that, and I appreciate you voicing those things. What we're aiming to do here is essentially create a union, like a labor union with several different locals that come together to have a unified voice on a subject. Our subject is

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the Independent Catholic movement the United States. As a collective body, we speak to our reality as Independent Catholics in the United States, without intruding on the autonomy or independence of individual parishes and ministries. Our "Huntington

Agreement" is a modern expression of those agreements that have existed between other churches that recognize the catholicity of other churches without intruding on the governance of those churches, including the Declaration of Utrecht, the Bonn Agreement and the Lambeth Quadrilateral. What we're creating here is a union, where we come into an agreement on the things that we are already doing, and we come together to have a voice. Imagine how we, as a community with one voice, might come together in agreement around issues like the recent issue of the priest who baptized with a different baptism formula. Imagine how we could voice our opinion and invite the people who have been affected by that into the lives of our parishes. Imagine having a unified directory of all the communities that belong to the NCC, where we could recommend that people visit those parishes when they're traveling. The NCC has been created to unite us with a greater and more resounding voice, not to push people away. Our movement as a whole is messy. If we want the movement as a whole to be well represented, I think that the NCC is the way in which that happens. The NCC could be a collective voice for clergy and jurisdictions in this country who celebrate their catholicity without

impeding on the autonomy of others. The creation of the NCC was not an exclusionary tactic. It was not created to exclude anyone. It was created to unify a beautiful, wonderful movement that has so much Spirit-filled grace but no unified voice.

Rodriquez: What we're trying to do with the NCC is to have a more uniform appearance and uniform standing with one another. When we look at Independent Catholicism, we seem to be in disarray. Everyone everywhere is doing their own thing, which is fine, but we're trying to come up with

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a way to be united, where we can all sit down and talk about different things and help each other out. We all belong to the one faith, so I'm down with the NCC 100%!

von Folmar: Our jurisdiction, the Convergent Christian Communion, has been consistent in its support of Extraordinary Catholics and the work that this community does, and we're very proud of that. We love it. Like many, when we saw the announcement on Facebook, we were surprised. While the authors of these document think they are very clear, it's very clear that the people who didn't author them are very confused about them. When you stylize yourself as a national church, the signal is that this is another jurisdiction. Saying that it's an accrediting agency but stylizing it as a national church puts out an inconsistent message. I would encourage you to work on a clear message and to be clear about how this will further the gospel. Who cares what Rome thinks? Who cares what Utrecht thinks? Who cares what Canterbury thinks? How is this going to impact how

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Who cares what Canterbury thinks?  
How is this going to impact  
how the gospel is done?*

the gospel is done? How do you ensure that a community of 12 people is more than merely the family members of the clergy? How do you ensure that there is something happening in their ministry? How is this unique from

the Ecumenical Catholic Communion and others who already have requirements for ministry? How is this unique from what other groups are already doing? What value does it bring to the movement? The NCC is not going to solve the problem of our disjointed movement—and I recognize that that's not the goal. And how will the election of a future NCC bishop play out for the movement, since your documents clearly state that no bishop will act as a bishop without being called upon to serve in this way by the NCC?

Quintana: Trish, Rosa and I have already been vetted by the ECC: educationally criminally, and wherever else they do. Would we have to be vetted again? That seems to be a bit

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redundant. Secondly, why will the NCC not recognize bishops who have been nominated and elected by the people? Thirdly, will we be dependent on this meta-organization to okay anything that goes on within our organizations?

Walker: I appreciate the ongoing spirit toward unity, which is the command of the gospel, and the continuation of what has been going on over the last several years. Mutual accountability, and not accountability to a higher authority, is a very good thing. Accrediting is a move toward accountability: That's important and will eliminate those who don't work well with others. I will point out that urban communities are able to have much larger parishes and churches. Rural communities like ours will be more challenged to pull together 12 people or the \$250 for membership dues for the NCC—especially if we're also paying \$250 to our jurisdictions.

Strong: I'm always cautious of documents that were written before they had the representation of all people. If one of the principles of this organization is not an intentional

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commitment to the elimination of racism, the NCC will be just another White, liberal organization.

Brohl: I was very excited when I first read about the NCC. I am very excited about it, and I see a lot of specificity, direction and Spirit in the words and ideas that are being expressed here. Like anything that is hashed out by human beings, it isn't perfect – but the Independent Catholic movement isn't perfect either. Perhaps there are some Roman Catholic documents on unity that we could include also, as a signal that we're willing to set aside any negative history with the Roman Church and work toward a relationship with Rome in the future. It's probably important for us to stay away from statements of doctrine, like the creeds, in these statements. We don't need to tell people what they need to believe. I was shocked to see a reference to belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the eucharist: That's a very contentious and controversial issue, even within Roman Catholic circles. I certainly

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support this group, even if I'm unable to be part of it. It's necessary for Independent Catholicism!

Perez: Our mother church is a mess, and we, its children, are even messier! I recall Francis' first synod, which resulted in nothing because they were all fighting over ideas. The purpose of this organization is union, and we need to be clear about our reasons for uniting. We have to give up things in order to come together with others. Otherwise, we'll just have the tutti frutti of God, where God is the Creator of all the fruits, but the bananas are over here and

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the oranges are over there. We have left our mother church and taken big steps toward inclusivity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let's continue to expand on those ideas, accept everyone, and be careful about rules and regulations!

Cheasty: The idea of a “community of communities” is very powerful to me. It allows people in various jurisdictions the integrity of being who they are, and it doesn’t tell them that they have to let go. It simply encourages people to come together and have a voice, so that we can better reach people. There are projects that we can all work on together that would be beneficial to the Independent Catholic movement. It sounds like people are hesitant to sign on to something like this because people have been burned before. We need to be very respectful of people’s legitimate anxiety. If you’ve been burned, you’re not likely to put your hand in that fire again! The feedback and contribution of folks is extremely important. We’re called to move forward,

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While acknowledging  
our difference, let’ build  
on what binds us  
together. Most of us don’t  
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which is why we’re Independent Catholics in the first place.  
Let’s bring some unity to this movement, in order to be  
more effective!

Bellino: Some of the angst that I’m hearing from people goes back to the membership dues. \$250 may be difficult for some people. Maybe we could have done it like Father Jayme’s podcast, where people are encouraged to donate. In concept, we’re going in the right direction. A lot of people contact me and want to say mass and preach at my church, and I wonder, “Who are you, and where did you come from? What are your credentials?” If that’s the direction of this organization, it could work. Baby steps: We have to crawl before we run!

Jess: I have always envisioned being a part of something bigger and to be validated for who we are and how we serve as branches of the tree. \$250 is steep for me, but we need to have mutual accountability and credibility. What good am

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I as a servant, if I’m not credible? I like that you started the NCC. Maybe it won’t be perfect, but neither are we. We’re striving toward a goal!



Quintana: First, I would hope that we could recognize the experience of those who have been around a while in the Independent movement. Second, I would hope that those of us who have been vetted in our jurisdictions would not have to go through that again. We've done it already. Third, I would hope that we could have a situation where we would work on intercommunion, rather than just belonging to a meta-organization. Part of our belonging needs to be intercommunion!

Aguillard: I want to be supportive of this organization, but I am not at all positive about a White male authority saying what people can and can't do. I'm not getting a very clear message that you aren't going to just be another big authority telling people what to do. We've already got our

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degrees and ordinations and can come together as Independents. This

sounds like a whole lot of Roman bureaucracy. I'll wait and see. I support the effort, but there's no way that I can come up with \$250.

Walker: Thank you for continuing to flow with the Spirit. Keep it up!

Ashmankas: I've not been around very long, but I like the idea of coming together, respecting diversity, welcoming unity, and having some kind of "umbrella" that gives legitimacy!

Buffone: I want to reiterate that I fully support the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and I look forward to what this might look like in the future, because I'm really not clear on what it is right now. I feel very validated within the ECC. I don't feel like I need any more credentialing or standardizing. That's already happening in our jurisdiction, so I'd like to see how the NCC will interface with jurisdictions. I still haven't heard answers to my questions, so I'll continue to tune my ear to hear how some of the concerns that I raised might get addressed, especially for those who might feel excluded. There's an exclusionary element to this, not only in race, as David mentioned, but perhaps of other groups.

Strong: I pray that the NCC will not be Rome-reactive, but ministry-reactive. Coming from a non-profit background for 20

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years, my questions are: Why do you exist? What is the purpose? What will you be doing? What is your mission? Any clarity on those questions would be a great gift.

Carter: To the sisters and brothers who created this, I feel the love of Christ for you, and I feel the love of Christ from you. Bless you. I can tell that you are on fire, and you are inspired, and that's a beautiful thing. Thank you for your activity, your effort, and your attempts to draw us into understanding what you're doing. The Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch is very committed to the divine gift of the personal conscience and is reserving comment on the advisability of joining or not joining the NCC until more details emerge. We need to spend the time to do our own internal work, to figure out where we should be on this issue. I do have one concern: We have been such a beautiful, productive group; it would pain me greatly to see our efforts somehow be altered, reduced or divided. I hope that this doesn't represent the end of an era of cooperation in terms of

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without coming together."*

"coming together without coming together." That said, God bless you. You are wonderful people, and I'm just so happy to be involved with you!

Dang: Our validity is so important. When I applied to become a Denver police chaplain, they ran a federal background check, and my bishop had to vouch that I am validly ordained. We are independent to the point of being fragile.

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but three trees are hard to attack."*

*Our validity is constantly  
attacked by other churches.*

*We will be stronger if we can unite!*

In Vietnamese, we say, "One tree is easily attacked, but three trees are hard to attack." Our validity is constantly attacked by other churches. We will be stronger if we can unite!

Jacobi: Our initial conversation in Huntington occurred just four weeks ago tonight, so this is very fluid and has changed many times. So, don't lose hope—and don't lose your jurisdiction! Let's give this some prayer time, and see if the Spirit moves others in the same way that it moved us four weeks ago in Huntington!

Rodriquez: For me, the whole idea of the NCC is for us to become more *interdependent* as a body. I served as a trauma chaplain for one of the biggest public transportation authorities in the world. I am a trauma chaplain for the MTA, the New York City transit. I had to be vetted by an association. In the Independent movement, we need a body at the national

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level that can help us with validation. I'm all for anything that will unify Independent Catholics to make an impact in this world and for the Kingdom. I

understand finances. Some of our ministries are struggling, especially after this pandemic. But those of us who are more fortunate can create a scholarship program for those who don't have the money for membership. We can figure that out as our brothers' keepers and sisters' keepers. The NCC is a marvelous idea, and I am most proud to be counted among the great minds that came together to create this document. Saint Peter was the "rock" of the Church, and he possessed the greatest "perfect imperfections," but we have to start somewhere. So, let's get this started!

Nachefski: I definitely think the Holy Spirit is working through this. I appreciate all the questions and opinions tonight. This is a new thing, and it's fluid. It will change. But there's strength in numbers!

D'Arrigo: I see everyone's fears and issues. Reading the documents that we have provided is not an easy task. They are very legalistic, and they imply that this is a church or jurisdiction. That was not intentional. We are trying to find wording that might be agreeable to specific mainline organizations that might read these documents with the hope of seeing what they need to see. I realize that that can be a cop-out. I hear that despite how clear we think the mission of the NCC is, that it is not clear outside of our own audience. As writers

of these documents, we are aware that they need to be edited in a way to make the intention much clearer to anyone who reads it. We are so extremely open to your feedback, and we want your input. This was never meant to be something that would never be touched by anyone but us who were on retreat. We want everyone's opinion. At the end of the day, we want to create documents that will reflect what will be best for the largest number of our vast majority. That's why we're having these meetings—and I'm sure we'll have another one. We covet your input as we try to unite the largest number of us in the simplest ways possible. I love my jurisdiction, and I love my bishop, and

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I'm not leaving anything. We want everybody to love this the way that we love it—and that means rewriting and editing and rethinking and using that metanoia thing that Jesus talked about. We're all in this together!

Božek: Let's make sure that Bishop Quintana receives a copy of our bylaws and constitution, so that he can provide his suggestions and input. Who we are is in the name: We are a community. The word is intentionally open-ended. I imagine that the day or week after Pentecost, they still

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didn't know what this Church would look like, let alone what it would look like 21 centuries later. It may take us several centuries, too, to get to where we want to be. The four years under our last U.S. President

taught me that I don't want to be in communion with everyone. There are people and organizations that I don't

want to be in communion with. I want to be certain that the person next to me at the altar is not a child abuser. I want to know that the people who speak in my church do not have a criminal record somewhere else. I want to know that they accept my women deacons and priests as validly-ordained clergy, and that they accept same-sex weddings as valid marriages. If you can't agree on those very basic *sine que non* conditions, I respect you, and I will love you as Christ teaches me to love you, but I do not want to be in communion with you. Our principles help us define who we want to affiliate with. The Declaration of Utrecht and Lambeth Quadrilateral acknowledge that we look at Old Catholics and Anglicans as validly-ordained clergy of valid churches. We will attract people who agree with us, and people who strongly disagree with us will choose to stay away. It's beneficial to have clear principles and clear statements up front. It usually falls to me to be the devil's advocate and to speak of the lines in the sand. We speak of being welcoming and inclusive, and, in American English, we have the term "all-embracing." While well-intentioned, we need to be careful as churches when we say that we are "all-embracing." There are some people whose visions I cannot embrace or agree with. We love, cherish and respect those with whom we disagree—and that's the beautiful thing about his community!

Mathias: In the interest of self-disclosure, I want to confess that I do not have a crystal ball—nor do I believe in them!—and I don't know where any of this is going. It's been a beautiful thing to see how, during these past 30 months of knowing some of you, pieces have begun fitting together in very beautiful ways, how we're building relationships, and how it is that some believe that the Holy Spirit could be at work in this. Let's see where it goes. Thank you for your questions, comments and concerns; we take them to heart. Here at Holy Family, I'm fond of saying, "By the mile, it's a trial, but by the inch, it's a cinch." We may not be able to see around the bend or what lies a mile down the road, but we can see over the hood of the car. Let's focus there, knowing that we're moving, and trusting that God's Spirit is leading us to a place that we can't even fathom at this point in the journey!

## Persecution by Roman Catholic Clergy

*In this conversation, lay and ordained leaders consider various possible responses to the lists of Inclusive Catholic clergy and communities on the websites of some Roman Catholic diocese in the United States.*

Mathias: It has come to our attention that the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Denver, Diocese of Orlando and Archdiocese of Santa Fe are warning the people of God about our clergy and communities. Denver refers to “so-called Catholic masses,” Orlando speaks of those not in communion with Rome, and Santa Fe has its list of “schismatic churches.” Someone told me today that Los Angeles has a similar list, but I have not yet found a link to that list. How should we respond to this? Should we simply ignore them and hope they’ll go away? How would we respond if our names or communities were placed on such lists? Is there some way to show our solidarity with and support for persecuted clergy and communities?

Quintana: I’ve been on two of those three lists. I repaid the compliment: When Junipero Serra was canonized, a group of us from St. Oscar Romero Catholic Community demonstrated outside the archdiocesan offices, with signs that read “Junipero Serra ain’t no saint!” Our opinion, of course, had to do with the cruel way in which he treated the indigenous people when he did his missionary work in California. All of the ECC parishes are listed by the Archdiocese of Denver, and we see it as free advertising.

Cheasty: There’s nothing we can do about it: They’re going to post what they’re going to post. Quite frankly, it’s yet another thing in this world over which I have no control. By posting

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about us, they let people know that we exist. Some people will find us through that. How many of us would be welcomed into the Roman Catholic priesthood? The Roman Catholic Church is great at marginalizing people, so let them marginalize us and alert

other marginalized people to our existence. We have no control over what they do, so why beat our heads against the wall?

Aguillard: I have written to Roman Catholic churches and told them that they are doing a disservice to people by saying that people can't go to other Catholic churches. I have been welcomed in some Roman Catholic churches, where they knew that I am an Independent Catholic priest. It just depends on who you're talking to and how "dyed in the wool" they are about dogma.

Božek: What we learned from the previous U.S. President is that there is no bad publicity. As long as they write and publish about you, enjoy it and milk it as much as you can! St. Stanislaus would not be on the map were it not for my good friend, Cardinal Burke. He may deny it, but he has been the greatest advertiser of me and our ministry. In fact, we intentionally try to do something scandalous every year, to end up in the media and have something said about us! It's free publicity, it brings in people, it gives you name recognition. Own, it, don't deny it, and say,

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"Yes, we are Independent, and, unlike Cardinal Burke, I am happy to give you communion no matter what." That's my advice after having gone through a storm of media releases for two years.

Mathias: Bishop Joe Vasquez of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin provided us similarly great advertising when he sent out a pulpit announcement to be read in all his parishes about Holy Family. It was tremendous advertising—and some of our great champions, like Shirley and Margaret Bruch, came to us as a result of that announcement. I love hearing them tell the story: When they heard that announcement, they said, "We need to check this out!"

Furr: I applaud Marek's comment and agree 100%. Personally, I don't care what the Roman Church does. They're going to do what they're going to do. They're in the middle of a tremendous upheaval within themselves, so they're looking to shift attention to other "elephants" in the room. As far as feeling persecuted, when I look at what's going on in the world, I am not persecuted by the Roman Church. We can get caught up thinking about what to do about it, or we can just go about doing God's work. I just can't get hung up over this. I don't care. It's not my church. They're my brothers and sisters in Christ, but I'm going to put my energy into the Inclusive Catholic movement!

D'Arrigo: Free advertising is the greatest. Anybody who comes to my parish already knows that they're not really welcomed at any Roman parishes here in Georgia. If our local diocese here were kind enough to advertise my ministry, I would want to thank them for it! So, on the one hand, I say, "Why bother?" On the other hand, it would be neat to have some

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kind of statement to thank them for the free advertising—but I don't want to seem vindictive. Let's tell people how much we appreciate the free advertising that the Roman Church gives us!

Dang: This topic has bothered me for years. Here in the Archdiocese of Denver, the secretary of Archbishop Aquila reached out to me and said, "For the sake of your salvation, Father Joseph Dang, come in and submit your obedience to local ordinary, Archbishop Aquila." As if Archbishop Aquila has anything to do with my salvation! What a theology! I said, "I'm asking and begging that the Archdiocese open its heart and truly be Catholic." It was a very short conversation. I have told Father Jayme and Father Marek that we need an apologetic course for all in our Independent Catholic movement, so that we can learn how to defend ourselves. Sure, we can ignore them, but there are times when you need to stand up to the bully.



There are times when you have to defend yourself. The local Roman Catholic Vietnamese parish has tried to scare people by saying that I am a fake priest, that I was kicked out of the Church, or that my sacraments are not valid. When people ask me, "What parish are you from?" I don't want to spend three hours explaining to tell what it means to be an Independent Catholic. If they want to learn, they can go online. Let's find a way for seminarians and people to learn about who we are and to be proud of who we are. One lady recently asked me, "How do you feel, Father, about them saying that your mass is invalid and that it's a sin to attend mass with you?" I answered, "Is my mass any less valid or holy than that Roman Catholic priest who is celebrating

mass today but who will be caught molesting kids tomorrow? Follow your heart. Jesus says, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there.' God is the only judge. Don't let big Aquila threaten you!"

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Lynch: This issue has come up where we are. The Diocese of San Bernardino does not have any listings of Independent Catholic parishes, but, if they did, it would amount to free publicity for us. A few years, the Diocese of Orange published a big article criticizing St. Matthew's as being all kinds of bad things. Mass attendance doubled the next week at St. Matthew's! I tend to follow the model of Father Arturo at St. Matthew's, who goes out of his way to make friends with the local Roman priests, some of whom have been referring to him the baptisms and same-sex marriages that they can't do. They're more than happy to make referrals to Father Arturo, and, as a result, he has quite an income from their referrals. Many people find our parish when they google "Catholic church, Palm Springs," so they

show up here and are surprised to see Deacon Sharon at the altar. Most of the time, they're pleasantly surprised, and they say, "We wish there were an Independent Catholic church where we are. We'd really like to

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see women at the altar!" That makes us feel good. When people ask, "Are you a Catholic church?" my response is, "Yes, we are." If they ask, "Are you a Roman Catholic church?" my response is, "No, we are part of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion." We don't hold ourselves out as being part of the Roman Catholic Church, and that seems to work. Our website contains a rather extensive apologia on Old Catholics in Europe and in this country, the apostolic pedigree of our clergy, and quotations from authorities within the Roman Church on the valid if irregular nature of our sacraments. For most people who walk through our doors, that's not an issue for them. People choose a church based on how they're treated at the church. They don't want to go to a church where they're crapped on, minimized or bullied. If you're nice to people, you'll attract parishioners. People tend to look at whether or not you're nice to them, a lot more than they look at the technical validity of your holy orders!

Nicosia: In 2017, when the Archdiocese of Denver's post came to our attention, I wrote a letter of response on the authenticity of "so-called Catholics" and presented it to our regional council for discussion. There was some input, but we dropped the ball and never published it due to an ordination that became the focus of our energy and media releases. In the letter, we said that the Archdiocese is correct: By conscious choice, we are not in communion with the pope or the local archbishop. After a bit of history and sacramental theology, I concluded, "The Roman hierarchy

has every right to state what is and is not appropriate for the members of their church. It is not within their authority to dictate what is or is not

*After a bit of history & sacramental theology, I concluded, "The Roman hierarchy has every right to state what is & is not appropriate for the members of their church. It is not within their authority to dictate what is or is not authentic for other churches.*

*There is more than one way to be Catholic."*

authentic for other churches. There is more than one way to be Catholic." The Archdiocese is keeping tabs on us, as evidenced by the fact that they updated the list of communities, dropping the former Pax Christi ECC and

adding our new member church, St. Paul Community of Faith.

Abel: I feel neglected: I have been in ministry since 1995, and I have yet to be on anybody's list! That's just wrong. I have been in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Diocese Joliet, the Diocese of San Diego, and now the Diocese of Las Vegas – and nothing. I recently wrote to the local bishop here in Las Vegas with the open letter that we put together that will be published in the *National Catholic Reporter*, so I'm hoping to get a rise out of him, to get us on the map. I welcome the opportunity to be able to respond to him personally or in publication. Like Joseph, if he were to respond, I'd probably say, "Who are you to say this? You do your thing, and I'll do my thing!"

Quintana: I have an article written by the *Denver Catholic Register*, that states that the Independent Catholic movement has valid sacraments. If they want to push our buttons, I can pull that out.

Green: I'm in the Diocese of Albany, New York, and I started my parish, St. John of God Parish, back in 2016. As the director of pastoral care at the only hospital in Schenectady, I already had a relationship with a number of priests. I was part of the United Church of Christ before I moved over to CACINA, and when I did the chancellor of the diocese at the time instructed all churches in Schenectady to print a paragraph, stating that our sacraments were not valid and that people should not receive sacraments from us. I spoke with an attorney, who suggested that I send a cease-and-desist letter by certified mail to the bishop, chancellor and vicar of all the parishes where those words were published. I spent the money on that and, in my visceral response, fired off a legalese letter. They sent a letter from their attorney, noting that their intent was not to disparage my reputation

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& we get along just fine. They realized that  
I wasn't going to be a rug that they could walk  
all over, that I wasn't going to roll over  
& let them shoot arrows at me.*

or affect my job. That was nearly five years ago, and I have developed a really good relationship with all the Roman Catholic priests in the area, and we get along just fine.

They realized that I wasn't going to be a rug that they could walk all over, that I wasn't going to roll over and let them shoot arrows at me. Everything's been pretty good since then, and they recognize that I am building my parish for people who are interested in my parish.

Vanni: Like Tom, I would love to be on a list, and I think my community members would love to be on a list. We're in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, and most of us have very deep roots there. Every moment there is something we consider embarrassing to the Roman Catholic Church is an opportunity for us to put ourselves forward and teach the bigger community about who we are. It doesn't mean that we have to be mean-spirited, but they're not publishing a big, long list of all the ELCA, Episcopalian or Presbyterian churches in the Archdiocese. They're singling out this corner of the Reformation. It's a great opportunity for us to say, "This is who we are, and clearly you were not fully informed." If I made such a list, I wouldn't even deal with the archdiocese; I would write the *Star-Tribune*. For me, it's all about the visibility, of people knowing there's another way. We have a chance to teach people when they make these missteps. There's also an

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*It's a great opportunity for us to say, "This is who we are, & clearly you were not fully informed." ...We are going to push back. We will not go back to the days of Savonarola & burning books. You don't get to disparage us or misrepresent us.*

element of saying, "We are going to push back. We will not go back to the days of Savonarola and burning books. You don't get to disparage us or misrepresent us" — which is an unchallenged thing about Roman authority. It's part of their disease right now.

Cheasty: At Holy Family, Jayme has shared a brochure that explains the valid consecration of our bishops and the valid ordination of our priests. Even if they don't like us, our ordinations and sacraments are valid! And that's what the Roman Catholic Church says. Knowing what they say is a way of answering people who may ask. A lot of this comes under the category of the cosmic "so what?" Like Karen, I

don't really care very much about what Rome has to say about anything.

Lynch: The local Roman clergy don't have enough priests to fulfill all the pastoral needs in our area, so I get calls from hospitals, hospices and nursing homes where the local Roman Catholic priests say they're too busy or don't want to get their asses out of bed in the middle of the night. We

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*We fill needs that Rome is unable to meet.*

*Due to their refusal to ordain women,  
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clergy shortage, and I'm happy to oblige  
when it comes to serving the people of God.*

fill needs that Rome is unable to meet. Due to their refusal to ordain women, gays or married people, they have a self-inflicted clergy shortage, and I'm happy to oblige when it comes to serving the people of God. As John Wesley

says, "My parish is the world," and if someone is dying at the regional hospital and only has a few hours to live, and the local Roman church is not returning their call, I'm going to scoot on down there and take care of business.

Božek: We need to be careful about rejoicing when the Roman Catholic Church condemns our sacraments as "valid but not licit." They say that only of sacraments shared by male clergy. It is male privilege to say that your sacraments are "valid but illicit." They refer to women's ordinations as "attempted ordinations" or "invalid ordinations." I would

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*I would rather be placed in the same basket  
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rather be placed in the same basket as our women clergy, rather than have them say that my sacraments are "valid but not licit." Twenty years ago, when Ratzinger published *Dominus Iesus*, there were no women clergy in the Old Catholic Church. Ever since Utrecht

began ordaining women, Rome has ceased publishing anything about the validity of Old Catholic sacraments. They also speak of same-sex marriages as invalid marriage. They have every right to say anything to their people, but we are not their people. We must take a very clear stand on the validity of our sacraments. Our sacraments are valid for our people and in God's eyes. Let's not play their games on their turf. They created the game, and they created the rules. Let's play our own game, be proud of it, and include as many people as possible!

Buffone: Thank you, Marek. That's exactly what I was going to say. The *men* here will receive the call to give last rites.

Dang: I appreciate the reminder that what I go through is not nearly as bad as what our female clergy have to suffer. I would really love to know of any videos by any of us here on Independent Catholic apologetics. We have to be proud of who we are, and we have to stand up to those who attack us!

Marsh: Be prepared to stand up for yourself! I once heard that we should prepare an "elevator speech," so that we have something to say – a little advertisement about ourselves –

*Be prepared to stand up for yourself!  
I once heard that we should prepare  
an "elevator speech," so that we have something  
to say – a little advertisement about ourselves –  
when people ask us about ourselves.*

when people ask us  
about ourselves.  
I'm still working on  
mine and trying to  
figure out who we  
are!

Quintana: The most important thing is that we do the work: We feed the hungry, we clothe the naked, we uplift those who are downtrodden. The only reason that any Roman diocese

*The only reason that any Roman diocese  
would ever say anything about us is that  
they're looking over their shoulder.  
Just do the work, be Catholic, & be proud!*

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about us is that they're  
looking over their shoulder.  
Just do the work, be  
Catholic, and be proud!

Cheasty: I appreciate David's willingness to take those calls. I echo that, as female clergy, we don't receive them. If we were to show up for the last rites, we'd likely send them into the hereafter more quickly, because they'll have a heart attack!

If you worry about what Rome says, you'll end up with grey hair, like mine. Some say, "We're just trying to justify ourselves to Rome." To hell with Rome! They're going to do what they're going to do—and we need to be who we are, rather than walk around with this giant inferiority complex, wondering, "Is Rome going to accept us?" It may be the case that female clergy can more easily say, "They're not going to accept us, so to hell with them!" Maybe one day Rome will wake up. There are progressive Catholics who would love to see female priests and married clergy. They don't care if their priest is gay or straight; they just want to know that their priest is a good priest! But that's not the hierarchy in Rome, and I just don't care to focus on what they think or don't think, which, again, falls under the category of the cosmic "so what?"

Brohl: The kinship between Rome and many Independent Catholic parishes and jurisdictions is so strong that we should all just call ourselves "Independent Roman Catholics." Why not? There are plenty of Roman Catholics who are stuck and can't quite make the jump out of that pew that they've been sitting in for years, who would welcome Independent Catholic churches! We say that we don't care what Rome thinks, but I think that comes from the individual hurt suffered by Roman Catholics and Independent Catholics alike.

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& Independent Catholics alike.*

Calling ourselves "Independent Roman Catholics" would provide a place for those Roman Catholics to go as a legitimate community within a Roman Catholic community.

Furr: I refuse to call myself a Roman Catholic of any sort. I will not align myself with the structure or dogma of the Roman Church, which discriminates against people. I just won't do it. I won't be part of that hurtful paradigm. I am called to give last rites and other services, and I don't make a big deal of it. Like any chaplain, I walk in as "Sister Karen" or "Reverend Karen." I'm comfortable with that, and the people around me get comfortable with that, too. In this movement, we disparage one another enough without worrying about disparagement by a whole different

organization. I pray for the Roman Church. They're in quite a quandary right now, trying to sort out what it is to be who they are. I step back and let it unfold and come to fruit, but

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different organization.*

I can't allow myself to be sucked back into the bigoted dysfunction. I don't want anything to do with Rome right now. I honor those who stay in the church and align themselves with it, but I personally won't go there.

Campbell: Let's own what they're saying: We are not in communion with them, and we are not under the authority of their local bishop. Maybe we should, as Father Joseph suggested,

*Let's define ourselves,  
rather than have other define us  
according to their terms!*

develop an apologia and get it out there. Let's define ourselves, rather than have other define us according to their terms!

Leary: Rome is burning, bishops are fiddling, and they're worried about us? Their concern for us is a huge statement. If we scare them as the little, independent communities we are,

*Rome is burning, bishops are fiddling,  
& they're worried about us?  
Their concern for us is a huge statement.  
If we scare them as the little,  
independent communities we are,  
just imagine if we got together!*

just imagine if we got together! The Roman Catholic priests who send people to us and who ask us to cover for them in hospitals understand that our sacraments are valid, and they know that their parishioners will be well

cared for by us. Let's be confident in who we are and what we are and in our own theology. Who cares what Rome thinks? Let's take any free advertising we can get, knowing that the people who come to us might just say, "This is a much happier, welcoming, inclusive group than anything I've ever seen before!"

Aguillard: I, too, no longer align myself with the Roman Catholic Church. I was raised Roman Catholic, but I reject its dogma. Let's just go out there and do the

*Let's just go out there & do the work,  
loving others, and, yes, telling some people,  
"You can't say that stuff about me!"*

go out there and do the



work, loving others, and, yes, telling some people, “You can’t say that stuff about me!”

D’Arrigo: When I was an Anglican priest, my wife and I visited a local Roman parish, where the elderly Irish monsignor came after me with his shillelagh, since I was a “fallen Catholic”

<p><i>At this point, I imagine I’m a “schismatic Catholic.” They don’t want anything to do with me, &amp; I don’t want anything to do with them. That makes for a good, healthy relationship.</i></p>	<p>and was corrupting my good Roman Catholic wife! At best, in their eyes, I’m a “fallen Catholic.” At this point, I imagine I’m a “schismatic Catholic.” They don’t want anything to do</p>
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with me, and I don’t want anything to do with them. That makes for a good, healthy relationship. Joseph and Seamus may be onto something with some sort of apology or teaching on who we are. We need to clearly state on the record that we don’t need Rome’s validation and that we stand in the knowledge of our completely valid orders without them!

Nicosia: I had an experience where the rubber hit the road. At the height of the pandemic, I was asked to provide last rites for a Roman Catholic ICU patient with COVID. I called a supply priest from the archdiocesan list, but he didn’t get back to me, so I went into the hospital and provided the sacrament. I then called the priest, to let him know that he didn’t need to go to the hospital—and he berated me: “You can pray with a person, but don’t ever call what you do ‘Anointing’!” From my perspective, as long as I practice full disclosure about being an Independent Catholic priest, I let the persons in need decide for themselves what they want!

Buffone: I was ordained a priest in 2010 here in the Archdiocese of Boston, and it was big news. Nearly 500 people attended the ordination of a Roman Catholic Womanpriest a few months before, and nearly 400 attended my ordination. My community is a group of ten, and her community has 25. Where are the rest? Where did they go? Why didn’t they follow us? They all wanted to support us, and they all wanted to see this happen in their lifetime, but, when push comes to shove, they’re not ready to leave their friends of their parish. They have dropped in and have wonderful

things to say about our liturgies, but they don't join us. The reasons that people "walk" and decide to join another group are complicated. I'm often mistaken for a Protestant minister. When I did my chaplaincy training at Mass General in Boston, I heard confessions, and people thought I was a Protestant. When I visited St. Peter's Basilica in my clericals, they thought I was an Episcopalian priest. When I insisted that I am a Catholic priest, they responded in shock, saying, "No, that can't be true!" So, I have a lot of mixed feelings, but we need to stay true to who we are, and remain persons of integrity, and let people decide. We set up a booth for Holy Spirit Catholic Community at a town fair

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*in their lifetime, but, when push comes to shove,  
they're not ready to leave their friends of their parish.*

here, and I shared  
communion with  
a divorced  
woman who  
hadn't received it  
in years, and she  
cried and cried.  
God will lead the  
people who need  
us to who we are  
and where we are!

Božek: For those who are looking for literature on apologetics, I will advertise Jayme's brochure, "Who are Independent Catholics?" It's a bilingual Spanish/English brochure, and it's really well written, with colorful illustrations. It's a really great and succinct explanation of who we are and who we are not. We had a great sidebar conversation in the chat box about praying for the pope or local Roman Catholic bishop during our eucharistic prayers. At St. Stanislaus, we pray for "Francis, the bishop of Rome, and all other bishops." If we take seriously the Utrecht Declaration and

the Bonn Agreement, we  
recognize that the Episcopal  
bishop in our area is a valid  
Catholic bishop; perhaps we  
should add their name to  
our canon, particularly if she

*We recognize that the Episcopal bishop  
in our area is a valid Catholic bishop;  
perhaps we should add their name  
to our canon, particularly if she is a woman.*

*That would introduce people  
to a wider theology!*

is a woman. That would introduce people to a wider theology!

Carter: I love the idea of all of us locally praying for everyone, Christian or not. Religious leaders around the world deserve our support. I don't feel an urgent need to directly or explicitly pray in any liturgical forum for the local Episcopal bishop – in the same way that I don't pray for the Roman bishop by name. I like the idea of supporting one another when we are feeling attacked, perhaps even helping with published responses and local ads. I don't have a lot of money, but I would be willing to chip in a small amount of money or whatever I can to help pay for ads, if you think that is the appropriate response for the people that you serve!

Vanni: I genuinely don't care what the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic archbishop think about me, my ministry or our community. To be honest, I don't care what Utrecht thinks. I would be a very happy camper if I never heard the word "Ultrajectine" again for the rest of my living days. The diocese I just left had an absolute obsession with "Old Catholic, Old Catholic, Old Catholic"! My focus is on the people out there who want to be in community, who want to have meaningful experiences of the sacraments, who want to do works of justice, who want to hear the

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who want to hear the gospel proclaimed  
& broken open in a meaningful way.  
That's what people want.*

gospel proclaimed  
and broken open in a  
meaningful way.  
That's what people  
want. Everything that  
people give us to  
build our visibility is  
a good thing, so I  
would love for  
Bishop Kae Madden  
to publish a sororal  
correction to the

Archdiocese of Denver in the local newspaper there. We need to say, "We have never represented ourselves as Roman Catholic, this is who we are, and the Roman Church can decide not to encourage people to receive our sacraments much in the way that it discourages people from

receiving Lutheran or Presbyterian sacraments.” There is a door of opportunity here, and the only people who look at an archdiocesan website are people who are worried about “orthodoxy”! They are never coming to us. We want to use those moments to expose another side of our communities: to highlight what your leadership promotes and why people find it attractive. I’d love to see Michael resurrect his letter, and I’d love to see Bishop Kae sign it and send it off to the local media as a gentle correction, but more importantly as an opportunity for tens of thousands of people to read a letter saying that there’s another way to be Catholic. I also want to say that one of the biggest recruiters for the Charis community is my dear friend, a local Roman Catholic priest, who has people coming and sitting in his office in tears, saying, “I can’t do this anymore.” And he says, “Have you thought about going over here? Maybe you’ll find friends there.” For me, there is no animus toward parishes, only toward the epic right-moving dysfunctions of the hierarchy in the United States in particular. It’s very problematic, and people are suffering—so I really want people to know about us!

## Our Failure to Halt the Proliferation of Bishops

*In the final “hive mind” think tank of this series, lay and ordained leaders discuss the perennial concern of the multiplication of bishops in the Independent Sacramental Movement.*

Mathias: As we scroll through social media, we see an episcopal consecration in our movement nearly every week. I find it interesting: There is a perennial complaint within our movement over the scandalous number of bishops, of the

*There is a perennial complaint within our movement over the scandalous number of bishops, of the proliferation of the infamous episcopi vagantes, but we also recognize that this is outside of our control since any bishop can lay hands on any person at any moment!*

proliferation of the infamous *episcopi vagantes*, but we also recognize that this is outside of our control since any bishop can lay hands on any person at any moment! The irony revealed itself as I quickly scrolled through my Facebook feed last night: In one post, a priest grumbled

over the multiplicity of bishops in our movement—and in the very next post were photos of the consecration of this weekend’s newest “baby bishop”! This certainly creates an intriguing ecclesiology: for us to have so many sheepless shepherds, and so many categories of bishops, if you will. I have attempted to create a theoretical framework for the stages of Inclusive Catholic eucharistic communities in our movement. What I haven’t done is to create a theoretical framework for the different types of bishops within our movement. If we were to create different “buckets,” different categories of bishops within our movement, what would those categories be? Is there a difference between the bishop who is elected by a very large jurisdiction and the “bishop” who awoke as a lay person yesterday with no theological education or pastoral experience, but with the itch to be consecrated by nightfall? Any thoughts on our failure to halt the proliferation of bishops in our movement? Should we resign ourselves to simply grumble, grumble, grumble, like the Israelites, all the way to the Promised Land?

Aguillard: Who are these people who wake up in the morning and say, "I'm going to be a bishop!" Who are they?

D'Arrigo: I've come across five or six such people since leaving the Anglican Communion, and they all seem to have two or three things in common: They have no formation or training, they found an elderly bishop and convinced them that they needed to be a bishop, too, and then they hold

*I've come across five or six such people....*

*They have no formation or training,  
they found an elderly bishop & convinced  
them that they needed to be a bishop, too,*

*& then they hold court  
with their new title & vestments.*

court with their new title and vestments. I've seen it over and over again. I won't share his name, and I won't speak ill of him since he is deceased, but I knew a "presiding bishop" who had a jurisdiction of one

person—himself—and the only members of his house-church were the members of his family. He was going to ordain members of his family to the priesthood and diaconate—I guess it's important to "keep it in the family." He approached our jurisdiction, looking for intercommunion. Before we realized how small his "jurisdiction" was, we recognized that he had a really bizarre theology about same-sex relationships, which was in itself a reason for us to disassociate from him. For me, he is the grand example, the epitome of the worst-possible bishop scenario.

Mathias: I edited the first volume of Bishop David Oliver Kling's *Sacramental Whine*, where he interviews some very fringe voices in our movement. He tells fascinating stories of people who are purportedly consecrated ISM bishops at such events at druid festivals!

Aguillard: These seem to be miniscule examples. I don't understand the issue. I'm mystified.

Walker: It's not so miniscule. There are far more out there than you would imagine. If we were to cull through the big list of Independent Sacramental ministers that Jayme has pulled together, we would find a great number of "bishops," and "archbishops" with no other bishops, and self-proclaimed "patriarchs." The titles that people take upon themselves continue to amaze me! This group here generally does not

attract such folks, so we don't tend to encounter them here. Historically, a bishop should be called from more than one community, and, except in extraordinary circumstances, three consecrators should be present. Only our Independent Catholic history takes us to such a creature as a bishop with

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as a bishop with no community.  
Many of us find this proliferation  
of bishops who have no understanding  
or basic standards to be insulting.*

no community. Many of us find this proliferation of bishops who have no understanding or basic standards to be insulting. Maybe Jayme can confirm my assumption that we have more bishops than priests in this movement.

Mathias: I can't confirm that. Our online wiki contains the names of some 1,600 Independent Catholic clergy. We have not broken them down by office or ministry—and, even if we did, this is such a fluid movement, with people who are ordained and consecrated all the time.

Nicosia: When I was studying for ordination, my mentor had me read about the history of our movement in Henry R.T. Brandreth's *Episcopi Vagantes and the Anglican Church* and Peter F. Anson's *Bishops at Large*. I think this conversation is simply to heighten our awareness of some of the pitfalls in the Independent movement, of where we shouldn't go.

Mathias: Father Marek has spoken in the past of the Archbishop of Utrecht's assessment that our multiplicity of "bishops" in the English-speaking world is a scandal within our movement and an impediment to unity—among ourselves and with those outside our movement. It might even be

*It might even be surmised that there are good,  
healthy priests in our movement  
who refuse to be consecrated bishops  
simply because that would associate them  
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surmised that there are good, healthy priests in our movement who refuse to be consecrated bishops simply because that would associate them with the likes of such *episcopi vagantes*.

Božek: I created the Council of Constance Principle as a hoped-for organizing principle for our movement. I believe that the

only ecclesial body within our movement in America today that justifies calling bishops is the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, because they have enough lay people in the pews to need so many bishops. I honestly cannot justify the need for five parishes with a total of 100 members to have a bishop. One ECC parish often has more members than five Independent Catholic jurisdictions with several bishops, archbishops and patriarchs. Most of the bishops I meet are good and saintly people. I always want to stress that I do not question their individual holiness or qualities. There's just no reason to have a bishop unless you have thousands of lay people who call you bishop. At this point, the ECC seems to be the only body that can logically justify calling a bishop—and perhaps even two or three bishops. A few weeks ago, Jayme challenged us to study the Philippine Independent Church, which is the largest Independent Catholic denomination in the world. They are larger than the Episcopal Church in the U.S. They were created during a labor union meeting, with not a single member of the clergy among them. They have some 30 bishops for over one million members. Their bishops are called by the people, and not the other way around. Now I'm more closely studying the Polish National Catholic Church, the only Old Catholic Church in the U.S. that has seen significant numbers. The PNCC has about 21,000 members today, and when they came to exist in 1897, they did not have bishops for the first nine years. They had more than 50 parishes, with thousands of people, but no bishop until

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unless you have thousands of lay people  
who call you bishop....The only churches  
in our movement that have survived  
the trial of time were organized by the laity!  
No matter how highly we think of ourselves  
as clergy, in humility we have to acknowledge  
that we don't build the Church – no matter  
how hard we work or how charismatic we are.*

*The Church will not exist because of us,  
priests or bishops. A priest or a bishop  
without a church is meaningless & pointless,  
but a church without a bishop can survive.*

Bishop Hodur was consecrated in 1908. History shows us that these successful movements, which have existed for over 100 years, were not created by bishops. The only churches in our movement that have survived the trial of time were organized by the laity! No matter how highly we think of



ourselves as clergy, in humility we have to acknowledge that we don't build the Church—no matter how hard we work or how charismatic we are. The Church will not exist because of us, priests or bishops. A priest or a bishop without a church is meaningless and pointless, but a church without a bishop can survive, as I suggested in the story that I told in Las Vegas, about my first mission trip in the Ukraine. The Ukrainian Church survived with no bishops or priests for over 60 years. Bishops without churches do not survive: They open and close churches all the time. The paradigm of our structural thinking has to change with respect to who begins a church, who forms the Church, and who successfully builds the Church.

Mathias: For those who may not have been able to join us here in Austin or through Zoom, Father Henry Janiola of the Philippine Independent Church suggested that there may be as many as seven or eight million people who are served by the Philippine Independent Church, which is served by 880 clergy in 49 dioceses. That gives us some insight into the structure of that church and its ratio of clergy to laity.

Vanni: When Jayme convened that gathering on the Philippine Independent Church, I thought he was out of his mind. But I was very enriched by it, and very grateful. This is an issue, partly because we have a lot of kooky Lone Rangers in this movement, unfortunately.

*We have a lot of kooky Lone Rangers in this movement, unfortunately.*

Walker: Our past experiences certainly shape our theology. Marek you came from the Roman priesthood where you were called to parish ministry. That's wonderful but it skews your whole understanding. Jayme came out of a Roman experience and was able to stay within the area of his ministry, where he already had a name and a following. I came out of the Roman Church, but I left my geographical area, where I would have had a following, and I moved to a small town where I had no following. I got called back into ministry because a small group of people was losing its Independent priest. I'm curious, Marek, where you'll go and what you'll do if you don't have the great blessing and benefit in the future of finding another large community that calls you into service.

Božek: I definitely will not start a parish. I don't believe that it's the priest's role to start a parish. In most instances, that is not a priest's vocation and job. There are multiple Independent churches in the U.S. that have paid, full- or part-time pastors.

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Yoegel: As shallow as it sounds, it seems that most folks who seek to be elevated to bishop are driven by ego and pure ambition. They want a new title! When they fail to gather a community around them, they end up being *episcopi vagantes*. This "barn door" was left open several centuries ago, when the Oriental churches left the main body of Western Christianity, followed by the Eastern Orthodox schism. In the OCCA, we have four bishops in a group of 40 to 50 clergy, and most of us have no parishes—but our governance structure requires those bishops. I think it's true

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that many of us who consider ourselves to be more "mainstream" are concerned about the kooky fringe, because the general public might conflate us with them.

Mathias: There's something very real and poignant in this conversation on the "kooky fringe." There was some discussion on social media this week that I should appear on Bishop David Oliver Kling's "Sacramental Whine" podcast. This causes real angst within me since such a move would associate me with all the other voices that have appeared on that podcast.

Božek: You may not have heard of St. Peter's Catholic Community in Cleveland, Ohio. It's a huge community that has been independent for 12 years. They have intentionally never been present at any Independent Catholic gathering

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because of the "kooky" reputation. Who wants to be associated with that?

*Who wants to be associated with that?*

Aguillard: You bring up “Sacramental Whine.” There was a bishop on the last episode who seemed to be whining a lot about all sorts of Independent priests who are running around without a bishop, supposedly without oversight and

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Why would we give them a megaphone  
much less pay attention to them?*

direction or accountability, as if a bishop were someone beyond reproach. I found that whole episode to be very odd. I was dismayed that we give such people a platform and amplify their voice. Why would we give them a megaphone much less pay attention to them?

Vanni: I want to disavow the word “kooky,” because it strikes me as incredibly uncharitable—and that’s not who I want to be in the world. I repent of its use. It’s a judgmental attitude of mine tied to my deep desire for us to be seen as credible, as a strong, healthy option for folks in a world that is increasingly indifferent to religion and where many people

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It’s a dangerous top-down model of Church.*

have been wounded by other experiences. There’s a saying in 12-step programs: “All you need to start a new group is a resentment and a coffee pot.” It’s like that in our movement. All you

need to become a bishop is a resentment and a person with a miter to lay hands on you. It’s a dangerous top-down model of Church. We need to perpetually interrogate the clericalism in our movement. Many of us come from systems that pull for clericalism. We were all wearing our collars in Austin—where we know one another! Our bishops are in danger of becoming abusers of power, because we come from a system where that’s chronic and where there are no mechanisms for addressing it.

Loveless: I think of my own experience without a bishop: As a deacon, I had an ecumenical street ministry, and I had eight kids to

confirm. I sent out invitations to three bishops for a Sunday afternoon confirmation – and three bishops showed up!

Božek: Phil, I couldn't have said it better: Here in the U.S., there are at least five or ten bishops in every state. When we need ordinations or confirmations, we will never be left without a bishop to perform those sacred duties. Most of our bishops are good, saintly people, who are happy to help. John mentioned that his jurisdiction is governed by bishops. Michael Angelo has said before, too, that the constitution of his jurisdiction insists on three bishops. The question arises:

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Whom are we governing?  
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They are called to be  
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Whom are we governing? Bishops are not called to have wedding ministries. They are called to be "overseers" and shepherds – but not of individual priests. They are called to shepherd multiple communities. A bishop needs to oversee more than five or six priests, with five or six people in the pews. Why do we need 12 or 50 or 100 tiny jurisdictions if they all

agree on the same principles? What is the logic in that? One of the biggest cultural shocks for me, when I came to America, was the extreme radical individualism. In this country, we think in terms of "I," not "we." Our language betrays us as a very individualistic culture – in fact, English is the only language in the world that capitalizes the first-person singular: I. We tend to approach Church and theology through "I" – which is not what Church is! *We* are the Church. *I* am not the Church. Until we can find a way to come together, we will continue to be a scandal for so many.

D'Arrigo: This conversation is awesome, and it mirrors every prayer that went through my head leading to my own situation. Marek, I love you. You are you are one of the coolest people I have ever met in the ISM. I'm so happy we got to hang out in February. But you guys come from such a Roman model of everything, and, on top of that, you have the massive blessing of having received a full Roman education that you can take anywhere in the globe and people are going to say, "Hell, yes, we want you on our staff!" Even Protestant churches will take you in because you have the pedigree of a Roman seminary education. You and Jayme could leave your Independent parishes right now and be leading a UCC

congregation in a couple of weeks – and they pay very well. I come from an extremely Anglican model, where we plant churches left, right and center. If there are three people who are asking for a parish, we'll plant it! Marek, you're also mostly right about bishops everywhere – but that flies out the window here in Georgia, where we have a single Independent bishop, and he's the one that Leslie referred to, from the last episode of "Sacramental Whine" – so I'll leave it at that. Many of you know that I was recently elected to be a bishop. After I prayed about it for a long time, I emailed a bunch of you, and many of you responded with honest feedback. Jayme was really honest and had really good, strong questions. So, I had to think about it. I love you all, but my calling is to the CCC. I answer to them. I serve them as a priest and canon. I really believe in the work we're doing, and I see the necessity of what they've asked – but I do it with tremendous fear and trembling and nervousness. The issue in our movement is not just too many bishops. It's too many unformed clergy who serve no one. They have no real education and don't know what it means to be a pastor – yet they run around with collars on and wearing funny-colored "dresses." That's the larger issue, which is why I still think the New Catholic Community is probably

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the best bet for establishing validation that actually is meaningful. At the end of the day, I've come to this place where I serve the CCC, the CCC needs me to step up and do this thing, and it's about answering a calling of your laity and clergy. The bishop fulfills a role required by laity and clergy, and is a pastor the rest of

the time – and any bishop who doesn't follow that rule is part of the "Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs" group.

Nicosia: Speaking from the experience of the ECC in the Rocky Mountain Region, one of our parishes here was one of the founding parishes of the ECC, on the ground level of forming the communion. There were decades of resistance to calling a local bishop. They were infamous for being the radicals out West who didn't want to be controlled. It took

a lot of growth and a lot of education about what a bishop is, to bring the people around to calling a local bishop. Part of that education was getting out of people's heads the idea that the bishop is a sacramental machine. That was not what we needed. We needed a local shepherd on the ground in a local geographic community, who knows the people and how the Spirit is moving in their midst, and who is a pastor to the pastors, so that they feel supported and not alone. In the ECC, bishops don't govern in the strict sense. The bishops, clergy and laity gather for holy conversation. All of this requires a shift in thinking for many people!

Walker: There's a caution that I would like to make: There really is no blanket statement that fits all. I have worked in such diverse ministries throughout the years, and I have seen the vast differences between churches and communities. We have to respect the differences and experiences of each community, recognizing that our own opinions are formed from our own experiences. That's what makes the United States so damned complicated. There's a lot of diversity for us to honor!

Marsh: I just finished Bishop Herman Adrian Spruit's book, *Sacramentation*, and he had quite a bit to say about the role and responsibilities of a bishop, of what they should and shouldn't do. It was quite enlightening!

Cheasty: There's a tremendous role for bishops in our movement, but, like anything else, "less is more." A bishop with no

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flock is just absurd, and the fact that we haven't come together in greater unity is a sign of our brokenness. Is our allegiance to our jurisdictions or to Christ? Those things that separate

us are not of God. There are the bishops who like to play dress-up, and there are bishops who are serious about their role of being a leader of a group!

Yoegel: Before I was ordained a priest with OCCA, I was ordained an interfaith minister by the oldest interfaith seminary in the world. What we learned there was that we needed to meet people where they were spiritually. When I look at the

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*I think it's God's work.*

*I don't think it's a problem.*

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& it's our job to meet them where they are  
& walk with them.*

history of Christianity, I see a centrifugal force at work that is pushing people out. I think it's God's work. I don't think it's a problem. People will choose the path that they're on, and it's our job to meet them where they are and walk with them.

Campbell: The "horse" was "out of the barn" for us when Arnold Harris Mathew started consecrating others without the approval of Utrecht. When the Episcopal Church elects a candidate for bishop, every bishop and every standing committee in the Episcopal Church has to vote for the approval of that candidate. Maybe we should do that, too, to have some credibility! The number of bishops in our movement is laughable and sad. We have too many uneducated bishops! I recently saw one bishop's resume: They were ordained in 2005, consecrated a bishop in 2006, and they had no bachelor degree or theological education! I

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just have to scratch my head, walk away, and keep my distance from those who are wackadoodle. I avoid them like the plague. I stay away from the nut jobs that want to be Roman Catholic "bishops"!

Nicosia: As I said in my Pentecost homily, many of us are a part of the Independent Catholic movement principally because of

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the Independent Catholic movement  
principally because of all of the "boxes"  
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It didn't resonate with our faith & our journey.  
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all of the "boxes" that some people have tried to put the Spirit in. It didn't resonate with our faith and our journey. Perhaps it's time to fashion new "boxes"!

Božek: I hope and I pray that in ten years, we'll be having a Zoom meeting titled, "What shall we do about the proliferation of Independent Catholic laity"!

Carter: God bless all of you who feel that you have a unique charism within the group that you either grew up within or came to through your own journey. To all of you bishops

*To all of you bishops  
who are validly consecrated,  
I won't do to you what Rome  
& others have done to us:  
I will not disavow, dismiss,  
or disown you.*

who are validly consecrated, I won't do to you what Rome and others have done to us: I will not disavow, dismiss, or disown you. Like Marek, I do not doubt the sincerity of all of us who show up here, or the divine inspiration that we feel!



## Appendix A

### Participants in Inclusive Catholic “Hive Mind” Think Tanks

**Most Rev. Thomas Abel**

Santo Nino Catholic Church  
Catholic Church of America  
Las Vegas, Nevada

**Rev. Leslie A. Aguiard**

Independent Church of Christ the  
Healer  
Ascension Alliance  
Denver, Colorado

**Rev. Brian Ashmankas**

Good Shepherd Companions  
Worcester, Massachusetts

**Rev. Brett M. Banks**

St. Anne Independent Catholic  
Church  
Independent Catholic Ordinariate  
Dallas, Texas

**Rev. Wayne Barry**

Outer Banks, North Carolina

**Rev. Frank Bellino**

St. Michael’s Catholic Parish  
Unified Old Catholic Church  
San Antonio, Texas

**Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek**

Saint Stanislaus Kostka Polish  
Catholic Church  
Saint Louis, Missouri

**Most Rev. Jerry Brohl**

The Independent Roman Catholic  
Church  
Wyandotte, Michigan

**Rev. Rosa M. Buffone**

Holy Spirit Catholic Community  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Newtonville, Massachusetts

**Rev. Seamus Campbell**

Madison Square Park Congregation  
The Ecumenical Outreach  
Partnership  
New York, New York

**Very Rev. Scott Carter**

Pilgrim Chapel Of Contemplative  
Conscience  
Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch  
Ashland, Oregon

**Most Rev. Eddie N. Cass**

Pacem Recovery Community  
Greenville, South Carolina

**Most Rev. William Cavins**

Abiding Presence Faith Community  
Reformed Catholic Church  
Winter Park, Florida

**Rev. Patrice Cheasty-Miller**

Ecumenical Catholic Church of  
Australia  
Durham, North Carolina

**Most Rev. Ken Corbin**

St. Francis Community of All People  
Catholic Diocese of One Spirit  
Plainview, New York

**Rev. Dr. Juanita Cordero**

Magdala Catholic Community  
Roman Catholic Womenpriests  
Los Gatos, California

**Rev. Joseph Dang**

Catholic Apostolic Church  
International  
Denver, Colorado

**Rev. Canon Michael Angelo  
D'Arrigo**

Agape Fellowship of Greater Atlanta  
Convergent Christian Communion  
Madison, Georgia

**Mary Desantis**

St. John of God Parish  
Catholic Apostolic Church in North  
America  
Schenectady, New York

**Rev. Victor Desantis**

St. John of God Parish  
Catholic Apostolic Church in North  
America  
Schenectady, New York

**Rev. Cynthia Drew**

Mary of Magdala Ecumenical  
Catholic Community  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Aurora, Colorado

**Bobby Duhon**

Holy Family Catholic Church  
Austin, Texas

**Rev. Mike Ellis**

Incarnation Catholic Community  
Mission  
Catholic Apostolic Church in North  
America  
South Burlington, Vermont

**Most Rev. Bernie Finch**

Ascension Alliance  
Pepin, Wisconsin

**Rev. Rock Fremont**

International Council of Community  
Churches  
Phoenix, Arizona

**Rev. Karen Furr**

Our Lady of the Angels Inclusive  
Catholic Community  
Kingman, Arizona

**Dennis Giblin**

Church of the Beloved  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Northglenn, Colorado

**Most Rev. Michael Goddard**

Christ the Good Shepherd  
Old Catholic Church  
Berkley, Michigan

**Rev. Jonathan E. Gray**

Christ the Light American Catholic  
Church  
Progressive Catholic Church  
Albany, New York

**Most Rev. Tony Green**

St. John of God Parish  
Catholic Apostolic Church in North  
America  
Albany, New York

**Most Rev. Martin de Porres Griffin**

American Catholic Church  
Sacramento, California

**Rev. Constance Hanser**

Emmaus Ecumenical Catholic  
Community  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Olympia, Washington

**Most Rev. Anthony Hash**

St. Joan of Arc Parish  
United American Catholic Church  
Virginia Beach, Virginia

**Rev. David Jacobi**

St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church  
St. Louis, Missouri

**Very Rev. Ben Jantzen**

Progressive Catholic Church  
International  
San Diego, California

**Rev. Kathleen Jess**

Divine Savior Catholic Church  
The National Catholic Church of  
North America  
Kingman, Arizona

**Rev. Jonathan Jones**

Fathers and Brothers of the Homeless  
& Poor  
Greenville, South Carolina

**Most Rev. Alan Kemp**

Ascension Alliance  
Gig Harbor, Washington

**Rev. Andrea Krawczyk**

Reformed catholic Church  
International  
Deerfield, Massachusetts

**Rev. Paul M. Leary**

Shamrock Ministries  
of New England  
Reformed catholic Church  
International  
Franklin, New Hampshire

**Benedito Leite de Souza**

*Igreja Anglo Católica* [Anglican  
Catholic Church]  
Caruaru, Brazil

**Samantha Leuschner**

Agape Community and Charis  
Community  
Cherry Valley, Massachusetts

**Rev. Mike Lopez**

All Saints Priory  
Benedictine Missionary of the Poor  
Ridgewood, New York

**Rev. Phil Loveless**

Orthodox Catholic Church of  
America  
San Diego, California

**Most Rev. John Luft**

St. Anne Independent Catholic  
Church  
Independent Catholic Ordinariate  
Fort Worth, Texas

**Rev. David Justin Lynch**

Saint Cecilia Catholic Community  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Palm Springs, California

**Sr. Laura Hayes Marsh**

Chapel of the Angel Presence  
Ascension Alliance  
Montgomery, Texas

**Hon. Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias**

Holy Family Catholic Church  
Austin, Texas

**Most Rev. Betty McManus**

Orthodox Catholic Church of  
America  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**Most Rev. William Myers**

The Society of Mercy  
Louisville, Kentucky

**Rev. Donna Nachefski**

Saint Stanislaus Kostka Polish  
Catholic Church  
Saint Louis, Missouri

**Most Rev. Mark Elliott Newman**

Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch  
Phoenix, Arizona

**Rev. Michael Nicosia**

Rocky Mountain Synod  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Denver, Colorado

**Most Rev. Doreen Noble**

Reformed catholic Church  
International, New England and  
Maritime Provinces  
Marlborough, Massachusetts

**Most Rev. Joaquin Perez**

Catholic Apostolic Church  
International  
Miami, Florida

**Rev. Mir Plemmons**

Rainier Open Catholics  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
South King County, Washington

**Most Rev. Don Pratt**

United American Catholic Church  
Salisbury, North Carolina

**Rev. Francis Quintana**

Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Denver, Colorado

**Rev. Victor Ray**

Saint Teresa of Calcutta Catholic  
Community  
Catholic Apostolic Church in North  
America  
Saint Petersburg, Florida

**Rev. John Robison**

Laurel Old Catholic Mission  
Convergent Christian Communion  
Laurel, Maryland

**Rev. Kelmy Rodriguez**

All Saints Priory  
Missionary Benedictines of the Poor  
Ridgewood, New York

**Most Rev. Linda Rounds-Nichols**

Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch  
Gallup, New Mexico

**Most Rev. Michael Scarlett**

Reformed catholic Church  
International, New England  
Taunton, Massachusetts

**Most Rev. Michael Seneco**

North American Old Catholic  
Church  
Capitol Heights, Maryland

**Most Rev. David Strong**

Spirit of Christ Community Church  
Apostolic Catholic Church  
in America  
Tacoma, Washington

**Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni**

Charis Ecumenical Catholic  
Community  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

**Sr. Lona Turner**

Independent Catholic Ordinariate  
Fort Worth, Texas

**Most Rev. Kenny von Folmar**

Solomon's Porch  
Convergent Christian Communion  
Phoenix, Arizona

**Most Rev. Leonard Walker**

Divine Savior Catholic Church  
The National Catholic Church of  
North America  
Kingman, Arizona

**Rev. Annie Watson**

St. Stanislaus Catholic Church  
St. Louis, Missouri

**Rev. Kevin Yell**  
American Catholic Church  
Oregon City, Oregon

**Rev. John Yoegel**  
St. Mychal Judge Parish  
Orthodox Catholic Church of  
America  
Greenwich, Connecticut