Synod’s Process of Pete’s Pals—Redwood City, California



Participants: Eight laywomen who have been meeting weekly as “Pete’s Pals” for 40 years. They belong to several different parishes in the San Francisco Archdiocese, but come together at a central meeting space in a Bay Area city’s civic center.

Where and How Do You Personally Experience Church Today?

- During the pandemic, I haven’t been going to Mass in Church, but online. This is different from being inside the church—that’s taken away. Mass is important to me. I miss receiving Communion. Depending on who is saying

Mass and who gives the homily, I get more out of it; other times, I get nothing. I will always be a Catholic. I feel bad my kids don't go to church, but they consider themselves Catholic.

- Church for me is to go to Mass and receive Communion. It does mean all the people. After COVID, when we couldn't go to Church, church was on Zoom. My husband isn't Catholic, but he often goes to Church with me. Christmas Eve—was a most wonderful, unreal experience. It was upsetting during COVID, but I wouldn't want people to get sick.
- I love daily Mass with fewer people, it's closer. During COVID I watched Mass on Zoom on my iPad. I can understand the priest better on Zoom. But I can't wait to be back with people. We have the most wonderful parish. We had a going-away Mass for the deacon. I cannot just talk to people. I have to hug them. I'm thankful knowing people are church. I feel sorry for people who leave the church over silly things. I say, "Take what you like; leave the rest. I love what I love and let go of what I can't take."
- I go back to Ireland sometimes. I went on a mission to Sweden with 6 people and a priest was with us. We saw what people in the parish needed help with. I did this work for weeks. I dressed altars every week, and went to Mass on First Friday. I came here to a parish, and got very involved. I belonged to the Legion of Mary. I was raising 3 sons. I don't like to miss Mass, but I don't see people I know. There is such a contrast now—too many changes; I'm not "with it" anymore. At my age there are too many changes.
- I've gone to different churches because of my hospital work schedule. I can tell when the priest seems to care about what he is doing. During COVID, the distancing is actually very caring; people are afraid to go and get sick or make others sick. I love the fact that I can go to Mass anywhere in the world and feel at home—even in Brazil. It's so special.
- When we travel, we go to church. We know our Mass, even when it's not in our language. Once we went to church, and knew it wasn't ours, so we got up and left. In past days, you weren't supposed to go to other churches. Now, church is my home. I went to Catholic school, but my parents never went to church. Not until high school was it not required that I go to church. In grade school, you were supposed to go to the 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. Mass. Mass has changed. It isn't the same. But what makes the Mass is 1) community; 2) celebrant; 3) choir. Sometimes the homily is bad, or people are sad.
- I have three experiences of church: Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern

Church. I experience the Eastern Church as full of sense experience and the mystery of Incarnation. God has smelled incense, seen the beauty of icons, and there's a sense of truth, beauty, community. The Western church was a missionary experience, plainer, shorter.

What Joys Do You Experience?

- A wedding was planned in the church, but because of fire in Tahoe, there had to be last minute changes. 14 bridesmaids came, there was music, and it all happened like a miracle. They did it at our house!
- I find joy in life, in reading, especially during COVID. My family is around; they don't miss church because they don't go; but they are wonderful Christian people. It's a grace to feel joy. Having the Mass to watch on my iPad, though not to receive Eucharist. I miss the priest. Thank goodness we can take joy in our priests. Through Jesus, we are all going to the same place.
- Receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, singing in Church, and a good homily.
- Eucharist—I'd bring Communion to people in their homes. A woman lived down the street from me, a mother a friend of other mothers. They didn't realize what I got out of it. I loved the people I met. Eucharist was special to them. For years I did this. I got more out of being with them.
- My granddaughters graduated from high school and college, and my joy in hearing from them. Our youngest son transferred to an office nearby.
- Seeing children, all baptized and getting married. When I got married, we couldn't go into the sanctuary. I like the change now that the couple can. Before, there were "mixed marriages", and the couple couldn't be married in the church.

What Difficulties and Obstacles Have You Encountered?

- My father wasn't Catholic; I never believed my Dad wouldn't go to heaven. I didn't care what they said; he was a good man. That message made it difficult for me as a child.

- We couldn’t go into another church; all my friends were not Catholic, but all my people and my friends were accepted if they went into those other churches.
- Protestant ending of the Our Father. Were we supposed to say it? That was a difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics.
- Bishop Thomas Olmstead (Phoenix, Arizona)—his literalist view of Baptism.
- Women can’t be altar servers in some churches—why do pastors have power like this?
- Women should be more involved in church decisions.
- The idea in Ireland that a mother was “re-churched” and blessed or purified after giving birth. The Lord was so good to have given her a baby, but a “blessing” or “purification” after childbirth?
- Priest would not give Communion to some people—priest acted like he was God.
- I feel sorry for Catholic people divorced and re-married. This breaks your heart. I know a woman who goes to church every day; she knows supposedly that communion is a sin.
- A Protestant woman lived in a convent building; the priest got okay for her from one bishop to receive the Eucharist.
- Husband, not Catholic was told he could receive communion at a private Mass but couldn’t receive at a parish without causing scandal.
- Jesus didn’t discriminate when he was distributing loaves and fishes to the 5,000,
- But if you’re not Catholic, cross your arms for a blessing.
- At a going-away service for a minister—we all went up to communion; we are celebrating love for our Savior Jesus Christ; it was so brave of a priest to receive communion in another church—he showed his faith.
- When people receive communion in other churches, they should be permitted.
- The Holy Spirit works in their hearts—turning them to love.
- I’m a convert. My husband and I joined a parish in this city; had our children baptized there; all four received Communion and Confirmation; two were married in this parish; my husband’s funeral service was there. I was very involved in the parish for years. Then a new pastor came who made changes; I realized I was coming home from Mass angry. I made a painful decision to change parishes.

What Is Your Dream/Vision for Our Church in the Future?

- The Church acknowledges the gift of women as ordained.
- We could experience Mass with a woman priest from Roman Catholic Women Priests.
- Priests need to be married. Was celibacy a rule because the Church didn't want to pay for children?
- Stop men making all the rules; let other people make rules too. Pastors shouldn't just make any changes they decide without asking parishioners.
- More togetherness and exchange among Christians on Zoom.
- We should open our doors. If we are believers, we celebrate together.
- Churches of every denomination come together.
- We should come up inside the altar area.
- If you believe in Jesus Christ, you are welcome —that should be the spirit.