Listening to the Spirit through the People of God: Pope Francis' Vision of a Synodal Church
Pentecost Lecture by Dr. Austen Ivereigh, Biographer of Pope Francis
Hosted by St. Mark's Parish and the Rockies/BC Region of Christian Life Community
May 22, 2021 Pentecost Lecture via Zoom

By Catherine M. Kelly, M.Div., CLC Group Guide, St. Mark's Parish



I am delighted to report on our Rockies/BC CLC regional formation event on May 22, 2021, which we co-hosted with St. Mark's Parish, the Jesuit parish in Vancouver and to which we invited the public. 73 people (including 25 CLC members and 3 priests, 2 deacons) registered and 50 attended. In celebration of Pentecost, we hosted a Zoom program and started with listening to "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus*" as people logged on. I offered a welcome and overview of the morning before praying "Come, Holy Spirit" and reading Acts 15:1-12 on the first synod, the Council of Jerusalem. I noted that in communal discernment and synodal listening like in Acts 15:12 where "The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened", we are invited to fall silent and listen to each other and the Holy Spirit.

I introduced Pope Francis' biographer, Dr. Austen Ivereigh, whom I met at the World Assembly in Buenos Aires, his roles and his books.



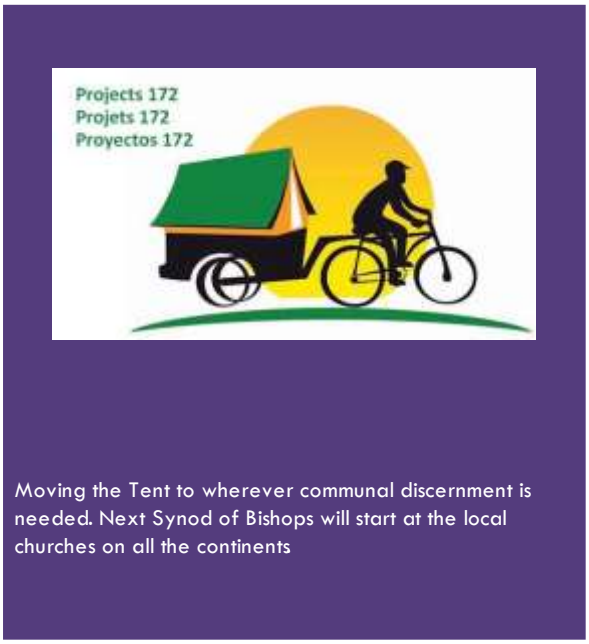


L to R: Elba Elena (Bolivia), Catherine Kelly (Canada), and Dr. Austen Ivereigh

I commented that he would reference the Tent of Meeting from Exodus 40 and showed an image of it as well as World CLC's image of the portable tent of discernment.



TENT OF MEETING



Then we watched the YouTube video of Austen's talk which he presented at the CLC NY Day of Prayer in March 2021. The handout for the day, a modified version of the CLC NY handout, included some key points from Austen's article which will be published in the fall issue of the *Progressio Supplement*. People were invited to take a 5-minute break and then pray for 10 minutes on two reflection questions: (1) What insights did you gain from the talk? (2) What invitations are you sensing personally, communally, as a church?

We reviewed the spiritual conversation guidelines and then broke into small groups for sharing on the reflection questions for 15 minutes. Then we rejoined the large group. I invited people to reflect silently on what they had just heard in their small groups and if there were any common words, themes, images or spiritual movements they sensed. Then I invited pre-appointed spokespersons who were either CLC members or Ignatian spiritual directors to model Round 2 sharing for the large group.

The fruits of the spiritual conversation included the following (each bullet point indicates sharing from one group):

- an understanding that the synodal process is messy, out of crisis change can emerge, although there are divided views, we can trust in the Pope and discernment with the Holy Spirit; a sense of excitement, longing and fear;
- an invitation to unity, moving in the same direction together, beauty, hope, a new understanding of democracy and our own participation;
- being at the center of a circle with Jesus, reflecting out to others on our inner and outer journey with God, fear moving to trust, risk-taking and adventure, leaning into alchemy, the Holy Spirit guides us and all will be well;

- leading people to the original church like in Acts 15, strategies to deal with adversaries in the church, hope for more opportunities like this, moving away from clericalism, holiness is not grounded in the books we read but the way we act, optimistic and willing to engage;
- a new awareness of tensions and that they are OK, they are part of the process, we don't need to fear where the Holy Spirit is leading us, synodality is not in its infancy but in its springtime, yes to the Holy Spirit, listen, love, action rooted in discernment;
- goodness of synodality, having servant leaders who listen, everyone has a voice, tensions necessarily arise but keep us humble, invitation to share honestly and humbly in the church, in our families, in our circles, which leads to new understandings, trust in the process, the Holy Spirit will help us find new ways;
- a deeper understanding of synodality, a new springtime in the church, going back to the early church, our responsibility to share the good news, when we encounter people we can share our stories, we become aware of our own missions;
- synodality is Francis' gift to the church, let go of agendas and let the Holy Spirit lead us, the importance of meditation and silence;
- the power of listening, allowing self to listen to others, seek a common understanding, allow diversity, allow the other to speak, feeling the movement of the Holy Spirit, how do we maintain the energy to sustain it?
- We are invited to be witnesses of the Holy Spirit, synodality is messy but the outcome is healing, let the Holy Spirit speak, don't manipulate the process, need time to discern the invitation. The personal/communal/church call is interrelated, pray for the church and for persons, prayer to discern, listen to the Holy Spirit, not to be political, working at seeing the larger picture, the universal community of Christ, love;
- Listening to others, reconcile diversity, it's OK not to have all the answers, often we experience turbulence and a storm and then a rainbow, we need to be attentive to the rainbow, listen, discern, act, ability to overcome;
- Process, learning, allowing time and connecting, synodal process includes learning in community, will of the individual in community within the holy catholic apostolic church structure, connecting with others, challenging especially with youth, will to participate and reflect on communicating and evangelizing in the modern world.

I concluded by announcing the synod on the bishops which will begin in October at the local parish level on all 6 continents and a closing prayer in gratitude for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Our Jesuit pastor was overjoyed at the event and remarked it was the best Jesuit event he had attended in the last decade! He is grateful for the witness and participation of CLC in the life of the parish and the archdiocese and how we model attentive listening and discernment. The CLC organizers were grateful for the energy, enthusiasm and hope we heard from the participants and their desire to continue listening like this in community.

Below is the schedule we followed.

- Welcome
- Opening Prayer
- Dr Austen Ivereigh's lecture

  Some key points in Ivereigh's article, Listening to the Spirit through the People of God:

  a. Origin of Pope Francis' own discernment, both personally and with the Latin American Church
  b. A Synodal Process includes:
     i. Seeking for true indifference
     ii. Begging for light of the Holy Spirit
     iii. Weighing motives according to Gospel criteria
     iv. Seeking confirmation of choice
     v. Testing spirits to unmask temptations, deceits and attachments
  c. Bottom-up Church involves much listening
     i. Listening to the People of God, listening to those involved (e.g., youth, indigenous, married people, etc.)
     ii. Listening to God, listening to the Spirit
     iii. Following the promptings of the Spirit
  d. "Overflow"
     i. The Church can hold "tensions" in contrary views in expectation of a resolution "by overflow." Overflow is that transcending of differences through a meeting of minds on a new plane.
  e. Beware of the enemies of discernment which seek to silence, distract, avoid conflict/ differences
  f. Synodality offers us a way to journey together to seek God's will, allowing differences to harmonize and to receive the "new thing" that the Spirit wishes to offer.
- Personal Prayer (10 minutes)/Reflection Questions:

  a. What insights did you gain from the talk?

  b. What invitations are you sensing personally, communally, as a church?
- Review Spiritual Conversation Guidelines & Small Group Sharing on the two reflection questions (15 minutes)
- Second Round of Listening in the Large Group (CLC members will share common themes heard in the small groups)
- Closing prayer

Rockies/BC Region Members participated in the CLC USA Guide Training



Guides for the Journey

Eighteen members of the Rockies/BC Region participated in the virtual CLC USA Guide Training on June 12 and 19. We witnessed many Canadian CLC members contributing wisdom and experience to the guide training sessions, although Canadian members comprised only 25% of the participants. We met on June 23 via Zoom to appropriate the graces, sharing reflections on three questions in two small groups:

1. Where have I experienced God in the guide training (including preparatory material, the sessions themselves, conversations afterwards, and what is stirring in your minds and hearts after the sessions)?

2. What insights (2-3) have I gained?

3. How am I feeling invited going forward?

Twelve members participated in the appropriation, five emailed their responses, one met individually afterwards. The overall feeling was one of joy, excitement, curiosity, and a movement from uncertainty, fear, resistance to clarity, trusting the process, trusting God and gratitude for personal sharing, diversity and a sense of community. Many members noted the timing for reflecting and sharing after the first module was apt -- enough time to digest and appropriate it but not so much time that we forgot it. We plan to meet again after the second and third modules in October and February, respectively.

A blessing of the small group sharing at the guide training is now the CLC USA guide who leads young adult CLC groups has connected with Catherine Kelly who guides young adult CLC groups in Vancouver. The CLC USA and Canada delegates to the World Youth Assembly July 29-31 and their guides plan to meet virtually on July 13. Please keep them in your prayers.

Summer blessings,
Catherine M. Kelly, M.Div., CLC Rockies/BC Region