

## “Inverting the Pyramid: Re-Imagining the Role of the Laity in Today’s Church” Conversation Guide



This conversation guide consists of both questions for discussion and a list of resources referred to in the lecture. Facilitators may wish to make use of these other resources as a part of their presentation and discussion of the materials. In utilizing this guide, we recommend facilitators choose those questions most helpful to the purpose of their group.

View this lecture here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qf4xW\\_wHzGM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qf4xW_wHzGM)

- Dr. Gaillardetz begins his lecture by addressing the fact that many discussions of the clergy sexual abuse crisis neglect the question of how lay people relate to this crisis. In light of this, Dr. Gaillardetz insists that it is important for us as lay people to ask, “How do I reimagine my own role in the Church?” Take a moment now to reflect on this question.
- Dr. Gaillardetz discusses two theologies of mission that emerged from the Second Vatican Council: the secular vocation of the laity and the baptismal priesthood of the *Christifidelis*. Which, if either, of these are you most familiar with? How have you understood your vocation as a lay person with respect to the mission of the Church? Have you understood this vocation as similar to or distinct from the vocation of clergy in the mission of the church?
- James Alison offers a thought experiment on how we might imagine ourselves first as members of a baptismal priesthood rather than laity and clergy. Imagining Albania at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, he suggests that upon hearing this news, the people of Albania begin to celebrate, not because things have changed yet, but because they know that the old regime is giving way and a new life is about to begin. In the same way, to live out our baptismal priesthood, we celebrate the new life of Christ even as the world is still marred by sin and injustice.

How might we better live out the joy of this baptismal priesthood in our ecclesial communities, reflecting Christ in the world?

- How do you think we might better become a church which serves as a field hospital, addressing serious wounds rather than nitpicking over high cholesterol?
- How does a willingness to be vulnerable allow us to act more like Christ? And how is this related to solidarity?
- Dr. Gaillardetz discusses the family as a domestic church – a community characterized by hospitality and the pursuit of justice. How might you incorporate this understanding of church into your own life?
- Pope Francis discusses the need for the church to become more synodal, which means that we focus less on teaching and more on listening. What do you think has led to failures in listening, and how might we listen better?
- The *sensus fidei* is the supernatural instinct for the faith that, according to Vatican II, is given to every Christian. Through the grace of baptism, God gives us a capacity to listen to God’s Word and bring it into practice in the life of the church. How can we better trust the *sensus fidei* and support where it leads us as communities of faith?
- What daily practices, stories, images, sounds, tastes, and rituals give shape to your *sensus fidei*? Is that wisdom honored in your local ecclesial communities? If so, how? If not, how might they better do this?
- How might your local ecclesial communities listen to a larger variety of perspectives – including those who no longer feel welcome within those communities? If hierarchical figures are not inclined to support this work, how might the communities still strive towards what Dr. Gaillardetz calls “holy conversation”?
- Can you think of a time when you experienced a failure in holy conversation? What about a time when holy conversation was achieved? What made the difference in those two conversations?
- Do you see your local ecclesial communities as embracing a “sphere” model or a “polyhedron” model? How might you and your communities better value the particularity of different ways of living?

Resources:

**Survivor Support**

**If you have been the victim of abuse in the Catholic Church, please reach out to someone. Below are contact points that can help.**

<b>RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline</b>	800-656-HOPE (4673) or <a href="#">online chat</a>
<b>Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests</b>	Assistance Line: 1-877-SNAP-HEALS (877-762-7432)
<b>Victim Assistance Coordinators</b>	<a href="#">Click here</a> to contact a victim assistance coordinator in your diocese.

- For reports and documents on the abuse crisis, educational information, and steps on how to take action, visit <http://catholiclayresponse.com/>.
- Discussing how Vatican II called us to become an adult church, Dr. Gaillardetz cites the Vatican II document on the Church in the Modern World, **Gaudium et Spes**, no. 43. The whole document can be found here: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)
- **James Alison**'s thought experiment on Albania can be found in his book *Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-In*.
- Pope Francis refers to solidarity 19 times in his apostolic exhortation **Evangelii Gaudium**, which can be found here: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)
- Pope Francis discusses the Church as a **field hospital** in this interview: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>
- The Vatican II discussion on the family can be found in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, **Apostolicam Actuositatem**, no. 11: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651118\\_apostolicam-actuositatem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html)

- Pope Francis discusses the importance of listening in his address on the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synod of Bishops**:  
[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html)
- Dr. Gaillardetz mentions a seminar which he co-chaired on the contemporary theology of priesthood and ministry. The results of that seminar were published as **“To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Ministry,”** which can be found here: <https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/bc1/schools/stm/faculty-research/Origins%20-%20To%20Serve%20the%20People%20of%20God%20-%2027%20Dec%202018.pdf>