

PEOPLE OF GOD



“People of God: How Catholic parish life is changing in the United States”

“People of God,” a feature documentary from America Media, explores the state of parish life in the United States today. By focusing on four specific parishes in geographically, culturally and ethnically distinct areas of the country, the documentary aims to capture experiences that are both familiar and foreign to viewers and to raise important questions about the future of parish life.

Watch the film, and download or print this discussion guide at: AmericaMagazine.org/PeopleOfGod

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The goal of the film is to *start a conversation* among Catholics who are navigating the changing realities in their own parish communities. To facilitate this, America Media's production team has compiled this guide with questions that can serve as a foundation for discussing the film.

We invite you to consider the questions that follow; either over the course of several weeks—watching each segment and then allowing time for a communal, prayerful listening in response to the questions proposed—or watching the entire film and choosing a few questions that seem most pertinent to your parish situation.

If you have time, we suggest you divide your time of prayerful reflection as follows:

- Divide into groups of 4 or 5 people at most—separating spouses, friends and family, and mixing people of different ages, political convictions, genders, races and abilities to ensure diverse discussion groups.
- Choose a facilitator and timekeeper in each group.
- Give each person the opportunity to briefly introduce themselves and the ministries they're involved with if appropriate. (1 minute each)
- Round 1: Go around the circle and allow each person to speak freely and without interruptions or comments, simply listening to the experience of the other person. (3-4 minutes each)
- A brief period of silence (1 minute)
- Round 2: Go around and ask each person to reflect on what most moved, encouraged or challenged them from what they heard in the first round, again without disruptions or comments from others in the group. (2-3 minutes each)

- Allow time for questions, clarifications and free discussion. At this time, you might ask someone to take notes, which can then be brought into plenary discussion. (10 minutes)

Opening questions

- Which segment of the film impacted you most positively, and why?
- What was the single most surprising thing that you learned from the film?

Phoenix, Ariz.

Integrating a multi-cultural parish

- Are there diverse communities within your parish (racial, socioeconomic, age-based)? What's the relationship and interaction (or not) between them?
- How do you encourage *belonging* in your community?
- What is done within your community to bring people of different backgrounds and cultures together? What kinds of activities encourage people to venture out of their individual or cultural silos? And what makes them retreat back into them?
- Are there other places in your diocese or your wider community where you see different ethnic groups or political affiliations integrating well together—or failing? What can your particular community learn from them?

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Antigo, Wis.

An institution dealing with decline

- How has ministry as a community changed in the past 5 to 10 years at your parish?
- What is your parish's general attitude toward decline in the number of active parishioners and/or resources? If your parish is experiencing decline, how does your community address these realities, or not?
- How many priests and deacons does your parish have, and how many lay ecclesial ministers? How are their spirits? Are there opportunities for them to receive support and feedback from the community?
- Does your community have experience with international priests? What are some of the joys and challenges that accompany the presence of an international priest in your community?
- Considering the challenges your community is facing today, look ahead. What is the mission to which your parish or community is being called?

Cut Off, La.

A church that is rapidly changing

- In your parish, have you discussed the impact of climate change and how human activity connects with environmental degradation? What relevance does “care for our common home” have in the context of our Catholic faith? How can this be lived out in your community?
- What are the pro-life issues that your community promotes? Do these issues reflect the wide spectrum of Catholic moral and social teachings?

- How does your parish support the broader community? Is the church a place where people can “go to plead to the Lord for mercy and support,” and “for fellowship,” as Al Archer suggests? Is it “a sign of hope?” Discuss.

Boston, Mass.

New ways of being and belonging in the church

- How has your community and specifically parish ministry changed since the Covid-19 pandemic? What has improved? What new challenges have emerged?
- Catholics today can find community online through live-streamed Masses and events. Discuss this new reality in parish life and consider the sacramental nature of the church. Where is God at work?
- How does your community care for and nurture the faith of young families in your parish, and attract younger members into the various ministries and practical aspects of your community's life?
- How can your parish develop a sense of inclusivity and embrace the diversity it contains so that it can be a place where all truly feel welcome—regardless of their race, gender or sexual orientation?

A final question

- What are your hopes for the future of your parish and for Catholic life as a whole? List a few concrete steps that you can take in your parish.

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