

# Synthesis Report Proposals



Please send any comments to [Synod23@rcdop.org.uk](mailto:Synod23@rcdop.org.uk)  
or by post to Synod Response c/o Diocesan Offices  
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**The Synthesis Report has 41 pages and is arranged in 3 parts:**

Part I	The Face of the Synodal Church	Topics 1 - 7
Part II	All Disciples, All Missionaries	Topics 8 – 13
Part III	Weaving Bonds, Building Communities	Topics 14 – 20

You can access the whole Synthesis Report at [Documents \(synod.va\)](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/2023/05/23-synod-synthesis-report_en.html)

## **Proposals from Synthesis Report**

### **1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding**

- The richness and depth of the synodal process indicates the value of expanding participation, and overcoming the obstacles to participation that have emerged so far.
- There is a need to find ways to involve the clergy (deacons, priests, bishops) more actively in the synodal process during the course of the next year. A synodal Church cannot do without their voices, experiences or contributions. We need to understand better the reasons why some have felt resistant to the synodal process.
- The synodal culture needs to become more intergenerational, with spaces for young people to speak freely for themselves, within their families, and with their peers and pastors, including through digital channels.
- The Assembly proposes to promote theological deepening of the terminological and conceptual understanding of the notion and practice of synodality before the Second Session of the Assembly, drawing on the rich heritage of theological research since the Second Vatican Council and in particular the documents of the International Theological Commission on Synodality in the life and mission of the Church (2018) and *Sensus fidei* in the life of the Church (2014).
- The canonical implications of synodality require similar clarification. For these, too, we propose an intercontinental special commission of theological and canonical experts, ahead of the Second Session of the Assembly.
- Finally, a wider revision of the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canon Law of the Oriental Churches is called for at this time. A preliminary study is therefore advised.

### **2. Gathered and Sent by the Trinity**

- It is proposed that the Churches should experiment with and adapt conversation in the Spirit, and other forms of discernment in ways they may consider appropriate drawing from diverse spiritual traditions relevant to the needs and cultures of their contexts. Appropriate forms of accompaniment can facilitate this practice, helping to grasp its logic and overcome possible resistance.
- Each local Church is encouraged to equip itself with suitable people trained to facilitate and accompany processes of ecclesial discernment.
- In order to illuminate ecclesial life, the practice of discernment can usefully be implemented in the pastoral sphere, in a way that is contextually appropriate. This will make it possible to recognise more readily the charisms present in the community, to

entrust tasks and ministries wisely. Going beyond the mere planning of activities we will be able to plan pastoral paths in the light of the Spirit.

### **3. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation**

- If the Eucharist shapes synodality, then the first step we should take is to celebrate the Mass in a way that befits the gift, with an authentic sense of friendship in Christ. Liturgy celebrated with authenticity is the first and fundamental school of discipleship. Its beauty and simplicity should form us prior to any other organised formation programme.
- A second step refers to the widely reported need to make liturgical language more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures. Without calling continuity with tradition and the need for better liturgical formation into question, deeper reflection is needed. Episcopal Conferences should be entrusted with a wider responsibility in this regard, according to the Motu Proprio *Magnum principium*.
- A third step consists in the pastoral commitment to widen community prayer beyond the celebration of Mass. Alternative forms of liturgical prayer, as well as practices of popular piety, in which the distinctiveness of local cultures is reflected, are elements of great importance in fostering the involvement of all the faithful. They introduce the faithful to the Christian mystery and bring those less familiar with the Church closer to an encounter with the Lord. Among the forms of popular piety, Marian devotion stands out because of its ability to sustain and nourish the faith of many.

### **4. People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey**

- The Church's social doctrine is a too little-known resource. This needs to be addressed. Local churches are invited not only to make its contents better known but to foster its reception through practices that put its inspiration into action.
- The experience of encounter, sharing a common life and serving those living in poverty and on the margins should be an integral part of all formation paths offered by Christian communities: it is a requirement of faith, not an optional extra. This is especially true for candidates for ordained ministry and consecrated life.
- As part of the rethinking of diaconal ministry, the Church should promote a stronger orientation towards service to those who are poor.
- Church teaching, liturgy, and practice must more explicitly and carefully integrate the biblical and theological foundations of integral ecology.

### **5. A Church "out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation"**

- Renewed attention is needed to the question of the languages we use to speak to people's minds and hearts in a wide diversity of contexts in a way that is both beautiful and accessible.
- We need a shared framework for managing and evaluating experimentations with forms of decentralisation, identifying all the actors involved and their roles. For the sake of coherence, discernment processes regarding decentralisation must take place in a synodal style, envisaging the concurrence and contribution of all actors involved at different levels.

- New paradigms are needed for pastoral engagement with indigenous peoples, taking the form of a common journey and not an action done to them or for them. Their participation in decision-making processes at all levels can contribute to a more vibrant and missionary Church.
- From the work of the Assembly, there is a call for better knowledge of the teachings of Vatican II, post-conciliar teaching and the Church's social doctrine. We need to know our different traditions better in order to be more clearly a Church of Churches in communion, effective in service and dialogue.
- In a world where the number of migrants and refugees is increasing while the willingness to welcome them is decreasing and where the foreigner is viewed with increasing suspicion, it is appropriate for the Church to engage decisively in education, in the culture of dialogue and encounter, combating racism and xenophobia, especially through pastoral formation. Equally, it is necessary to engage in concrete projects for the integration of migrants.
- We recommend continued engagement in dialogue and discernment regarding racial justice. Systems within the Church that create or maintain racial injustice need to be identified and addressed. Processes for healing and reconciliation should be created, with the help of those harmed, to eradicate the sin of racism.

## **6. The Eastern Churches and Latin Church Traditions**

- First and foremost, the request emerged to establish a permanent Council of the Patriarchs and Major Archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches to the Holy Father.
- Some requested to convoke a Special Synod dedicated to the Eastern Catholic Churches, their identity and mission, as well addressing pastoral and canonical challenges in the context of war and massive migration.
- We need to establish a joint commission of Eastern and Latin theologians, historians and canonists to address issues requiring further study and formulate proposals pointing a way forward.
- There needs to be adequate representation of members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the dicasteries of the Roman Curia to enrich the whole Church with their perspectives, to help address problems as they arise and to enable their participation in dialogue at the various different levels.
- To foster forms of reception that respect the heritage of the faithful of the Eastern Churches, we need to intensify relations between Eastern clergy in diaspora and Latin clergy to deepen mutual knowledge and recognition of the respective Traditions.

## **7. On the Road Towards Christian Unity**

- The year 2025 marks the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325) at which the symbol of the faith that unites all Christians was elaborated. A common commemoration of this event will help us to better understand how in the past controversial questions were discussed and resolved together in Council.
- In the same year, 2025, providentially, the date of the solemnity of Easter will coincide for all Churches and Christian communities. The Assembly expressed a keen desire to come to a common date for the feast of Easter so that we can celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord, our life and our salvation, on the same day.

- There is also a desire to continue to involve Christians of other Churches and ecclesial traditions in Catholic synodal processes at all levels and to invite more fraternal delegates to the next session of the Assembly in 2024.
- A proposal has been put forward by some to convene an ecumenical Synod on common mission in the contemporary world.
- It was also proposed that we might devise an ecumenical martyrology.

## **8. Church is Mission**

- We need more creativity in establishing ministries according to the needs of local churches, with the particular involvement of the young. One can think of further expanding responsibilities assigned to the existing ministry of lector, responsibilities that are already broader than those performed in the liturgy. This could become a fuller ministry of the Word of God, which, in appropriate contexts, could also include preaching. We could also explore the possibility of establishing a ministry assigned to married couples committed to supporting family life and accompanying people preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage.
- Local churches are invited to consider appropriate means and moments of acknowledgment by the community of lay charisms and ministries. This could happen on the occasion of a liturgical celebration in which the pastoral mandate is bestowed.

## **9. Women in the Life and Mission of the Church**

- Local churches are encouraged to extend their work of listening, accompaniment and care to the most marginalised women in their social contexts.
- It is urgent to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry. The Holy Father has significantly increased the number of women in positions of responsibility in the Roman Curia. This should also happen at other levels of Church life, in consecrated life and dioceses. Provision needs to be made in Canon Law accordingly.
- Theological and pastoral research on the access of women to the diaconate should be continued, benefiting from consideration of the results of the commissions specially established by the Holy Father, and from the theological, historical and exegetical research already undertaken. If possible, the results of this research should be presented to the next Session of the Assembly.
- Cases of labour injustice and unfair remuneration within the Church need to be addressed especially for women in consecrated life, who are too often treated as cheap labour.
- Women's access to formation programmes and theological study needs to be considerably expanded. We suggest that women should also be integrated into seminary teaching and training programs to foster better formation for ordained ministry.
- There is a need to ensure that liturgical texts and Church documents are more attentive to the use of language that takes into equal consideration both men and women, and also includes a range of words, images and narratives that draw more widely on women's experience.
- We propose that women receive appropriate formation to enable them to be judges in all canonical processes.

## **10. Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: A Charismatic Sign**

- We believe the time has come for a revision of the 1978 document *Mutuae relationes*, regarding the relationships between bishops and religious in the Church. We propose that this revision be completed in a synodal manner, consulting all involved.
- To the same end, it is necessary to put in place, in a synodal spirit, means and instruments for promoting encounters and forms of collaboration between Episcopal Conferences and the Conferences of Superiors and Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.
- At the level of both individual local churches and groupings of Churches, the promotion of missionary synodality requires the establishment and configuration of councils and advisory bodies at which representatives of lay associations and ecclesial movements and new communities can meet in order to foster enduring relationships between their life and work and that of the local churches.
- In theological formation at all levels, above all in the formation of ordained ministers, the prominence given to the Church's charismatic dimension should be monitored and strengthened where necessary.

## **11. Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church**

- In the Latin Churches the permanent diaconate has been implemented in differing ways in different ecclesial contexts. Some local churches have not introduced it at all; in others, there is concern that deacons are perceived as a kind of substitute for the shortage of priests. Sometimes, their ministry finds expression in the liturgy rather than in service to those living in poverty and who are needy in the community. We therefore recommend an assessment of how the diaconal ministry has been implemented since Vatican II.
- From the theological point of view, there is a need to understand the diaconate first and foremost in itself and not only as a stage of access to the presbyterate. Qualifying the primary form of the diaconate as "permanent," to distinguish it from the "transitional" form, is itself an indication of a change of perspective that has not yet been adequately realized.
- The uncertainties surrounding the theology of the diaconate are related to the fact that it has only been restored to a distinct and permanent hierarchical ministry in the Latin Church since the Second Vatican Council. Deeper study will shed light on the question of the access of women to the diaconate.
- A thorough review of formation for ordained ministry in view of the missionary and synodal dimensions of the Church is called for. This means also reviewing the *Ratio fundamentalis* that determines how formation is structured. We also recommend at the same time ensuring the adoption of a synodal style when it comes to the ongoing formation of priests and deacons.
- Transparency and a culture of accountability are of crucial importance for us to move forward in building a synodal Church. We ask local churches to identify processes and structures that allow for a regular audit of how priests and deacons are carrying out roles of responsibility in the exercise of their ministry. Existing institutions, such as participatory bodies or pastoral visits, can be the starting point for this work, taking care

to involve the community. Such forms must be adapted to local contexts and diverse cultures, so as not to be a hindrance or a bureaucratic burden. The discernment of the kind of process required could be considered at the regional or continental level.

- On a case-by-case basis, and in accordance with the context, the possibility should be considered of re-inserting priests who have left the ministry in pastoral services that recognise their formation and experience.

## **12. The Bishop in Ecclesial Communion**

- It is necessary to implement, in forms legally yet to be defined, structures and processes for regular review of the bishop's performance, with reference to the style of his authority, the economic administration of the diocese's assets, and the functioning of participatory bodies, and safeguarding against all possible kinds of abuse. A culture of accountability is an integral part of a synodal Church that promotes co-responsibility, as well as safeguarding against abuses.
- There are calls to make the Episcopal Council (can. 473 §4), the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Eparchial Pastoral Council (CIC can. 511, CCEO can 272) mandatory, and to make the diocesan bodies exercising co-responsibility more operational, including in legal terms.
- The Assembly calls for a review of the criteria for selecting candidates for the episcopate, balancing the authority of the Apostolic Nuncio with participation of Episcopal Conferences. There are also requests to expand consultation with the faithful People of God, and to involve a greater number of lay people and consecrated persons in the consultation process, taking care to avoid being put under any undue pressure in the selection process.
- Many bishops express the need to rethink the functioning and strengthen the structure of the metropolitan sees (ecclesiastical provinces) and regions, so that they can become concrete expressions of collegiality in a territory and, through fraternity, mutual support, transparency and a wider consultation, become commonplace practices among bishops.

## **13. The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops**

- The Visits *ad limina Apostolorum* are the highest moment of the relationships of the pastors of the local churches with the Bishop of Rome and his closest collaborators in the Roman Curia. It is necessary to review the form in which they are carried out so that they become always more the occasion for open and mutual exchange that fosters communion and a true exercise of collegiality and synodality.
- In light of the synodal configuration of the Church, it is necessary for the dicasteries of the Roman Curia to enhance the consultation of bishops, for greater attention to the diversity of situations and a more attentive listening to the voices of local churches.
- It seems appropriate to establish forms of evaluation of the work of the Pontifical Representatives by the local churches in the countries where they carry out their mission to facilitate and perfect their service.
- It is proposed to enhance and strengthen the experience of the Council of Cardinals (C-9) as a synodal council at the service of the Petrine ministry.

- In the light of the teaching of Vatican II, it is necessary to carefully evaluate whether it is opportune to ordain the prelates of the Roman Curia as bishops.

#### **14. A synodal approach to formation**

- In the light of synodality, we propose that priority should be given to providing programmes designed and intended for the joint formation of the entire People of God (laity, consecrated and ordained ministers). Dioceses should endeavour to encourage these projects within the local churches. We encourage Episcopal Conferences to work together at regional level to create a culture of ongoing formation, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.
- A range of members of the People of God should be represented in formation programs for ordained ministries, as already requested by previous Synods. The involvement of women is of particular importance.
- Adequate standards and processes for selecting candidates for ordained ministry need to be applied to ensure that requirements for the propaedeutic programme for seminarians are met.
- Formation for ordained ministers should be designed in a way that is consistent with a synodal Church in the different local contexts. Before embarking on specific paths candidates should have a significant, albeit initial, experience of life in a Christian community. Formation should not create an artificial environment separate from the ordinary life of the faithful. By safeguarding the requirements of formation for ministry, we can foster an authentic spirit of service to the People of God in preaching, celebrating the sacraments and enacting charity. This may require a revision of the *Ratio fundamentalis* for priests and permanent deacons.
- In preparation for the next session of the Assembly, a consultation of those responsible for the initial and ongoing formation of priests should be undertaken to assess how the synodal process is being received and to propose changes that will promote the exercise of authority in a style appropriate to a synodal Church.

#### **15. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions**

- We propose that initiatives enabling shared discernment on controversial doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues should be developed, in the light of the Word of God, Church teaching, theological reflection and an appreciation of the synodal experience. This can be accomplished through indepth discussions among experts with diverse skills and backgrounds, in an institutional setting that protects confidentiality and promotes frank discussion. When appropriate it should also involve people directly affected by the matters under consideration. Such initiatives should be set in motion before the next Session of the Assembly.

#### **16. Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church**

- What would need to change in order for those who feel excluded to experience the Church as more welcoming? Listening and accompaniment are a form of ecclesial action, not just the actions of individuals. They must therefore find a place within the ordinary pastoral planning and operational structuring of Christian communities at



different levels, making full use of spiritual accompaniment. A synodal Church needs to be a listening Church and this commitment has to be translated into practice.

- We do not start this work from scratch. Numerous institutions and structures carry out the valuable task of listening, including the accompaniment work of Caritas amongst the poorest, and among migrants and refugees, and the many other contexts of accompaniment linked to consecrated life or lay associations. Connecting their work in a more integral way with the local Church community enables this work to be seen as part of the life of the whole community, not a delegated task.
- Those performing the service of listening and accompaniment, in its various forms, need adequate formation, taking into account the experiences of those they come into contact with. They also need to feel supported by the community. For their part, communities should become fully aware of the meaning of this service exercised on their behalf and to receive the fruits of this listening. We propose establishment of a ministry of listening and accompaniment in order to give greater prominence to this service. It should be grounded in baptism and adapted to different contexts. The way this ministry is conferred should promote the involvement of the community.
- SECAM (Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) is encouraged to promote a theological and pastoral discernment on question of polygamy and the accompaniment of people in polygamous unions who are coming to faith.

## **17. Mission in the Digital Environment**

- We need to provide opportunities for recognising, forming, and accompanying those already working as digital missionaries, while also facilitating networking amongst them.
- It is important to create collaborative networks of influencers that include people of other religions or indeed who may profess no faith, but who wish to collaborate on common causes to promote human dignity, justice, and care for our common home.

## **18. Structures for Participation**

- Based on the understanding of the People of God as the active subject of the mission of evangelisation, we suggest legislating for the obligatory nature of Pastoral Councils in Christian communities and local churches. It would also be desirable to strengthen the bodies of participation, with a proper presence of the laity, recognising the role they can play in discerning decisions by virtue of their baptism.
- Participatory bodies represent the first instance in which to experience the accountability of those who exercise responsibility. While we warmly welcome and support their commitment, in turn, they are invited to practice the culture of accountability to the community of which they are an expression.

## **19. Groupings of Churches within the Communion of the Whole Church**

- Among the structures already provided for in the Code, the ecclesiastical province or metropolitan see should be recovered and strengthened as a place of communion for the local churches within their territory.
- Relevant authorities should implement synodality at regional, national, and continental levels in accordance with the insights that have emerged in regard to Church groupings.

- Where necessary, we suggest creating international ecclesiastical provinces to benefit bishops who do not belong to any Episcopal Conference and to promote communion among Churches across national borders.
- In Latin Rite countries in which there is also a hierarchy of Eastern Catholic Churches, we recommend including Eastern Bishops in national Episcopal Conferences, leaving intact their governmental autonomy established by their own Code.
- A canonical configuration of the Continental Assemblies should be worked out that, while respecting the particularity of each continent, takes due account of the participation of the Episcopal Conferences and that of the Churches, with their own delegates who make present the variety of the People of God.

## **20. The Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assemblies**

- The synodal processes at all levels of the Church should be evaluated.
- The fruits of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops should be evaluated.