



## SYNOD 2021-2024

Taking the opportunity to share and listen to each other and, ultimately, to the Holy Spirit

### NEWS OF THE ‘SYNOD ON SYNODALITY’

We have undertaken to report progress and are pleased to provide some information about a major development.

Following the listening phase of the Synod on Synodality, a mix of 26 religious, clergy and lay people gathered in Frascati, Italy, to synthesize reports from around the world. They had two weeks in which to create a document that harvested the fruits of the greatest-ever exercise in listening and consultation the Catholic Church has ever carried out. Their report was presented on Thursday 25 September.

The group was made up of religious, clergy and lay people from many places — among them Lebanon, France, Canada, Singapore, Hungary, Portugal, Peru, Kenya and Korea. Most were theologians, canon lawyers and Scripture scholars; some were facilitators of synodal processes and leadership programs; two worked in church communications. Many were also members of the synod’s four commissions: theology, methodology, spirituality and communications. Only one bishop was invited.

Added to the above 26 members of the reading/writing group were the three superiors of the synod secretariat and the four members of its coordinating group. 12 women were involved. Each member arrived having read some 15 to 20 of the 10-page “national synthesis reports” sent in to the secretariat by 112 of the world’s bishops’ conferences and by Oriental churches. To ensure that particular perspectives were not lost, the make-up of the groups constantly shifted: first by continent, then by gender and then by ecclesial status. The report contains many supporting quotes from the national documents to ensure that it catches not just **what** matters had been discerned, but also **how** local people had expressed their opinions. Care was taken to consider the minority voices that risked getting lost in the focus on the celebrity issues, ensuring that all prophetic voices had been heard and all perspectives had been considered.

One participant commented that, at the end of the day, an account of what the Spirit was saying to the church was right there in the reports, in that “instinct of faith” in the voices pained by fragmentation and division, that longed for a maternal, embracing, patient, more capacious church, one that could gather in those left outside, one that was better capable of holding in tension difference and disagreement and that takes seriously the idea that all the baptized are called to mission and to sit at the table where decisions are discerned. Catholics have repeatedly expressed a desire for a more welcoming, inclusive Church that eradicates the misuse of power.

The document does not go deeply into all the issues raised. But leaves them hanging, noting the disagreements where they exist and inviting them to be wrestled with. The text gives expression to the desire for a future synodal way of proceeding in a global church that lives unity in diversity, adding that, “God is preparing something new, and we must collaborate.” The report, the “Working Document for the Continental Stage” of the synod, says that Catholics clearly want the role and vocation of women to be tackled urgently. They remain the majority of those who attend liturgy and participate in activities, whilst men are in a minority; yet most decision-making and governance roles are held by men.

The report found that one of the barriers to a more synodal Church is clericalism, a phenomenon which sees power concentrated in the hands of an elite group - lay or ordained. This must be eliminated so that all members of the Church, including priests and laity, can fulfil a common mission. Renewed forms of leadership — priestly, episcopal, religious and lay — should be relational and collaborative, with forms of authority capable of generating solidarity and co-responsibility.

The next stages of the synod will involve regional assemblies in February next year, the European one being in the Czech Republic on 5-12 February 2023. Every diocesan bishop must “arrange an ecclesial process of discernment” on the latest document, to be submitted to its national bishops’ conference, each of which must submit a report to their continental assembly. These will draft documents in February to be sent to the Holy See’s synod office to form the working document for a summit of bishops in Rome from 4-29 October 2023. This will no longer be the end of the process, as Pope Francis has recently decided that there will be a final concluding meeting in Rome a year later.

*You can download the full Document at:*

**[www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf](http://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf)**