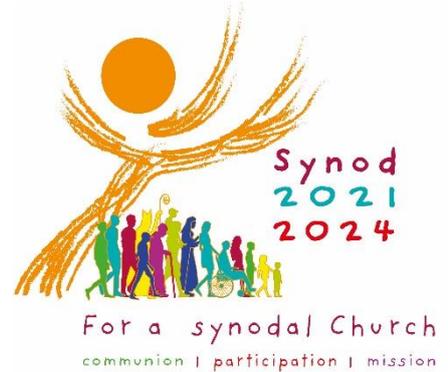




europäische allianz katholischer frauenverbände
european alliance of catholic women's organisations
alliance européenne d'organisations féminines catholiques



Response to the Document for the Continental Stage of the Synod



Voices from around Europe

Andante, the European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations

With the aim of making the voices of Catholic women heard at all stages of the synod, Andante organised two webinars, and the following document is our response.

We respond to the DCS as a group of women from many nations and traditions who gathered to share their reflections and now offer their insights for the next stage of the synodal journey.



After having read and prayed with the DCS, which intuitions resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent? Which experiences are new, or illuminating to you?

Reading and praying with the DCS we are moved by the level of engagement by dioceses across the world, and the extent to which the concerns and challenges revealed by the synodal process are common to Catholics of different cultures and continents.

The often expressed need for transformation in the life of the Church and its structures and relationships resonates with us. We value the opportunity this process has given us to speak and be heard, and to come together to share the joys and frustrations of our lives as Catholic women today.

Almost all dioceses raise the need of the full and equal participation of women in the Church, and this is linked to the necessity of establishing a new culture, of conversion, of new ways of being Church.

We share with others an expectation that the synodal process will bring about transformation at many levels: of relationships, of custom and practice, of canon law, and of structures that act as barriers to participation, to enlarging the tent.

Trust will be essential to this transformation.

In the Continental Stage control of the synodal process passes to the bishops. As the journey continues, we expect the bishops to remain faithful to the principle of full participation by the whole People of God in the synodal journey. The voices of women must not be suppressed.

Lay people, especially women, are often silent if they think they will not be heard, or have not been heard.



After having read and prayed with the DCS, what substantial tensions or divergences emerge as particularly important in your continent's perspective? Consequently, what are the questions or issues that should be addressed and considered in the next steps of the process?

In Europe some Bishop's Conferences and some dioceses have engaged well with the synodal process but others have not; many have made efforts to engage lay women and men, but some have not. This is a cause of concern.

For many people, and especially women, the parish is central to their faith and practice; as the synodal process moves towards Rome, the place of the parish in the life of the Church should not be forgotten. If synodality does not take root in the parish and the diocese, it will not take root at all.

The 'People of God' are still thought of as objects not agents, actors in their own right. Clergy and laity do not communicate well, and the knowledge, experience and skills of lay people are undervalued by clergy. We share our concern about a hierarchical top-down power of clergy to prevent or block without explanation whatever does not meet with their approval.

Tension between the contribution women make to the Church and the value placed on their contribution is an issue for us. The DCS notes that women are the majority in most congregations and are active in all kinds of works of spiritual guidance, mercy, service, pastoral care, catechetics, theological education and theology. Even so they are excluded from positions of responsibility and authority and denied a voice in decision making. This must change.

We expect that the Church will adopt language inclusive of both women and men.

The prophetic witness of women, both religious sisters and lay women, who are committed to being with people on the margins of Church and society may cause difficulties with the hierarchy. This practical wisdom learned through service to the poor enriches the Church and deserves respect and acknowledgement. At every level their professionalism and hands-on experience should inform the Church's thinking and decision making.

We regret that the DCS has little to say about climate change, and the impact it has on women, their families and communities, the importance of learning to live simply, and the role of Catholic thought about justice and peace. A truly Christian social and environmental teaching against violence, exploitation and destruction gives the Church a voice that matters in secular economic and social policy making.

We noted that Canon Law is not designed for a synodal Church. We believe that Canon law needs to be reformed, for example in the way it protects abusive priests but not those they abuse.

Respect for human rights and the common dignity of all should be part of the law of the Church. Renewal will be essential as the synodal Church develops; processes should be clear and transparent.

The abuse crisis continues to have a negative impact on the life and mission of the Church. Children, women and religious sisters continue to experience spiritual, sexual and economic abuse and this must be addressed by the bishops with courage and determination, as a matter of the greatest urgency. It is a public scandal and a pastoral disaster.

Tensions arise between the worldwide Church and local churches. The Church is rich in peoples and cultures and we expect that there will be respect for cultural diversity and local autonomy within the enlarged tent.



Looking at what emerges from the previous two questions, what are the priorities, recurring themes and calls to action that can be shared with other local Churches around the world and discussed during the First Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023?

The many vocations fulfilled by women in the Church must be made visible and acknowledged. Women in leadership must be valued for their work. The Church must respect the equal dignity of all the baptised and proclaim the common call to holiness with greater confidence.

Admitting women to the diaconate, providing appropriate formation and training to enable women to preach, and opening positions of authority to women with relevant qualifications and experience are recurring themes that would have a transformative impact on the Church.

We are aware of many testimonies from women who have a vocation to the diaconate or to priesthood. We propose that further discernment is necessary on the question of women and ordination.

We recognise that becoming a synodal Church involves a steep learning curve. New ways of working and relating will have to be discerned. Although this will take time, necessary changes should not be delayed; we expect to see evidence of real change emerge from the Synodal Assembly.

Synodality is not an easy process: if we commit to the synodal way we must accept that there will be mistakes and failures, and these will have to be addressed and overcome. The necessary training and formation for this should be an essential part of the synodal process.

It will be important to think through the financial implications of an inclusive Church with all posts open to laity; and to determine how resources can be used to support synodality.

Synodality is about extending the space of the tent. This has practical implications. Many questions remain for us about the exercise of authority in the Church, about power and influence, about who has the right to speak and vote and how to include women in decision making. We expect the Synodal Assembly to open the way to further reflection and discernment on these issues.

The Church awaits cultural transformation: the use of inclusive language, processes that are more receptive and empathetic, and a focus on healing relationships are all priorities for us, that will help to make the Church more truly maternal.

The response of the Synodal Assembly to the call and concerns of women will be the critical test of the synodal way.

February 2023

