

TOWARDS OCTOBER 2024

NZCBC Consultation

How can we be a synodal Church in mission?

BACKGROUND

The General Secretariat of the Synod's document *Towards October 2024* (11 December 2023) outlines the process for a local church consultation prior to the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly.

The objective of these new reflections is to identify the paths we can follow and the tools we might adopt in our different contexts and circumstances in order to enhance the unique contribution of each baptised person and of each Church in the one mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and his Gospel to the world.

Each local Church is invited to focus on those aspects that enable it to make a contribution in the light of its own situation, character and experience, sharing good practices that represent visible and concrete signs of synodality.

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*(Towards October 2024,
XVI Ordinary General Assembly Of The Synod Of Bishops)*

From "Amoris Laetitia"

An ecclesial renewal which cannot be deferred

I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: "All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion".

(Pope Francis, 2015)

THE PROCESS

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference has set out the method and timeline for this consultation, collating the fruits of the diocesan consultations and writing a summary national document (maximum eight pages) to be sent to Rome by 15 May. This material will contribute to the drafting of the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Second Session.

The consultation is about actions to be taken. It is not a critique of the Synthesis Report from the First Session. That report serves as a reference point for this process. This consultation is to be guided by the question:

“How can we be a synodal Church in mission?”

Local churches are asked to identify concrete actions that enable individuals and groups to make their unique contribution to the Church’s mission, guided by the following questions:

- *How can we enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the People of God?*
- *What ways of relating, structures, processes of discernment and decision-making with regard to mission make it possible to recognise, shape, and promote co-responsibility?*
- *What ministries and participatory bodies can be renewed or introduced to better express this co-responsibility?*

Within the Synthesis Report, reference can be made more specifically to Chapters 8-12, 16 and 18.

(NZCBC, 30 January 2024)

NZCBC CONSULTATION: NEXT STEPS

- Specific groups are being invited to engage with the material summarised in this document from the perspective of their particular role and ministry.
- It is recommended that each group engage in the process of ‘Conversation in the Spirit’ to prayerfully listen, discern and respond to the overarching question: *How can we be a synodal Church in mission?*
- It is our preference that, whenever possible, these ‘Conversations in the Spirit’ are locally led. This helps groups gain confidence in a process that we hope will be adopted at every level of consultation in the Church. Should a group need guidance or support, please let us know as help with that process is available.
- All feedback should be sent to the NZCBC Secretariat for collation. Please ensure that your feedback is under half of an A4 page (300 words). If using the ‘Conversation in the Spirit’ method, the feedback needs to include only the final round – two or three clear common threads (and any key divergences) that emerged from the conversation.

Send your feedback secretariat@nzcbc.org.nz no later than **Friday 5th April 2024**.

For more information or support, contact Damian Dempsey:

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8. CHURCH IS MISSION

The Church exists for mission. All the baptised, through different charisms and vocations and in different roles and functions, are called and nourished by the Holy Spirit to form one body in Christ (1 Cor 4-31). They are all disciples, all missionaries and co-responsible in mission.

If the mission is a grace involving all the Church, the lay faithful contribute in a vital way to advancing that mission in all areas and in the ordinary situations of every day. Wherever they are present, they are called to witness to Jesus Christ in daily life and to explicitly share the faith with others. The lay faithful are also increasingly present and active in service within Christian communities. All of these contributions are indispensable to the mission of the Church; for this reason, the acquisition of necessary competences should be provided for.

In their immense variety, the charisms of the laity represent distinct gifts to the Church from the Holy Spirit that must be called forth, recognized, and fully appreciated.

Matters for Consideration

j) Vatican II teachings state that the mission of the laity is out in the world. However, the reality is that nowadays, lay people are more and more involved in pastoral roles and ministries within the Church itself – on a parish, diocesan and universal level. Theological reflection and canonical provision are needed to clarify that the mission of the laity is both out in the world and within the Church, and that the latter is not reserved for the ordained alone.

k) Persons with disabilities have much to contribute to the mission of the baptised. We want to better value their rich human experience and the huge contribution they make to the work of evangelisation. We need to be more aware of their experience of suffering, marginalisation and discrimination, and find ways of including them in meaningful ways within the Christian community.

l) Pastoral structures need to be re-organized so that lay charisms and ministries are recognised, called forth and fully utilised in the outward mission of a synodal Church. Church communities need to be guided so that these charisms and ministries are channelled for mission rather than maintenance.

Proposals

n) We need to think differently and creatively to establish ministries that are relevant to our local Church and the society we live, with a particular intention to involve young people. We need to find ways of expanding existing liturgical ministries to meet current needs.

9. WOMEN IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

In Christ, women and men are clothed with the same baptismal dignity (Gal 3:28) and receive equally the variety of gifts of the Spirit. We are called together into a communion of loving, noncompetitive relationships in Christ, and to a co-responsibility to be expressed at every level of the Church's life.

The Assembly asks that we avoid repeating the mistake of talking about women as an issue or a problem. Instead, we desire to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue together, order to understand more deeply the horizon of God's project, that sees them together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion and competition.

Matters for Consideration

i) Churches all over the world have expressed a clear request that the active contribution of women would be recognised and valued, and that their pastoral leadership increase in all areas of the Church's life and mission. In order to give better expression to the gifts and charisms of all and to be more responsive to pastoral needs, how can the Church include more women in existing roles and ministries? If new ministries are required, who should discern these, at what levels and in what ways?

Proposals

l) Local churches are encouraged to extend their work of listening, accompaniment and care to the most marginalised women in their social contexts.

m) 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.

p) 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.

q) 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.

r) 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

The Church's charismatic dimension is made manifest in the rich and varied forms of consecrated life, which demonstrate the beauty of discipleship and holiness in Christ through prayer, service, community life, the contemplative life, synodal practices, discernment, and mission.

With equal gratitude, we recognize the seeds of renewal in lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities which are a precious sign of the maturation of the co-responsibility of all the baptized. They hold particular value because of their experience in promoting communion among different vocations, the impetus with which they proclaim the Gospel, their proximity to those on the margins economically and socially and through their promotion of the common good. They are often models of synodal communion and of participation for mission.

Matters for Consideration

f) The variety of charismatic expressions in the Church highlights the People of God's commitment to being a prophetic presence in the world, and to providing contemporary culture with a deeper sense of the spiritual life. We need a deeper understanding of how consecrated life, lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities place their charisms at the service of communion and mission, encouraging the universal call to holiness through their prophetic presence.

i) Representatives of lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities need to be included in Church councils and advisory bodies, so that their life and work can be in unity with and in support of the mission of the local Church.

11. DEACONS AND PRIESTS IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

The Synodal Assembly wishes, first and foremost, to express to priests and deacons a deep sense of gratitude. Aware that they may experience loneliness and isolation, it encourages Christian communities to support them with prayer, friendship, and collaboration.

In a synodal Church, ordained ministers are called to live their service to the People of God in a disposition of proximity to people, welcoming and listening to all, while cultivating a deep personal spirituality and a life of prayer. Above all, they are required to reconsider the exercise of authority, modelling it upon Jesus, who, "though he was in the form of God, [...] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:6-7).

The distortion of clericalism, which views the vocational call as a privilege rather than a service, needs to be challenged from the earliest stages of formation by ensuring close contact with the People of God and through concrete service-learning experiences among those most in need. The contribution of families of origin, and the Christian community, within which a young man's vocation is fostered, as well as that of other families that accompany his growth, cannot be underestimated.

Matters for Consideration

e) Within the context of the formation of all the baptised for service in a synodal Church, the formation of deacons and priests requires special attention. The request has been widely expressed at this Assembly that seminaries and other programmes of priestly formation remain connected to the daily life of the community. We need to avoid the risks of formalism and ideology that lead to authoritarian attitudes and impede genuine vocational growth. Revision to programmes of formation requires extensive discussion and consideration.

Proposals

k) 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.

12. THE BISHOP IN ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

The bishop is, in his Church, the one primarily responsible for proclaiming the Gospel and for the liturgy. He guides the Christian community and promotes pastoral care of those experiencing poverty and defence of the most vulnerable. As the visible principle of unity, he has, in particular, the task of discerning and coordinating the different charisms and ministries sent forth by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the common good of the community. This ministry is realized in a synodal manner when governance is accompanied by co-responsibility, preaching by listening to the faithful People of God, and sanctification and celebration of the liturgy by humility and conversion.

The conviction with which the bishop himself adopts a synodal approach and the style by which he exercises authority will influence decisively how priests and deacons, lay men and women, and those in consecrated life, participate in the synodal process. The bishop is called to be an example of synodality for all.

Matters for Consideration

i) Integral to a synodal Church is ensuring a culture of transparency and respect for the procedures established for the protection of minors and vulnerable people. It is necessary to develop further structures dedicated to the prevention of abuse.

Proposals

k) 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.

16. TOWARDS A LISTENING AND ACCOMPANYING CHURCH

The experience of the synod so far is best expressed by the word “Listening”. Listening is a deeply human reality, a dynamic of reciprocity in which each contributes to the other's journey while receiving a contribution to one's own. Being deeply listened to is an experience of affirmation and recognition of dignity and is a powerful way of engaging people and communities.

The dynamic of conversations in the Spirit, which obliges each person to recognize his or her own limitations and the partiality of his or her point of view, opens the possibility of listening to the voice of the Spirit of God that speaks to those beyond the borders of the ecclesial community, and can initiate a journey of change and conversion.

Young people have especially requested to be listened to and accompanied, confirming the need for a preferential option for young people. Many others who feel hurt, neglected, or excluded by the Church need to be listened to with special attention and sensitivity. People who suffer the many different forms of poverty, exclusion and marginalization within our unequal societies also turn to the Church in search of love, listening and accompaniment.

Respectful listening without judging is a prerequisite for walking together in search of God's will. Listening means adopting Jesus' attitude toward the people he encountered (cf. Phil. 2:6-11). The Church wants to listen to everyone, not just those who can most easily make their voices heard but also and especially those who, for various reasons, may find it more difficult to express themselves freely in public or ecclesial spaces.

Proposals

n) What would need to change so that those who feel excluded can 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.

o) 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.

p) 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.

18. STRUCTURES FOR PARTICIPATION

All the baptised are co-responsible for mission, each according to his or her vocation, competence and experience. Therefore, all contribute to imagining and discerning steps to reform Christian communities and the Church as a whole.

The purpose of synodality is mission. Co-responsibility is for mission: this attests that we are truly gathered in the name of Jesus and makes the gathering fruitful. The co-responsibility of all in mission must be the criterion underlying the structuring of Christian communities and the entire local church. (Lumen Gentium & Evangelii Gaudium)

The authority of the Word of God must inspire every meeting of participatory bodies, every consultation and every decision-making process. It is necessary that gatherings draw meaning and strength from the Eucharist and takes place in the light of the Word heard and shared in prayer.

The composition of the various councils for the discernment and decision-making of a synodal missionary community must provide for the presence of men and women who have an apostolic disposition, distinguished not by their frequent presence in church, but by a genuine evangelical witness in ordinary life.

Matters for Consideration

e) It is important to ask how we can promote participation in the various councils when many feel they are not up to the task. Synodality grows when each member is involved in processes and decision-making for the mission of the Church.

f) In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis entrusted the Church to make changes to the composition of participatory bodies, this task cannot be further delayed. The participation of baptised men and women living in complex situations of loving relationship "*can be expressed in different ecclesial services, which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion currently practised in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surmounted*" (299). This discernment also concerns their exclusion from parish and diocesan community participation bodies as experienced in some local churches.

g) From the perspective of the uniqueness of ecclesial communion: how can we interweave the consultative and deliberative aspects of synodality? Given the variety of charismatic and ministerial gifts of the People of God, how do we integrate the tasks of advising, discerning, and deciding in the various participatory bodies.

Proposals

h) 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.

i) 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.