

**Responses to the document
for the continental phase of the Synod**



**Diverse women's voices from all over
Europe**




The Catholic Women's Council is a worldwide network of Roman Catholic women and women's associations working for the full recognition of the dignity and equality of women in the Church. The aim is to make the voices of Catholic women heard in all stages of the Synod. Therefore, together with the European women's organisation Andante, we have organised two webinars to invite as many women and women's organisations as possible to find their own answers based on their experiences. The following document aims to give an insight into these experiences and demands. We invite all interested women to find their own reports and answers.

We respond to the DCS as women from many nations and traditions who came together to share their reflections and offer their suggestions for the next phase of the synodal process and while we all share a similar vision, we respect the fact that different backgrounds and cultures can mean different perspectives.

The demands, concerns and visions of women from across Europe were collected in breakout rooms and are intended to bring together as many people as possible for an informative, honest and inclusive dialogue, without prejudice and without judgement.



After reading and praying with the DCS, what intuitions resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent? What experiences are new or enlightening for you?

-  The DCS highlights the extent of diocesan engagement around the world and the scale of the concerns and challenges that the synodal process brings to light and that are common to Catholics of different cultures and continents.
-  The often expressed **need for change in the life of the church** as well as in church structures and interdependence resonates strongly with us. We support the opportunity this process has given us to share together our joys and frustrations in our lives as Catholic women.
-  It should be noted, however, that this document women are once again attributes purely **sentimental actions** to women "women love, women are sad". Women are an **active part of** the Church and they are ready and willing to **exercise their authority** "without asking permission". "*Belonging is still seen as a term reserved for the male sphere, while women are often left with only the word "sharing".*"

- ✈️ The issue of **abuse** (No.34) is still addressed from the **perspective of the church hierarchy**. Abuse must be acknowledged as a crime and the victim and those affected must be placed at the centre.
- ✈️ In almost all dioceses, the need for **full and equal participation of women** in the Church is addressed, which is linked to the need to create a new culture, a conversion and new ways of being Church.
- ✈️ Women share with others the expectation that the synodal process will bring about **change on many levels**: in relationships, in habits and practices, in church law and in structures that stand in the way of participation and 'widening the tent'.
- ✈️ Trust in **equal fraternal togetherness** will be an essential prerequisite for this change.
- ✈️ In the continental phase, control over the synodal process passes to the bishops. We expect the bishops to remain faithful to the **principle of full participation of the whole people of God** in the synodal process as they move forward. Women's voices must not be suppressed and outsourced.
- ✈️ Lay people, especially women, often remain silent when they think they are not being heard or have not been heard, and **listening** runs the risk of remaining **sterile** if **no concrete decisions follow**.



Having read and prayed with the DCS, what major tensions or divergences emerge as most important from the perspective of your continent? Consequently, what are the issues or themes that should be addressed and considered in the next steps of the process?

- ✈️ In Europe, some Bishops' Conferences and some dioceses have engaged well with the synodal process and included women and men, we recognise this. However, we also learn that many Bishops' Conferences have not yet fully engaged in this **process of sharing as brother and sisters**. Many women ask themselves the question: "*Who will be allowed to **accompany the synodal process** in the future and who will **control** the leadership in the Church and in the synod*". This is a cause of concern for women.
- ✈️ The parish is a central place for many people to develop their faith; as the synodal process moves towards Rome, the place of the parish in the life of the Church should not be forgotten so that synodality finds itself at all levels of Church life. If synodality does not take root equally in **parishes**, in **dioceses** and in the **universal Church**, it will not take root at all.

- **The "people of God" are still seen as objects rather than actors, as agents in their own right.** Clergy and laity often do not communicate on an equal basis, and the knowledge, experience and skills of the laity are not sufficiently valued by the clergy. We share the concerns of many people about the **hierarchical, top-down power of the clergy**, who prevent or block without explanation everything that does not meet with their approval.
- Women's great **frustration with the discrepancy** between the contribution women make to the church and the value placed on their contribution is an important issue. The DCS notes that women are the majority in most congregations and are active in all kinds of works of spiritual accompaniment, care, ministry, pastoral care, catechesis, theological education and theology. **Yet they are excluded from positions of responsibility and leadership and have no say in decision-making.** This needs to change. *"Failure to recognise the authority of women undermines the entire authority of the Church."*
- Women expect the church to use language that is inclusive of both women and men.
- Women, both religious and lay, give a **prophetic witness by advocating** for all people in society. This often leads to difficulties with the hierarchy. The experience gained through the multitude of services rendered enriches the institutional church and the **pastoral care rendered** deserves respect and recognition in the sacramental church. *There should be no hierarchisation of the sacraments or sacramental acts (baptising without chrism).* At all levels, the professionalism of women and their experiences should be incorporated into the **thinking, decisions and actions of** the church.
- *"The spirit of time needs to be reassessed: There needs to be an openness to needs."* Many women regret that the DCS has little to say about climate change and its impact on women, their families and communities, and the role of Catholic thinking on justice and peace. A truly **Christian social and environmental teaching that opposes violence and exploitation of women and destruction gives the Church a voice that matters in secular economic and social policy.**
- **Canon law** is showing itself more and more **unsuitable for a synodal church** and should be reformed in the sense of participatory involvement and a focus on the rights of the faithful.
- **Respect for human rights and the common dignity of all people** should be **part of church law.** *"Clerical power relations prevent (this) and promote dependencies and spiritual as well as sexual abuse."* As the synodal church develops, renewal will be essential; processes must be clear and transparent and people's rights of self-determination must be valued more.

- The abuse crisis continues to have a negative impact on the life and mission of the Church. **Women and religious sisters continue to be affected by spiritual, sexual and economic abuse** and the bishops must address this problem with courage, determination and the utmost urgency. This is a public scandal and a pastoral disaster.
- Tensions are increasingly arising between the universal Church and the local Churches. The Church is rich in peoples and cultures and we expect **cultural diversity and local autonomy to be** respected within the expanded tent.



What priorities, recurring themes and calls to action emerge from the previous two questions and can be shared with other local churches around the world and discussed at the first session of the Synod Assembly in October 2023?

- Women experience a variety of **vocations**, and the many **testimonies of** women called to the diaconate and priesthood must be made visible and appreciated. Women in **leadership positions** must be valued for their work. The Church must respect the **equal dignity of all the baptised** and proclaim with greater confidence the common call to devotion to the sacraments.
- The admission of women to all **ordained ministries**, the provision of adequate education and training to enable women to **preach**, and the **opening of leadership positions** to women with appropriate qualifications and experience are recurring themes that would have a transformative effect on the church.
- New ways of cooperation and relationships must be found and we are aware that the transition to a synodal church is a difficult path. Nevertheless, the necessary changes must not be postponed and women must always be put off until later. Women do not want to spend their whole lives fighting for their equality, we expect the **Synodal Assembly** to bring about **real change**.
- Synodality is not an easy process and mistakes and failures have to be addressed and overcome. The necessary readiness for **constructive cooperation** requires preparation and training and should be an essential part of the synodal process. This also includes the development and definition of a different understanding of the church.
- An inclusive church in which all ministries are open to lay people, needs transparent financial structures in which the resources to support synodality are determined jointly and professionally. The considerable imbalance in budgets in many countries needs to be redressed.

➤ Synodality has practical implications. For us, there are demands related to the exercise of authority in the church, power and influence, who has the **right to speak and vote**, and how women can be included in decisions. We expect the Synod Assembly to pave the way for **decisions on** these issues.

➤ "*The diversity of all BELIEVERS MAKES the church more lively*": The church is waiting for a cultural shift: using inclusive language and procedures that are more receptive and empathetic, and focusing on healing relationships are all priorities for us that will help make the church truly fraternal.

The Synod Assembly's response to the call and concerns of women will be the decisive test for the further synodal journey.