



CWC Report on their Discussions on Synodality and what it means for Women.

The Catholic Women's Council has been engaged in understanding and discussions on the issues of women concerning the Synod on Synodality ever since Pope Francis opened the process in October 2021. We have conducted two series of Listening Sessions. The first in 2022/ 2023 and the second during the interim period of the Synod of 2023 and 2024. The process of preparation and the actual Synod of 2023 gave numerous reform organizations of the People of God worldwide the opportunity to network and discover we have similar concerns.

Equality for Women in Church

Women in the Roman Catholic Church are excluded from all ordained ministries and experience incredible resistance when attempting to claim their equality and dignity.

What Women Expect

- **Equality for Women and other genders.**

The binary anthropology in the Catholic Church that places men over women does injustice not only to women but also to all LGBTQ+ persons. It creates a hierarchy among human persons, with men controlling and dominating all spheres of life of the People of God.

To achieve true synodality, this has to change so that everyone's baptismal equality is recognized. Regrettably, the first session of the Synod in 2023 failed to address this critical issue, instead reinforced the subordination of women in both the 2023 Synthesis Report and the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the 2024 Synod, which emphasized complementarity and reciprocity between men and women.

Women worldwide are demanding full equality in the Catholic Church, which means opening all ordained ministries to women.

- **An end to the stalling tactics and delaying strategies regarding women's ordination**

The exclusion of women from ordination (canon 1024); Church governance (cc.129 and 274§1), and from preaching the homily (c.767§1) are discriminatory and contrary to Jesus' inclusion of all, and deprive the Church of the benefits of gender diversity and balance in leadership.

Women repeatedly report that they are dependent on the goodwill of their respective bishop or parish priest to lighten their load of work. This leads to situations where the charisms of women are exploited for the clergy's own goals. In many remote parts of the world, and places where priests are not available, women are running parishes, conducting Eucharistic Liturgies, baptisms, marriages, funerals, preparation for sacraments, etc. Women preach with biblical depth and authenticity, provide pastoral care, and lead congregations and communities, doing the job of a Parish priest without any ordination.

It is evident that a synodal church cannot exist without the charisms of women. This great wealth of women's service can no longer be ignored in a synodal community.

Women expect the synod to provide concrete responses and visible signs that the church is advocating for their voices and rights.

The exclusion of discussion of the ordination of women at the 2024 Synodal Assembly contradicts the synodal understanding of *todas, todos, todes*.

- **Acceptance and reception of the theological, ecclesiological and social research on women in ministry**

We demand acceptance and reception of the theological, ecclesiological and social research on women in ministry done by theologians, at numerous conferences, meetings and seminars that have been organised in collaboration with universities and research institutions. These demonstrate a profound theological understanding of the subject. There are no doctrinal reasons against the ordination of women as permanent deacons. In 1997 the International Theological Commission concluded their study affirming that the Church can restore the female diaconate.

- **Women call for an end to discriminatory teachings and language**

Women's organisations around the world denounce the misogynistic teachings, traditions, structures, practices and language that not only marginalise women but exploit and abuse their charisms and vocations. The use of the male gender as generic in Church language marginalizes and renders women invisible. Teachings that position men as heads, leaders, and in authority in all aspects of faith life contribute to the prevalence of violence against women and vulnerable groups, including domestic violence.

Recognising the *sensus fidei fidelium*

We have experienced a worldwide recognition and acceptance of the ordination of women as deacons and priests. In Asia, Africa and Latin America where the Small Christian Community (SCC) structures have been established, women have emerged as respected and appreciated leaders within their communities. Believers experience women (both lay and religious) in their communities as builders of community, community outreach, providers of education and health services. In some cases women even run parishes. Nevertheless, they are not allowed to administer the sacraments of the anointing of the sick or absolution. This discriminatory practice is deeply hurtful and unacceptable. People accept and appreciate the ministry of women in communities. We demand that the Synod recognize this.

- **Change in Structures for inclusion and equality**

The current church structure is inherently unjust to women as decisions concerning women's lives and spirituality are being taken by celibate men that affect the health and well-being of women all over the world. We demand the inclusion of women in Church structure to enable them to be among those who make decisions.

As long as all pastoral and theological decisions are dependent on ordination, there is no real equality or participation for women in the church. Women are dependent on the goodwill and exercise of power of the priest or bishop and must submit to their will in all decisions. Due to the hierarchical structure of the church, which is based on male ordination, women are excluded from the internal power circles – they are relegated to the status of servants.

This power imbalance is used to perpetuate the subordination of women in the Church and keep them out of leadership, despite Jesus' empowerment of women during his life on earth, particularly at the time of his resurrection. A synodal Church requires a change in the structures where women participate equally in decision-taking, not just in the decision-making processes.

Conclusion

In conclusion we stress that the role of women is key to the synodal process and should be discussed as a whole and not fragmented into discussions of women deacons, women in decision-making, women needing care, etc. To disregard the question of women's equality especially their access to ordination to the priesthood, is to exclude women from synodality and ignore the voice of the 'sensus fidei' of the people of God.

We, the Catholic Women's Council want to be part of a synodal Church that "walks together", listens, and dialogues. We therefore, invite everyone to "speak with courage and candor" (preparatory document p. 20). It is in this spirit that we place our appeal for due consideration of women's position of full equality in the Church to be considered at the Synod of 2024.