



EUROPEAN LAY FORUM - SYNOD 2023 - and the TEN NUCLEI

Pope Francis described the synodal church in this way:

“A synodal Church is a listening Church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.”

We thank Pope Francis for starting the Synodal Process for the whole Church.

ELF encouraged the Presidents and members of the National Lay Committees to take part in discussions of the “Ten Nuclei Document” within their diocesan structures and their national committees which are represented at ELF.

This is a compilation of the responses to the Ten Nuclei received from the member associations of ELF and enriched by discussions during the ELF Study Assembly in June 2022. It was edited by the ELF Steering Committee and will be sent as a European laity response to

the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops

the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

the Commission of the European Episcopal Conferences (COMECE)

the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE)

and all the lay forums within the European Lay Forum.

Responses to the Ten Thematic Nuclei that were Explored

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

Synodality starts from the awareness that we need to learn to see different kinds of people journeying together with us on the road - some walk with us for a long time, some only a short distance – we meet them in our families, at work, both believers and non-believers; in the parish, sometimes anonymously in a tram, a sad person in the street. We should try to communicate directly with the people but also about the people with God. Communication is important on a common journey.

With many people in a parish there is a need for communication. It should be a community of co-equals that travel together. It is the quality of the journey that matters.

We must include and give more space to women and young people and also more attention to people who are marginalized, vulnerable, and on the periphery of society, lonely people and those who look for some spiritual inspiration, but do not express these needs inside the Church. Because of the way some representatives of the Church handle(d) sexual abuse cases many people are annoyed and leave the Church.

It is very important in small communities, where people can be approached easily, to be able to accept others, to take care of each other and interact with each other in a familiar way - open to take into account their needs and express welcoming and mutual support by prayer.

It is important to connect with today's culture and discover the signs of the times in the world around us. We ought to respond by being a living Gospel to be authentic witnesses of hope; we are all called to evangelise as Christians, we should not live in a closed community. A journey of faith is always going out.

II. LISTENING

The Church has always had to listen to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and learn from Jesus the art of communication.

Listening to and speaking to the people should serve to form a better community, to form better relations. Throughout our lives, we should always be ready to learn the art of communication, to learn not just to hear, but to listen with our heart. Let us also be sensitive to the inner voice in us.

We should not be afraid of listening to people from outside our comfort zone. Their wording can be harsh and very different from what we would like to hear. We owe it to listen to the people with little faith and to the people with problems in their lives, especially to those who got hurt by the Church. We must ask ourselves the reasons why people move away. We must listen to young people and the victims of sexual abuse.

We stand up for justice for men and women in the Church and consistently put it into practice. We oppose any discrimination in the Church and give space to all people in their diversity and uniqueness. We need to be more proactive. We should never strive for superiority or distance.

We live in a Church in which we consult and decide together according to our services and charisms. There is a need to give more opportunities and action to the laity, encouraging their participation and welcoming their initiatives.

We translate all documents into concrete action: in our dioceses and parishes, in schools and charitable institutions - in all places of Church life.

Formation is important within our Catholic Church, particularly with regard to interpersonal communication.

May there be more and more spaces of welcome and deep listening, where we can grow, share, be formed, celebrate together, improving the participation and collaboration of all.

III. SPEAKING OUT

We Christians are not enough used to communicating as believing persons. Therefore we as Christians and our organisations should stand up and express our opinions and communicate what we find true and important even if it could bring us some risk. We understand this as our personal contribution to the common good.

Laymen and laywomen should be invited more to speak out within the Church structures.

One of the conditions of speaking out is that others listen with an open mind and heart. Mutual confidence and trust are basic, if we want to share in an honest way.

A free and authentic style of communication is only possible if a central reference is maintained. The central reference in the Church are the teachings of Christ and those of the Church and the core and substantial message of Christ must not be compromised.

In a world of rapid dynamism of the media, every form of communication must be applied to reach the people. That includes not only the regular gospel teachings in the churches, but also ensuring appropriate representation in both the print media and the digital channels of communications as well as in politics. The Church must go to the people wherever they are and spread the Good News of salvation in the appropriate language and media, understandable for the people.

It is important to differentiate between different levels in society and the Church. On the national level it is important to have high-ranked and well-known personalities to express Catholic views on ethical questions such as peace and war, all questions concerning the protection of life, marriage and family, climate change etc.

IV. CELEBRATING

Liturgical celebration can inspire action and stand at the beginning of decisions. Whether many participants of a spiritual reunion are included in the liturgy depends on the local conditions. Often Sunday celebrations are the only opportunity for building community.

In general, the laity is being more and more invited to take an active part in celebrating masses. There are places where only ordained priests and male altar servers run the liturgy, but there are also places where most duties are done by lay people, including women reading the gospel and preaching. The participation of lay people in the liturgy should be one of our focal points in the Synodal Process. It includes, for instance, allowing the lay people to participate in the preaching at mass. The training of laity in various ministries is needed.

The role of women in the church should be reassessed, aiming at breaking the barriers for women in the Church and enhancing proper participation of women and men in the liturgical life of the church.

The lockdown experience has led us to a broader experience of liturgical celebration; awareness of variety could be beneficial to the Church.

Communities need to search for new ways for the catechesis of adults.

V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

There is a need for more balance of responsibility between clerical and lay members in the Church. All faithful have a mission and are co-responsible at several levels. Clergy and laity walk together. Yet, clerics are often disproportionately represented in the Church organisations. The hierarchical structure of the Church should not be used as a block to the Synodal Process. We cannot have hierarchy without involvement of laity - we need each other.

Thus, it is important to reassess the role of priests, what is their essential role. We long to have bishops and priests contented with their role. We long for an open, friendly and direct communication between bishops and their priests, bishops and their laity, priests and their laity.

We need to have an open dialogue with bishops and their conferences to discuss the role(s) of women and men in the Church.

People witness to their faith in what they do, in the choices they make in daily life. People active in society (in politics, culture etc.) should have more support from the whole Church (hierarchy, laity, and organisations).

By baptism we all share in the priesthood of Christ. Christians were given the responsibility of evangelization by Christ, to preach the Good News of salvation to all ends of the earth, armed by the discernment of the Holy Spirit, the Divine Counsellor. Each baptized person has his/her own way of performing the mission of the Church according to his/her position in society or the Church.

We feel that this aspect of faith has been greatly diminished for many Catholics in our lifetime, partly because of the decline and the reduced numbers in Catholic organisations.

Without group support it is harder to be a missionary. We realize however that some traditions in the Church can constitute a hindrance for evangelization.

Catholic schools are very important in the mission; therefore, they should also act in a synodal way to become Catholic dialogue schools. They are often beacons of light recognized by many outside the Church, carrying forward their good work should be encouraged.

VI. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

We must create permanent platforms of dialogue, to make the tradition of dialogue a continuous process in the Church. Engagement in dialogue, both in politics and in other aspects of society that affect faith and ethics, should be encouraged by Church members. It is necessary to deepen the dialogue between faith and culture.

We have to use a language that is close to the people and use it in dialogue that is nearer to social reality. Language must not be ecclesiastical or unintelligible to the majority of people.

Parishes need to cherish the communion between the diverse Christian lay vocations (Christians belonging to different ecclesial movements and others who do not).

It is important to identify people who can act as bridges to other groups. We need to find spaces for encounter, to listen actively, to shed old safety nets and to enter into the others' concerns.

There should be regular dialogue with Catholics in the neighbouring countries through their various existing structures of communication and inter-diocesan dialogue.

We need to further develop the dialogue with other religions, such as the Muslim and the Jewish communities, to enhance mutual respect, tolerance and co-existence in the society. The central idea is to enhance both Christian and religious ecumenism, for a peaceful society.

Significant Catholic newspapers and social media can help in the dialogue. Importance should also be given to testimony.

There is a need for the formation and training of people in charge - if they have skills, they still need training in using them. This applies to priests and bishops and lay people in management roles and also in leadership, because a synodal church needs a new kind of leadership. There must be continuous adult Christian formation and training for dialogue.

VII. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

Ecumenism should be an integral part of the Church. There are positive tendencies to work together on common projects rather than focusing on our differences, although the differences we have should not be neglected.

There exist meetings with many non-Catholic religious groups in an institutional way. Many contacts run on a personal level. Both political as well as spiritual questions must be taken into consideration, for example prayers for peace and political issues.

Where necessary, church buildings should be shared and used for common worship and liturgy.

The fruits drawn from "journeying together" are enormous. There are benefits of communication with fellow Christians and of sharing ideas and visions. We have to try to learn from the many examples of good practice.

VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

Lay people have to be engaged in teams and receive the responsibility for the pastoral field in the pastoral unit. Lay people and clerics should behave in a complementary way, being co-equal in their roles of responsibility, no side dominating.

We should create circumstances where everyone can bring in their talents. We deeply hope that the Synodal Process will strengthen the role of the synodal organs (such as parish councils, parish/diocesan pastoral councils) in the Church structures.

With the Synodal Process we experience a new way of common discussion to achieve a good structure in the Church. It needs a change of behaviour and mentality, which is true both for clerics as well as for the laity. Reflection on how we meet and decide in our teams and how we learn to discern together is needed.

There should be teamwork on the parish level and lay people encouraged to become leaders of parishes. No group can have a monopoly of deciding what to do in Church.

IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

Discernment is a great way for the Church to check itself, to become attuned to listening to God's voice guiding it and to plot a realistic path to the future.

Taking the time for spiritual discernment may not come naturally when we are used to quick and predictable decision-making and decision-taking. It requires patience, humility and letting go of control. In short, it's the opposite to the way how many operate today. We have to learn to work together in a more synodal way.

Spiritual discernment can be challenging for the 21st-century Church. The process can last from a few months to a couple of years. However, when done right, discernment is both practical and liberating. It means turning everything – including one's biases and anxieties – over to God and letting the Holy Spirit take the wheel. Discernment can bring church members closer together, while putting them in-step with God's vision for their Church.

We have to be aware of appropriate methods of discerning. In some questions the best thing might be to try certain ways of power sharing and evaluate afterwards. It is important to discuss the ideas in many parishes. A synodal Church is always aware of the Holy Spirit being with Her.

We need concrete tools and ways to proceed, and guides, coaches, creative instruments to be developed - learning by doing.

X. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

The goal is not first of all a text with conclusions for Rome, but the experience of journeying together is far more important. The goal is growing into being a synodal Church. Looking to the future, what could be the next step or the next milestone to take as a National Lay Forum and as the European Lay Forum.

We don't want the Synodal Process to stop, but want a synodal way to stay the common way as to how the Church lives. We need to continue developing ourselves in synodality. There is a vital need to meet in groups at local, diocesan, national and European levels.

The aim is developing a different culture of behaviour which acts more according to the Bible and respects everybody as the image of God. This concerns the liturgy as well as management and leadership of the Church.

