

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

For the First Session
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An Introduction to the Synod's Guide for the First Assembly of the Synod

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My presentation will focus solely on the content of the [Synod's Working document](#). I have focused on the key issues identified by the local consultations held at St Carthage's Parish, in Melbourne (before Covid) for both the Plenary Council held in Sydney last September and the consultations we were part of for the continental stage of the Bishops Synod process to be held in Rome in October this year.

Priority groups and issues identified by parishioners (many of you here tonight) are highlighted in the document. These include the role of women, the church's engagement with the poor and marginalised, Laudato Si and the Church's response to climate change, formation of priests and the laity, and governance.

The working document covers all these critical issues under the three priorities '**communion, mission and participation**'. These concepts provide the three-part structure of the Synod Working Document containing a series of statements of the priorities identified in the continental stage submissions to the synod. These statements are followed by questions for reflection.

For example, in the first part of the document -A Communion that radiates, on **the poor**, the working document states:

Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor" (EG 187). This implies a willingness to take a stand alongside the most marginalised in public debate, lending a voice to their cause and denouncing situations of injustice and discrimination whilst seeking to avoid complicity with those responsible for injustice.

And on **Climate change** it states:

Caring for our common home calls for shared action. The solution to many problems, such as climate change, calls for the commitment of the whole human

family. Working together to care for our common home already provides a context for encounter and collaboration with members of other Churches and ecclesial Communities, with believers of other religions and with people of goodwill. This commitment requires us to act simultaneously on a plurality of levels: catechesis and pastoral work, promotion of better lifestyles, and management of the Church's assets (real estate and financial).

What a synodal Church means comes through in the above statement. A synodal church is a church that collaborates and walks and works with other faiths/religions and people of good will for the common good. It works at number of levels - local, regional, national, and global with the church's resources used for the good of people and the earth.

The first part of the document also discusses and recognises marginalised people such as **migrants** in the following statement:

Migratory movements are a sign of our time, and "migrants are a 'paradigm' able to shed light on our times". Their presence constitutes a particular call to the Catholic Faithful to walk together. They represent an invitation to create links with Churches in the migrants' countries of origin, also representing a chance to experience the variety of the Church, including importantly through the diaspora of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

The need for peace and reconciliation as a focus of the Church is addressed in this way:

A synodal Church can offer a prophetic witness to a fragmented and polarised world, especially when its members are committed to walking together with others for the building of the common good. In places marked by deep conflict, this requires the ability to be agents of reconciliation and artisans of peace.

In relation to being a genuine welcoming church particularly for **marginalised people** the document is clear about what needs to be done. The Working Document states that the final documents of the Continental Assemblies often mention those who do not feel accepted in the Church, such as the divorced and remarried, people in polygamous marriages, or LGBTQ+ Catholics. These reports also note how racial, tribal, ethnic, class or caste-based discrimination, also present in the People of God, leads some to feel less important or welcome in the community. Also mentioned are 'widespread reports of a variety of practical and cultural barriers that exclude persons with disabilities, which must be overcome'.

The Working Document also highlights that 'the poorest to whom the Good News is primarily addressed are too often on the margins of Christian communities (for example, migrants and refugees, street children, homeless persons, victims of human trafficking, and others)'.

The seven key questions for the participants in the First Assembly on how the Church should respond to the exclusion of the marginalised are:

1) How can we restore proximity and caring relationships as the core of the Church's mission, "walking with people instead of talking about them or solely at them"?

2) how can we walk together with young people? How can a "preferential option

for young people” be at the centre of our pastoral strategies and synodal life?

3) How can we continue to take meaningful and concrete steps to offer justice to victims and survivors of sexual abuse and spiritual, economic, power and conscience abuse by persons who were carrying out a ministry or ecclesial responsibility?

4) How can we create spaces where those who feel hurt by the Church and unwelcomed by the community feel recognised, received, free to ask questions and not judged. what concrete steps are needed to welcome those who feel excluded from the Church because of their status or sexuality (for example, remarried divorcees, people in polygamous marriages, LGBTQ+ people, etc.)?

5) How can we be more open and welcoming towards migrants and refugees, ethnic and cultural minorities, and indigenous communities who have long been part of the Church but are often on the margins? How can the Church better embrace their presence as a gift?

6) What physical and cultural barriers do we need to break down so that people with disabilities can feel that they are full members of the community?

7) How can we enhance the contribution of older people to the life of the Christian community and society?

And on the role of women in the Church, the question asked in the working document is this:

How can the Church of our time better fulfil its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?

The document goes on to make the following strong statements in relation to women and the church.

The Continental Assemblies were unanimous in calling for attention to the experience, status, and role of women, notwithstanding the different perspectives present within each continent. They celebrate the faith, participation and witness of so many Lay and Consecrated women worldwide, often present as evangelists and first teachers in the ways of faith, ministering in remote places and challenging contexts, and at the “prophetic margins”.

During the first phase of the Synod, questions of women’s participation and recognition, of mutually supportive relationships between men and women and the desire for a greater presence of women in positions of responsibility and governance emerged as crucial elements in the search for more synodal ways to live the Church’s mission. The women who participated in the first phase of the Synod expressed a clear desire that society and the Church be places of growth, active participation, and healthy belonging for all women. They ask the Church to be at their side to accompany and promote the realisation of this.

The Working document states that:

A synodal Church must address these questions together; seeking responses that offer greater recognition of women's baptismal dignity and rejection of all forms of discrimination and exclusion faced by women in the Church and society.

... the Continental Assemblies highlight the plurality of women's experiences, points of view and perspectives and ask that this diversity be recognised in the Synodal Assembly's work, avoiding treating women as a homogeneous group or an abstract or ideological subject of debate.

The Question for discernment and reflection articulated in the document is this:

What concrete steps can the Church take to renew and reform its procedures, institutional arrangements, and structures to enable greater recognition and participation of women, including in governance, decision-making processes and in the taking of decisions, in a spirit of communion and with a view to mission?

Clericalism is covered on page 31 and the issue of governance and decision making is covered in the third section on Participation on pages 37, 38 and 39.

I encourage you to read this document for yourselves. I hope that what I have highlighted for you from the document gives you a flavour of what the First Assembly of the Synod to be held this October in Rome will discuss.

My reading of the document is that it covers all the issues we have articulated over many years that matter to us, our families, and our communities. As such it offers hope that the Church will work towards becoming more Synodal and welcoming of all the baptized through this Synodal process.

The results of the final two assemblies of this Synod in October 2023 and 2024 will be judged by how well they can reach consensus on the practical steps needed to implement changes to many aspects of our Global Church. The challenge for these final sessions is to ensure that all the voices in all the Continents who contributed to nominating the priority issues are heard.