

The Continental Stage of the Synod Consultations, Process and Key Priorities

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The Oceania Assembly: process, key priorities and the Bishops' response

The process

The Oceania Bishops Conference includes Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific countries such as Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and the Eastern Catholic Churches. An Oceania Discernment and Writing Group prepared a document called the [Oceania Discernment on the Working Document for the Continental Stage](#). It is based on five country responses to the Working Document for the Continental Stage titled "Enlarge the space of your tent". These national responses are available on the Synod of Bishops webpage of the ACBC, via the Catholic Australia website.

The Oceania Discernment document identified eight priorities and calls to action on the themes of mission, ecological crises, church teaching, becoming more synodal, authority and decision-making, young people, women, and formation. Key points are noted below with references in brackets to the source country report for a specific quote.

Mission - there is a need to make a transition from a “maintenance” to a “mission-focused” Church (Australia). In the absence of priests, validating and strengthening lay pastoral ministry in prisons and hospitals to ensure that people receive the healing ministry of Jesus (New Zealand).

Ecological crises: ... the Synod Assembly should consider this as an urgent existential global issue by a) standing in solidarity with those communities severely impacted by the ecological crisis, noting the different impacts on the poor and vulnerable; and b) promoting Laudato Si's integral ecology as critical to our care for the earth and for the oceans and urge local churches and ministries to implement action plans. Based on the New Zealand report's recommendation, the assembly should consider the ecological crisis as a mission field in which the whole Church, globally and locally, should be engaged in the “urgent struggle to preserve our planet and its life, and to provide economic justice for its people” (New Zealand).

Church teaching: ...There are differences in the region about whether change is needed in Church teaching in some areas, and about whether Church teaching can change or develop. These issues listed below need to be addressed for the sake of our unity in diversity. Those aspects of Church teaching which are perceived as “exclusionary or hurtful” or understood to “cause people to walk away from the Church or deter them from returning” (New Zealand). These include teaching on sexuality, diverse sexual relationships, contraception, the situation of the divorced and remarried, intercommunion with other Christian denominations whose Baptism we recognise, priestly celibacy and the restriction of ordination to men.

Also highlighted was the need for ‘liturgical reforms to implement the teachings of Vatican II on inculturation and reflect contemporary theology, such as “a better translation of the Missal, inclusive language, lay people giving homilies, flexibility in different contexts ... Overall, it was agreed that liturgy should always allow for active participation and be inclusive and open to all” (Australia). Liturgical norms [are needed] which enable and facilitate local cultural approaches to worship (Pacific).

Becoming more synodal: ...Embedding “synodality as the ‘way of being Church’ at every level” (New Zealand) by identifying “those bodies in the Church at all levels which are synodal by nature” (New Zealand), and “establishing forums at all levels of the Church” where they are lacking (Australia) to promote “subsidiarity within the Church” (Australia).

Authority and decision-making: Discernment in Oceania revealed a common view that a synodal Church needs a cultural and structural change in Church leadership. The Synod

Assembly should consider ways to embed a culture of servant leadership for those in leadership positions for clerical, religious and lay people. Also make changes to current structures to enable shared governance and decision-making, involving both laity and clergy. So recommended is to change those areas of canon law which do not enable lay women and men to participate in appropriate forms of decision-making, while not undermining episcopal authority. Changes to Canon law are needed to remove provisions that restrict certain diocesan and tribunal roles to clerics to allow qualified lay people to take up these roles (New Zealand). Investigate “pathways for people from diverse backgrounds to be trained in governance roles, such as pastoral councils or other areas of governance” (Australia).

Young people: The discernment across Oceania revealed a common concern regarding the disconnection and absence of many young people in the life of the Church and a keenness that the Assembly give them priority.

The role and place of women in the Church: The Synod Assembly should consider the experience of women in the Church by hearing directly from women on all matters under consideration during the Synod Assemblies. Also ensure the spirit of synodality continues to cause the Church to listen to those women who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church (Pacific). Change the perception of women in the Church as being homogenous in their views, the way cultural influences impact them at a local level or their way of life (New Zealand).

Other recommendations are to provide a full and just participation of women in Church governance, decision-making, mission and ministry (Australia; New Zealand). Ensure that a just remuneration is paid to for lay women working in the Church and “religious women, especially in the pastoral field” (PNG/SI). Also ensure there is a greater involvement of women in the formation of seminarians and priests (New Zealand).

Formation: In the five responses from the region, changes to formation were seen to be essential. The Synod Assembly should consider a) creating a formation framework for all the baptised to help them participate in a synodal Church and be courageous missionary disciples; b) ensuring that formation identifies needs in the light of Scripture and Church teaching, that it includes Catholic Social Teaching, and addresses the reality of people’s lives. Also recommended were c) prioritising formation resources for ecological conversion and specific resources for the formation of young people in the faith; and d) ensuring that there is an adequate emphasis on formation for catechists and other lay leaders.

The bishops’ response

The bishops of Oceania offered a pastoral reflection which included the following comments:

We noticed in the people’s responses a desire for practical applications of synodality in the present moment. However, we also realise that while we are a synodal Church, giving practical expression to synodality will take time. It will be a long journey, both in Oceania and in the Universal Church. This document is not a catechetical or magisterial document. It is more like a postcard at this point in our journey, showing where we are now.

We do not want to build a different Church, but rather to renew and revitalise the Church which we love. This renewal and revitalisation will begin with personal conversion, and it will also find communal and structural expression. A renewed and synodal Church seeks not to leave anyone behind. In such a Church we will walk together, loving one another.

Not every bishop found every part of the document wholly convincing or

complete, and some had doubts and concerns about where this might be leading us. Jesus appeared to the disciples with their pain, shame, loss and shattered hopes. In the same way, we bishops feel doubts, anxieties, and fears about certain parts of this document. We also feel joy and hope. The crucified and risen Christ showed his wounds to his disciples and despite their shame, doubts, and fears, they were filled with joy and hope. His words were “peace be with you”. He invites us bishops to trust in his mercy and proclaim the truth with love, as Jesus did.

In the face of our doubts and fears, Jesus sends us to a broken world. We receive the griefs and anguish, the joys and hopes of the people of Oceania expressed in this document. With trust in the Holy Spirit, we will continue to journey together, people and pastors, as the pilgrim People of God. Jesus Christ is walking with us in our synodal journey, offering us His peace and urging us to have courage.

The European continental Assembly: process, key priorities and the Bishops’ response

The process

European Continental Assembly, held in Prague on 5-12 February 2023, was composed of 200 people. There were 140 delegates from the 39 member conferences (4 delegates each conference) of the Council of the Conference of Bishops in Europe (CCEE). Another 42 participants were invited from the General Secretariat of the Synod, the CCEE Commissions, and institutions, networks, associations and movements of the Catholic Church active on the continental level. In addition, each member conference of CCEE was invited to name up to ten delegates (numbering 269 persons) who participated online and contributed to the online working groups.

The European Continental Assembly worked in five languages (English, French, German, Italian, and Polish). Following the opening session, the work was divided into three units, each of which was structured as a broad spiritual conversation. Then delegations took the floor in the plenary assembly; sharing discussions in working groups; collecting and expressing reactions on the shared points in the plenary (group reports and free interventions). Delegates participating online were divided into groups that worked on a platform. They provided their contribution to the Assembly in a special session (online group reports).

To be transparent and to allow as many people as possible to participate in the journey, all the plenary sessions of the European Continental Assembly in Prague were live streamed. These recordings remain available on the YouTube channel of the CCEE Press Office.

Seven reference points

The discussion and exchange starting from the DCS [Working Document for the Continental Stage] have led to the identification of seven points of reference for the path of building a synodal Church in a European perspective. These are shared intuitions from which we can all draw inspiration specific local contexts: 1) the spiritual dimension of synodality, in a perspective of a continuous conversion to Christ; 2) the rediscovery of the common baptismal dignity and its implications; 3) the essential [connection] between synodality and mission; 4) dialogue as a way of life of the Church; 5) the commitment to overcome prejudices and reconcile memory; 6) preferential attention to families, women and young people; 7) the adoption of the synodal method for all ecclesial processes (para 20).

Key priorities

Recommended seven priorities of the continental synthesis for Europe for the October 2023 Synodal Assembly are:

- (1) Deepen the practice, theology, and hermeneutics of synodality. We need to rediscover something that is ancient and belongs to the nature of the Church, while always being new. This is a task for us. We are taking the first steps along a path that opens as we walk it.
- (2) Address the meaning of an all-ministerial Church, as a horizon in which to place the reflexion on charisms and ministries (ordained and non-ordained) and the relations between them.
- (3) Explore forms for a synodal exercise of authority, namely the service of accompanying the community and preserving unity.
- (4) Clarify the discernment criteria for the synodal process and at what level, from local to universal, decisions are to be made.
- (5) Take concrete and courageous decisions on the role of women within the Church and on their greater involvement at all levels, including in decision-making and taking processes.
- (6) Consider the tensions around the liturgy, to consider, from a synodal perspective, the Eucharist as the source of communion.
- (7) Care for a synodal related formation of the entire People of God, with specific attention to discerning the signs of the times, with a view to carrying out the common mission.

Concluding note from the Bishops

We thank the Lord for the experience of synodality which has seen us all - bishops, priests, consecrated and lay men and women - side by side for the first time on a continental level. We rejoice because during these days in Prague we found that the moments of prayer lived together and even more the work of the Assembly have been a profoundly spiritual and truly synodal experience. Mutual listening, fruitful dialogue, and the story of how our ecclesial communities lived out the first phase of the synodal process and prepared for this continental meeting are an unmistakable sign of our unique belonging to Christ....

As a fruit of this synodal experience, we bishops are committed to keep living and promoting the synodal process in our diocesan structures and life. This experience of care for the whole Church in Europe heartened us in our commitment to faithfully live out our universal mission. We are engaged in supporting the indications of the successor of Peter, our Holy Father, to become a synodal Church nourished by the experience of communion, participation, and mission in Christ.

We want to walk together, as holy people of God, both lay persons and pastors, pilgrims along the roads of Europe to proclaim the joy of the Gospel which springs from the encounter with Christ. We want to do it together with our brothers and sisters from other Christian denominations. We shall work tirelessly to enlarge the space of our tents so that our ecclesial communities become even more places where everyone feels welcome.

The Continental Assembly for Latin America and the Caribbean: process and key themes

The process

The report for Latin America and the Caribbean was based on regional meetings in El Salvador for the Central America and Mexico Region, in the Dominican Republic for the Caribbean Region, in Ecuador for the Bolivarian Region and in Brazil for the Southern

Cone Region of Latin America, including the countries of Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay). A total of 415 people participated: 96 from Central America and 177 from the Southern Cone countries.

Key themes

The following extracts are taken with change from the synthesis report. The report did not identify key priorities, nor did it have conclusion. There was response from the bishops of the region.

We note, that today more than ever, the Church is committed to a new style of relationship, one more contextualized, incarnated, capable of listening and of making the different voices resonate and of positioning itself to generate the necessary dialogue that favours encounter. We feel called to generate an authentic dynamic of listening, participation, communion, shared mission, and co-responsibility.

Many voices questioned how we relate to one another in the Church, especially between pastors and lay people, and between women and men. In all the regional assemblies, we heard a deep cry that called out to be treated well, to be respected as an equal, and to be valued in one's own identity and in one's specific contribution. The shared discernment shows that we still have a long way to go in relating to one another in a more evangelical, humanizing and synodal way. "We need a structural change that uninstalls us. It requires flexibility, dialogue, tolerance, acceptance, and respect. Not putting new wine in old wineskins".

One of the challenges is to open spaces, provide means and create ways for the effective participation of women in the discernment and decision-making processes. The Synodal Assembly of October should deepen these themes: the leadership of women and their contribution in theological reflection, in pastoral councils, in the accompaniment of communities, in the areas of elaboration and decision-making. ...Many voices consider urgent the institution of the diaconate for women, recognizing what is lived in several communities.

What is needed is a "revision of the structures and of the ecclesial institution as a whole, in the function of service and evangelization". ...it is necessary to "renew and rethink the structures of the Church to respond to the challenges of today's world, interpreting the signs of the times [and]. One step towards this is the reform of the Code of Canon Law".

.. it is requested that the General Assembly in October ... promote the revision of the theology and forms of a ministerial church, the formation and profile of ministers, both instituted and ordained, and the opening of some ministries to women.

The socio-environmental service that the Church is called to serve in the light of the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church is strengthened in an

ecumenical and interreligious dialogue that leads to common action. In many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, there are Interreligious Councils in which representatives of various Christian Churches and multiple religions present in our region actively participate. They jointly carry out activities in favour of society from a shared commitment to the promotion of human rights, justice, peace, and the care of the common home.

The exercise of the episcopal ministry is enriched as a pastoral service to the People of God. We are learning that the ministry of the bishops, if it is not situated in a synodal ecclesiality, can be impoverished because it does not receive the fruits of a broad exchange and because it feels threatened, as if synodality were a democratization that challenges the hierarchical institution of the Church. In a process lived in synodality, the elaboration and decision-making of the competent authorities gain legitimacy and are more positively received by the community.

The North American (USA and Canada) Continental Synod: process, key priorities and the Bishops' response ¹

The process

More than 900 participants came together online in the “continental phase” of the Synod on Synodality. Based on input of participants in 12 virtual sessions, held in English, Spanish and French, conducted mostly in January 2023. Many of those tensions, the report states, flow from the church not welcoming the voices of women, LGBT people, youth, the poor and those still reeling from abuse scandals.

The North American Synod drafting committee consisted of eight bishops, two priests, two women religious, three laywomen, and two laymen. The committee laboured to give a synthetic account of the richness of the conversations. The report noted that ‘what emerged from the assemblies was a recognition that there are strong tensions within the Church. The document acknowledged that a ‘significant threat to communion within the church is a lack of trust, especially between bishops and the laity, but also between the clergy in general and the lay faithful’.

The report was slightly critical of the synodal process overall, in part because relatively few Catholics were involved in the early meetings and because the concept seems not to have been easily understood by many. the report states that synodality is not always easy to comprehend; it can also be seen to be a complicated process.

Key priorities

The North American report concludes by suggesting five “principal themes” from the discussions, offering them “for further consideration at the Synodal Assembly to be held in Rome in October 2023.

First, participants said formation about the purpose and methodology of the synod would be helpful and suggested that “rethinking our diocesan and national ecclesial practices and/or structures in a way that truly prioritizes the synodal style” may be required for greater buy-in from priests and laity.

Second, while participants said they desired a more welcoming church, “many asked what is meant by ‘radical inclusion,’ and what are its pastoral and even doctrinal implications?”

¹ Summary adapted from Michael O’Loughlin [‘North America synod document calls the church to welcome women, LGBT people and youth’](#), *America The Jesuit Review* 14 April 2023. Another source used was Gina Christian, [‘Synod’s ‘messy,’ joyful’ North American phase concludes with call to mission, moves to Rome’](#), *National Catholic Report*, 12 April 2023

Third, related to “co-responsibility,” participants said that there is a greater need for transparency about decision making, “which demands a better understanding of the roles of the laity in general, and of women and young people in particular.”

Fourth, the document also says church leaders must focus on unity, lest polarization threaten the cohesiveness of the church. Baptism and the Eucharist “must be seen as primary sources of our identity and unity as the People of God, and prior to any racial, ethnic, social, economic, political, or ideological differences,” the report states.

Finally, the document says that Catholics in the United States and Canada desire more formation when it comes to missionary activity. ‘On our continent there is always a danger of forgetfulness of, and indifference to, those who are poor and ostracized’.

Bishops’ response

No overall response was forthcoming from the bishops collectively. However, a member of the report drafting committee, Bishop John Stowe, said he was disappointed by the virtual nature of the continental discussion and by the “lukewarm” buy-in among U.S. bishops. He noted that ‘Asia, Europe and Africa with their vast geographies and cultural diversity were able to conduct continental assemblies. Even the Middle East created such an assembly North America did not, citing economic and practical difficulties in coming together’.

The African Synodal Continental Assembly: process and key priorities

The process

The report was initially prepared by the Continental Team for the Synod on Synodality, which was comprised of Secretaries General of the Regional Episcopal Conferences, members of the African Synodality Initiative, theologians, religious and some lay faithful, numbering 28 and 20 persons. Under the umbrella of Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), a meeting of about 209 people made up of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Religious men, and women, and lay faithful, with the lay faithful being in greater number took place in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia 1-6 March 2023 for the final phase of the continental stage of the Synod on Synodality. This event brought together about 209 people made up of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Religious men, and women, and lay faithful, with the lay faithful being in greater number.

For five days, the Church Family of God in Africa through the continental representatives prayed, listened, and reflected on the new way of being a Church today, i. e. the Synodal way. It was a spiritual Synodal journey of the Church Family of God in Africa, an opportunity to practise Synodality in reality. At the end of the session, the assembly went through the Final Document and officially adopted it as the Document for the African Church. These meetings became the basis for the elaboration of the present document which took into consideration all the main ideas raised during the discussions.

In the spirit of collegiality, all the Cardinals and Bishops sat together in another meeting on the last day of the Assembly to evaluate the whole Synodal process. They expressed satisfaction about the process, especially about the family spirit that prevailed throughout the Assembly. They, equally, went through the Final Document and unanimously adopted it as the Final Document for the African Continental Synodal Assembly.

Key priorities

Having listened to other Churches and to the experience of Africans, we consider the following eight points to be recurrent and urgent priorities on which it is important to continue discernment at the level of the universal Church. These points are directly related to

manner of living out the Synodal spirit of Communion, Participation and Mission.

- To deepen Catholic Synodality according to the values of the Church as the Family of God, nurture life from conception to natural death, based on co-responsibility, biblical hospitality (Eph. 2:19), the dignity of children, women, and men, and reaching out to the entire human family and all creation, from the Small Christian Communities to the Vatican level.
- African voices and values should be taken into consideration when elaborating the doctrines and teachings of the church, values such as family, solidarity, communitarian life, reverential dialogue, hospitality, and co-responsibility.
- The commitment of the Church, Family of God to conflict resolution, to fight against economic colonialism and illegal exploitation of resources in Africa, and the promotion of Good Governance, Justice, and Peace.
- Synodality is the way of being Church and hence the necessity of formation as a means of making the synodal model a pastoral model of the Church's life and practice.
- The process of synodality must also involve inculturation and liturgical renewal to respond to the aspiration, participation, and overall growth of the African faithful.
- Synodality should strengthen subsidiarity on all levels of the Church's life to promote the inclusion, participation, and communion of all the members, especially women, the youth and persons living with disability.
- The family is an important structure in the promotion of the synodal Church and demands pastoral care that focuses on marriage and family and their challenges in the present-day Africa, especially situations of polygamy, divorced and remarried people, single parenthood, and child protection.
- Ecological justice and stewardship should become a way of life of the synodal Church.

The Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, process and key priorities

The process

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) comprises 17 Episcopal Conferences, Synods of Oriental Churches, and 3 Associate Members and covers 29 countries or territories, grouped into four regions: South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Central Asia. The initial responses of the 22 members to the Expanding the Tent document were compiled from the existing synodal teams at the deanery, diocesan and national levels. In some places, online meetings were held. Small group meetings were utilized, focus groups, assemblies where possible and bishops and priests' councils.

The second phase consisted of writing of the draft framework of the summary of the Episcopal Conferences' reports. FABC Central Committee appointed the Asian Task Force to be the Discernment and Writing Team to prepare a draft framework. The team was composed of 9 individuals: 2 lay people (1 female and 1 male), 1 consecrated female, and 6 priests, with the FABC Secretary General overseeing the process.

The third phase took place in the form of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, which was held from 24-February 2023 in Bangkok. The number of Asian participants at the Assembly was: 6 Cardinals, 5 Archbishops, 18 Bishops, 28 priests, 5 consecrated women, 7 laymen and 11 women. The fourth and fifth phases consisted of The Discernment and Writing Team incorporated the amendments proposed by the delegates to the Asian Continental Assembly, edited and presented to the FABC Central Committee for their deliberation. The final document was approved and validated on 3 March 2023.

Key priorities

Formation: For a synodal Church, there needs to be an initial and ongoing formation at all levels, for all people, beginning with the families and Basic Ecclesial Communities. Seminarians, priests, bishops, and consecrated men and women must be formed to live synodal leadership styles, communal discernment, and decision-making - the promotion of a culture of synodality that entails renewal of training of seminary formators, professors of theology, and the present seminary programme needs to be more life-ministry oriented. The laity needs to be formed to take active roles, according to their baptismal call, to serve with generosity to God and a love for the Church and its people. Formation for a synodal spirituality must be at the heart of the Church's mission and vision.

Inclusivity & Hospitality: The women, youth, and those marginalised or excluded, with special attention to the abandoned (e.g., street children and elderly), also significant pastoral care should be provided to divorced, remarried, single parents, broken families, persons with disabilities, prisoners, persons who identify as LGBTQIA+, the elderly, substance dependents, commercial sex workers, etc.) the wounded and victimised, fractured families and those struggling with gender identity, the displaced and the persecuted, and a whole spectrum of many others must find their place in this 'tent' (Church). Structures may need to be revisited so that everyone feels a sense of belonging in the Church and each person becomes an ambassador of Christ, an ambassador of inclusivity and hospitality.

Missionary Disciples: In the context of Asia, we must learn how to prophetically witness and "whisper" the Gospel to one another, which, first and foremost, entails actively living out one's faith founded on personal encounters and personal experiences with Jesus and contributing to the community of the Church as a communion of communities. While recognizing that Christians are a minority in Asia, the incomparable witness of Asian martyrs provides a challenge and source of encouragement. We must also learn to grow in dialogue, consultation, and communal discernment. At the same time, respecting the sensitivities of other Asian peoples must also be at the heart of the Church. Interfaith families are becoming a common sight and therefore how do we bring Christ to others? We need to embrace a culture of encounter and bridge-building to bring Christ to the world. In this post-pandemic era, the hybridization of the Church's life (onsite and online) is a reality that we must embrace and maximise opportunities to evangelise, including the wider and more discerning use of technology in this endeavour, as our Christian mandate.

Accountability and Transparency: The call to be accountable and transparent not only in financial matters but also in decision-making processes and governance. This may necessitate the revision of some provisions of Canon Law. Those in leadership roles - whether clergy or lay, are also accountable for the formation of the laity and the youth. A spirit of collaboration and co-responsibility must be promoted with each embracing the other's vocation and state of life and the manifold charisms in the Church.

Prayer and Worship: Our prayer and worship must reflect and touch the hearts of the Asian people. Liturgical celebrations must be more "synodal" (participatory, inculturated, relatable, and convivial) so that everyone can find a sacred and safe space to worship God. The integration of culture in the life and worship of the Church must also animate the lives of the faithful.

Environment: In the care for the common home, the Church must be at the forefront in not only protecting Mother Earth but also healing her. As Jesus came to redeem and reconcile all things, the Church must seek to renew the face of the earth. As members of the one Body of Christ, we are called to become a green Church and live in solidarity and respect, protect, defend, and nurture the oneness of all of God's Creation. Environmental concern is not merely

ecological but also has a spiritual and social dimension as it affects everyone, the poor the most.

The Continental Assembly of the Synod Catholic Churches in the Middle East: process and key issues

The process

The Catholic Churches in the Middle East (Coptic, Maronite, Greek-Melkite, Syriac, Chaldean, Armenian and Latin) held their Synodal Continental Assembly in Bethania (Harissa, Lebanon) on 13-17 February 2023. The participants came from Egypt, the Holy Land, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and the Arabian Gulf. The total number of participants was 125, including 40 lay and consecrated women and 40 laymen.

The participants in the Synodal Assembly expressed the difficulty of communicating under the harsh conditions that have affected, and continue to affect, the countries of the region, especially in terms of disruption, conflict, and war. Taking charge of the priorities related to the survival and safeguarding of the Christian presence in the Middle East had a profound impact on the synodal process, common reflection, mutual listening, and especially the attention given to those who seem to live on the margins of ecclesial life, in conditions of estrangement and distance.

The syntheses prepared and presented by the Churches during the Synodal Assembly, as well as the deliberations in the reflection and working groups, unanimously underlined the crucial importance of the following issues: unity in diversity; the liturgy, our life; the call to a creative and revitalized ecumenism; a church of openness to the other and to differences; communion and hope in the midst of suffering: the journey toward a humble church; renewal of structures for a more synodal church; and finally the media, digital culture, and their contributions to making the church more synodal.

Key issues

- *To bring about a change in the mentality of all, laity, and clergy ...*
- *To recognize the complementarity between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood (diaconate, presbyterate, episcopate) ...*
- *To affirm that every baptized member of the faithful has a "sense of faith"....*
- *To work for the renewal of liturgical life in the Churches ...*
- *To purify the ministry of priests of all weaknesses and shortcomings present in some of them... This ... requires a review of the means and criteria for choosing candidates for the holy orders of deacon, priest, and bishop ...*
- *To make an irreversible commitment to the restoration of the visible unity of the Church, and to promote ecumenical relations between the Churches and ecclesial communities in the Middle East.*
- *To recognize the value of religious, cultural, and human diversity in the Middle East... a*
- *To abandon any form of exclusion of women from participation in the life of the Church, especially in making ecclesial decisions. Our respective Churches should begin to reflect seriously on the re-establishment of the diaconate for women.*
- *To trust young people and believe in their gifts and capacity to contribute to the various responsibilities of the Church ...*
- *To have faith in the participation of people with disabilities and in the value and*

importance of their constructive role in the life of the Church.

- *To adopt the principles of good governance and transparency in the administration of Church institutions. ...*
- *To avoid minority complexes and to banish the fear associated with it, due to multiple hardships suffered through persecution, immigration, and other difficult situations, in order not to succumb to temptations and to preserve Faith and Hope. To work to enable Christians to take root in the territories of their respective countries and to contribute to stemming the current process that is emptying the East of the Christian presence and risks changing its demographic identity. This requires close cooperation with the civil authorities.*