

Swiss Synod Report 2022

The synodal conversations and surveys in Switzerland strengthened the awareness of the importance of baptism. The priestly, royal and prophetic dignity and vocation of the baptized should be more and more recognized and developed in a synodal church.

"Received up into the people of God, you are now anointed with the holy chrism, that you may forever remain a member of Christ, who is priest, king and prophet forever."

(From the Rite of Baptism of the Catholic Church)

This report was finalized following the Synodal Assembly Switzerland (May 30, 2022 in Einsiedeln Monastery), taking into account the results of the discussions there. The basis was a draft report of the Pastoral Commission of the Swiss Bishops' Conference, which was prepared on the basis of the joint evaluation of the diocesan synodal processes and synodal reports.

Fribourg, July 12, 2022



Experiences with the synodal process in Switzerland

1 Context Church Switzerland

- 1.1 A synodal church always finds its mission, its vocation, in its concrete context. This requires an accurate perception of the reality and the challenges, as well as the ability to shape the mission on the basis of appropriate decision-making powers.
- 1.2 The synodal process in Switzerland must be understood against the background of the church situation in Switzerland. Despite different church cultures in the language regions, the overall situation is comparable and can be named with three keywords: Loss of relevance of the church faith tradition, loss of trust in the church and growing distancing from the church.
- 1.3 It should not be forgotten that in parishes, associations, communities, religious orders and bishoprics many faithful contribute to church life in Switzerland on a daily basis. The diversity of ecclesiastical ministries - priests, deacons, pastors - contributes to the multifaceted face of the church. Here and also in the structures of the dual system, much of what constitutes a synodal church already succeeds.
- 1.4 At the same time, the trend toward distancing oneself from the church continues.
 - 1.4.1 The loss of trust in the church and church leadership among believers and in society is massive. The level of mistrust is high.
 - 1.4.2 Sexual and spiritual abuse of power in the church and the long-standing practice of seduction are central causes of the church's increasing loss of credibility and trust.
 - 1.4.3 Many baptized people still formally belong to the church and pay church tax, but they no longer have any real connection to church life and are increasingly keeping a conscious distance.
 - 1.4.4 Many distanced church members learn about church events almost exclusively through the media and are present at church celebrations only on special occasions.
 - 1.4.5 There is widespread disappointment, incomprehension and clear resentment, both among the public and among church members, at the lack of genuine reform and at the evasive or dilatory answers given by church officials to questions about it. Only a minority believes that nothing should change in the church.
 - 1.4.6 The Catholic Church is increasingly becoming a foreign body in Swiss society and culture. It is increasingly speechless towards its environment and less and less able to communicate the meaning of faith today.
 - 1.4.7 The alienation of the church from society and the massive turning away of many church members from the church, from church life and from sacramental practice are leading to a striking increase in church departures.
 - 1.4.8 Attracting people to get involved in the church is very difficult against this background.
 - 1.4.9 Even if the perceptions of the problem are similar, concrete approaches to the problem and solutions differ culturally and structurally depending on the language region in Switzerland. The French- and Italian-speaking regions of Switzerland place greater emphasis on the critical examination of clericalism, while the German-speaking regions of Switzerland place greater emphasis on the experiences of exclusion of groups of people, especially women, queer persons and the alienation and distancing of young people.

2 In this situation: divided response to the synod process

- 2.1 On the one hand, there was hope in many places that a departure from the rigidities and rigidities of the church could actually be begun, from the local church to the universal church; in many cases, this hope was combined with a feeling of "last chance" for changes that had already often been called for.
- 2.2 On the other hand, doubts were raised about the meaningfulness of the synodal process. Unclear decision-making and action perspectives due to the approach of the dioceses and the Bishops' Conference as well as the discrepancy between the synodal approach (seeking agreement) and the basic democratic understanding culturally anchored in Switzerland (voting procedure) weaken confidence in the process.
- 2.3 In addition, there was concern about renewed frustration among those who participate in discussions, since previous processes of a synodal nature had led to disappointment because of their ineffectiveness.
- 2.4 Finally, there were irritations because of the questions about synodality, which require a lot of explanatory work and thus made participation more difficult.

3 Experience

- 3.1 Conversations created community and surprising experiences of church: shared experiences were interpreted as indications of the (missing) presence of God.
- 3.2 Synodal conversations have been perceived as spiritual or mystical experiences in which church, encounter and community have been experienced in a new quality.
- 3.3 Where church was perceived as a synodal event of encounter and fellowship, this dimension of the church was judged to be more important than the dimension of the church as an institution.
- 3.4 Impatience, hurt, feelings of powerlessness and resignation in the face of a lack of prospects for overdue reform steps are widespread. On the one hand, high expectations were formulated in the synod discussions; on the other hand, fears were also voiced that once again nothing would change.
- 3.5 Only people close to the church, some of whom have been involved within church and parish structures for years, took part in the discussions; it was not possible to obtain input from outside this generally narrow circle.
- 3.6 The proportion of voices that did not want any changes, that were oriented toward traditional church images and that were skeptical of the idea of a synodal church was low overall.

Results of the synodal surveys and discussions

1 Companions/Participation

- 1.1 Baptism is evaluated by the majority as a criterion for belonging to the Church. Baptism contains all the basic dimensions of belonging to the Church and participating in its mission, the priestly, royal and prophetic vocation of every Christian.
- 1.2 The denied equality of women as well as the experiences of exclusion of people with LGBTIAQ* identity and remarried divorcees are understood as an inner contradiction to faith and baptism.
- 1.3 Several official church positions on the role of women in church and society, on sexuality and on ways of life are perceived as pejorative and exclusionary.

- 1.4 The appointment of women to positions of responsibility and office is understood as a sign of hope for a synodal church. Where there are persistent exclusions in theory and practice, on the other hand, these are often described as characteristics of a clerical church.
- 1.5 Various other groups of people do not feel welcomed. This is experienced in particular by many young people, but also by people with a migration background, people with impairments and people who are distanced from the church.
- 1.6 In many places, living and working together with believers who position themselves as strongly exclusive in a traditional identity is seen as challenging, but necessary.
- 1.7 Overall, the view of the church shows a strong internal orientation. Often, a mindset shaped by the parish milieu is evident. It holds on to the expectation that people (should) come to the parish *from the outside*. The mission of an ecclesial community to the *outside world* is less evident.

2 Listen

- 2.1 The quality of listening in the church is considered important but often missed. In listening to others, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit can also take place.
- 2.2 There is fear of bringing up one's faith or way of life if it does not seem to be identical to the official faith or teaching of the Church or does not seem to fit the language of the Church.
- 2.3 Where people feel that they have been listened to and that this has an effect, they feel taken seriously.
- 2.4 The representatives of the hierarchy (especially bishops and diocesan leaders) are experienced as not listening very much.
- 2.5 The closer the church hierarchical level is to one's own reality (e.g., parish), the more people experience themselves as being heard.
- 2.6 What is desired and hoped for is a church that listens to all people and does not reject, prejudice, or disparage anyone because of gender, sexuality, lifestyle, age, social status, or one's attitude toward faith.

3 Take the floor

- 3.1 A synodal church should help to overcome the speechlessness in sharing the faith within the church as well as towards society.
- 3.2 Prerequisites for taking the floor are:
 - 3.2.1 Trust towards the people involved,
 - 3.2.2 Reciprocity of communication in speaking and listening,
 - 3.2.3 Admission of issues related to conflict,
 - 3.2.4 Binding nature of participation and transparency in decision-making processes and
 - 3.2.5 Overcoming the alienation of the expressions of faith, e.g. language, from the culture of society.

4 Celebrate

- 4.1 Looking at worship services and liturgy leads to contradictory observations:
 - 4.1.1 On the one hand, the liturgy of the church is experienced as a place of synodal church experience and community promotion. Here, deep experience of God can take place.
 - 4.1.2 On the other hand, the expressions of the liturgy, its language and forms, are experienced as incomprehensible, hardly related to experience and actuality, and not very inviting.
 - 4.1.3 Liturgy, moreover, often gathers only an inner core of the faithful - for many others, even for many who are committed to the church, it remains incomprehensible and inaccessible.

- 4.2 Expectations are:
- 4.2.1 The language and forms of liturgy should be adapted to cultural contexts and their beauty and richness should be promoted in a more conscious and culturally appropriate way.
 - 4.2.2 The diversity of liturgical celebrations and spiritual forms should be promoted in order to reach different people.
 - 4.2.3 The synodal dimension of the liturgy is to be more strongly respected and clerical narrowness is to be prevented.

5 Shared responsibility in the program

- 5.1 A shared responsibility in the mission of the Church presupposes the recognition and promotion of one's own charisms and vocations among the faithful. The priestly, royal and prophetic dignity of all the baptized should become the starting point here.
- 5.2 The binding of large parts of responsibility in the church to ordination demands that the conditions of admission be broadened. The exclusion of groups (women, married people) undermines the acceptance of the church as an institution as well as its official representatives.
- 5.3 The pyramidal structure in the church, especially the striving for superiority and power in parts of the clergy and also among some theologians and co-workers is seen as an obstacle to the perception of the co-responsibility of all the baptized in the mission of the church.
- 5.4 However, where the mission of the church is understood primarily as a commitment to its self-preservation, to the preservation of traditional structures, the willingness to share responsibility falls very sharply.
- 5.5 Many adults, parents and teachers are hardly able to pass on the contents of the Christian tradition to the children and to convey to them that the Gospel and church commitment enrich life, create community and convey meaning.
- 5.6 The commitment in the diaconal field is manifold. At the same time, taking sides with poor and marginalized people sometimes harbors potential for conflict in church and society: is church social work meaningful without calling systems and structures into question? Such questions slow people down in their commitment.
- 5.7 The ability to deal with conflict is hardly developed and practiced in the church.

6 Engaging in dialogue in the church and in society

- 6.1 Successful dialogue is rarely experienced in church and society.
- 6.2 Political or ethical positioning on the part of the church leads to conflict when it is perceived as patronizing or discriminatory.
- 6.3 Successful dialogue requires trusting relationships, both in the church and in society. However, the Catholic Church in particular still enjoys little trust as an institution in Switzerland.
- 6.4 Where the Catholic Church succeeds in admitting different opinions, beliefs and values, it is perceived as capable of dialogue.
- 6.5 In dialogues, professional and scientific competence is expected. If scientific findings, e.g. from theology, social and human sciences, are taken seriously, the credibility of dialogues increases.
- 6.6 The faithful who took part in the synod discussions wish for a church that is tolerant of pluralism and capable of conflict, that can also endure difficult processes of dialogue, and that shows itself to be capable of learning.
- 6.7 In the field of diaconia, disputes sometimes arise about the church's position on social and political issues and about the church's perception of its role in society.

- 6.8 There should be more dialog offers on different levels with people from disadvantaged groups of the population, e.g. with people affected by poverty, people with a migratory background, people who depend on the use of easy language.
- 6.9 Where a synodal church is lived and a clerically narrow church culture is overcome, genuine dialogue in the church and between church and society succeeds.
- 6.10 Church, even episcopal, pronouncements are understood when they use language that is close to the way people speak and avoids internal church jargon.
- 6.11 The way the church deals with abuses of power discredits it as a partner in dialogue and as a witness to the kingdom of God in the eyes of many believers and large segments of the public.

7 Exchange with other Christian denominations

- 7.1 Exchange and cooperation with Christians of other denominations is part of everyday life for many believers in pluri-denominational Switzerland.
- 7.2 Many people live in mixed-denominational families. Especially in the older generation, the injuries caused by church reprisals against mixed-denominational couples are still painfully remembered.
- 7.3 Eucharistic hospitality is considered by many to be long overdue or appropriate and is experienced positively by many in locally realized practice.
- 7.4 Many believers no longer see any fundamental reasons for separation in denominational differences, especially with Protestant Reformed churches in Switzerland.
- 7.5 The Christian ecumenism is challenged by the increased appearance of new churches and denominations in the course of migration, e.g. Orthodox churches or free churches.
- 7.6 Believers find it easier or more difficult to exchange with Christians from free churches or Orthodox churches, depending on their own spiritual character and religious education. The dialogue with believers who follow a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible is seen as difficult.
- 7.7 Some voices suggest that the Roman Catholic Church should become a member of the World Council of Churches.
- 7.8 Interreligious dialogue seems to many today almost more important than the inner-Christian ecumenism.

8 Authority and participation

- 8.1 Clericalism
 - 8.1.1 Clericalism in the Church undermines any genuine synodal attitude and practice in the Church.
 - 8.1.2 The priestly ministry therefore needs a renewed understanding in order to serve the synodal church.
 - 8.1.3 In many synod conversations, the inflated understanding of the role of some priests and those faithful who support a clerical understanding of the role meets with criticism. An authoritarian, narrow, arbitrary, institution-oriented priestly authority contradicts the Gospel and the expectations of a synodal church.

- 8.1.4 Criticism of the exercise of power by public officials is ignited by the observation of clerical mentality, abuse of power, ignorance of the realities of life and culture in Switzerland, devaluation of women and rejection of people from the LGBTIAQ* spectrum, retreat into individual identity notions of priesthood, lack of attention to people, disinterest in the poor, etc.
- 8.1.5 Believers report that negative experiences with priests have caused them to become distant, indifferent or even opposed to the church.
- 8.1.6 Particularly in German-speaking Switzerland, in view of the equality experienced in political culture, the exclusion of women from the priesthood is openly criticized and judged by many to be no longer acceptable.
- 8.2 Shared exercise of power
 - 8.2.1 Many believers desire a church in which authority and power are shared in new ways among ordained persons, other full-time pastors, and all the baptized.
 - 8.2.2 Desiderata are: more collegial forms of leadership at various levels; leadership in participatory forms of representative involvement of the whole people of God; effective opportunity for all baptized people to speak in matters of local concern to them; separation of powers as is natural in political systems.
 - 8.2.3 Religious traditions are seen as the reference point of a synodal church. In them, as in many Catholic associations, effective participation and democratic elements of the exercise of authority have long been taken for granted.
 - 8.2.4 In the cantons of Switzerland where structures are characterized by the dual system (canonical church bodies, parishes), there is good experience with shared power. At the same time, the current dual system still falls short of the understanding of a synodal church because it only affects parts of church life. However, it should be included in the considerations for the further development of a synodal church in Switzerland.
 - 8.2.5 Criticism is directed at church structures, including the culture of some parish councils, which are in danger of standing in the way of a synodal church. Above all, the system of parishes with the central position of the priest is criticized where it stands in the way of more egalitarian understandings of roles and models of authority.

9 Distinguish and decide

- 9.1 The understanding of the task of discernment as a spiritual process is alive in Switzerland. Worship and prayer are valued as important supports of this process, for the readiness for conversion of the community as well as of the individual believers.
- 9.2 It remains open, however, how discernment and decision-making can be strengthened as a reliable building block of an ecclesial culture with an appropriate structure.
- 9.3 It remains unclear how processes of discernment take place in concrete terms and how the interrelation of spiritual discernment to the confrontation with scientific insights and empirical facts can be designed in a reasonable and comprehensible way.
- 9.4 Discernment work requires both great mutual trust and great transparency in order to avoid a manipulative approach to spirituality.
- 9.5 Where decisions do not reflect the results of discernment and a plausible rationale for them is lacking, the credibility of discernment processes declines - as does the motivation to participate in relevant bodies, such as councils.

- 9.6 In the Catholic Church, parishes are an important level of discernment and decision-making. Not infrequently, opportunities and structures for discernment work are already lacking here. Decisions are then not understood, people do not feel taken seriously and turn away from the parish.

10 Forming oneself in synodality

- 10.1 Especially in the context of Switzerland's democratic culture with clearly regulated procedures and great transparency in consultation, discussion and decision-making processes, the Catholic Church is challenged to make its own ways of decision-making participatory and transparent.
- 10.2 In some places, parishes and dioceses already have a tradition of synodal deliberation, discernment and consensus-building, e.g. councils with synodal experience and culture. Here the work of the Holy Spirit, the mystical reality of the Church can be experienced.
- 10.3 A synodal culture must be established and practiced patiently, reliably and bindingly. In this way, trust can grow as well as a deeper and deeper spiritual understanding of synodality.
- 10.4 In addition to listening to each other and taking each other seriously, an ongoing task of synodal church development is the self-critical question of those people or groups who are not yet part of the synodal community or who have not yet been able to feel invited and welcome.
- 10.5 Formation in synodality requires overcoming the fear of speaking at all, or of contributing one's own experiences, questions, and positions, and equally enduring the contributions of others, even when the different opinions make conflicts visible.
- 10.6 The credibility of the synodal church grows with its ability to respect and recognize the freedom of each and every baptized person as well as every human being. In addition, there is the will for an intellectually honest discussion with the sciences, especially the human and social sciences.
- 10.7 The experience of respect is a necessary condition to participate as a Christian with one's own existential commitment to the building of a synodal church and not just to consume pastoral services. A common formation of priests and other pastoral workers contributes to a respectful culture.
- 10.8 In many places, priests and full-time pastoral workers are key persons for the success of a synodal church. Accordingly, the formation and continuing education of priests or other leaders in parishes should contribute to the formation of a synodal attitude and role. They must be formed and supported to fulfill the ministry in such a way that it serves the participation of all in a synodal church.

11 Minority votes

- 11.1 This report represents the consensus of the votes of the discussion contributions from the synod process. Of course, there were dissenting voices as well. In addition to a spectrum of voices between more traditional and progressive believers, in some places there was a diversity of cultural differences due to migration, which was also reflected in different images of the church.
- 11.2 The minority votes go in particular to,
- 11.2.1 question the necessity of a synodal culture for the Catholic Church,
- 11.2.2 not to change the role of priests and the present hierarchical form of the Church,
- 11.2.3 limit the influence of laymen and laywomen in the church and
- 11.2.4 to preserve and promote more strongly the traditional forms of liturgy, especially the "extraordinary form".

- 11.3 It should be added and remembered that participation in the synodal discussions was primarily characterized by people who are close to the church and, for example, involved in parishes. The attitudes of the many church members who are distanced from the church were hardly recorded.

Perspectives

- 1 In view of the following stages of the synodal process, it seems necessary to maintain the effort of listening to one another and, for this purpose, to form ecclesial frameworks for listening to the call of the Holy Spirit: in listening to the Word of God, in attentiveness to the expressions of each other and in the life of our fellow human beings.**

- 2 End the exclusion of groups of people: The open or indirect rejection or devaluation of groups of people contradicts a synodal church as well as the promise of the gospel.**
 - 2.1 Women rightly expect full recognition of their equal dignity and rights as men. This expectation corresponds to a widely shared understanding of baptism. Conversely, for many, exclusion from ordination and therefore from participation in decision-making is incompatible with the gospel and the practice of Jesus.
 - 2.2 The exclusion and devaluation of people with LGBTIAQ* identity is also rejected as a contradiction to the Gospel and to the lived faith - their integration in the life of the church is understood as a witness to the Gospel and as a consecration of the practice of Jesus.
 - 2.3 The sexual morals and teachings of the Church must be revised in synodal dialogue with people's experiences and in reception of scientific and empirical research, and the pastoral care of the Church must be changed accordingly. The basic attitudes of *Amoris laetitia* are to be given greater prominence.
 - 2.4 The Church's treatment of remarried divorcees is incomprehensible. The Church's testimony of a loving and merciful God is discredited by the exclusion of remarried divorcees from the sacraments.
 - 2.5 Individual regulations regarding the admission of remarried divorced persons to the sacraments and regarding the commissioning of pastors whose way of life does not correspond to the applicable norms are considered insufficient. They depend on the goodwill of the responsible minister and fall short of the expectation of a fundamental reassessment of the corresponding situations.

- 3 Overcoming clericalism: The role of priests (or theologians and co-workers) in a synodal church needs to be fundamentally rethought and redefined-namely.**
 - 3.1 with regard to the culture, structures and effects of clericalism in the Church,
 - 3.2 in view of the experiences of abuse of spiritual and sexual power,
 - 3.3 in view of the assignment of the sacramental priesthood to the priestly dignity of all the baptized,
 - 3.4 in view of the interrelation of different ministries, charisms and vocations in the church,
 - 3.5 with regard to conditions of admission to the priesthood, which in the eyes of many should be opened to women and to married people,

- 3.6 with a view to a reversal of the understanding of ecclesiastical ministry from the point of view of tasks: starting from the necessary services of proclamation, leadership and sacraments, in order to empower the persons responsible for them accordingly, and
- 3.7 in view of the necessities and requirements in the different cultural contexts worldwide and with the possibility of creating regionally different solutions.

4 Introduce shared exercise of power: Participation in a synodical church implies participation in processes of discernment as well as decision.

- 4.1 When separation of powers is achieved and the concentration of ecclesiastical decision-making power with clergy is ended, synodal church can succeed.
- 4.2 The people of God must be effectively involved in the selection of church officials. This applies in particular to the election of bishops.
- 4.3 At the same time, the power of the episcopate must be critically reviewed and limited. In a synodal church, the credibility of the office presupposes shared power and shared responsibility as well as transparent control and accountability for the conduct of the office.
- 4.4 Synodality must be developed and established both as a culture in the church and with transparent processes and reliable structures. This development process must be defined and decided upon so that synodality does not remain a seasonal church topic.
- 4.5 The dual church structures typical of large parts of Switzerland were acknowledged in the synodal discussions as strengths and as opportunities for a synodal approach. However, the relationship between synodality and dual church structures, the corresponding responsibilities and the structures must be continued, adapted and renewed jointly by those responsible for pastoral work and the state-church authorities in order to meet the demands of a synodal church.

5 Respect contextuality and promote regionalization: Synodal church always takes place in concrete contexts. Synodality is always committed to concrete situations.

- 5.1 In view of cultural differences and contextually specific challenges for the mission of the church, it is necessary to establish regional levels of responsibility in the universal church with their own tasks as well as shaping and decision-making powers.
- 5.2 Cultural areas and language regions as well as politically coherent regions are to be taken into account. In this way, the social-ethical principle of subsidiarity can be better applied in the worldwide church.
- 5.3 In this sense, it is necessary for a synodal Church that responsibilities, powers and competences in the sphere of national and continental (or culture area oriented) Episcopal Conferences be expanded to better support the unfolding of the Church's mission in the contexts of the countries.
- 5.4 In principle, synodal church can only succeed if it values the diversity of people, cultures and structures and thus enables the participation of all in the mission of the church.

6 Bringing liturgy to life: Liturgy as a place of experience of the synodal church presupposes the overcoming of its cultural alienation.

- 6.1 Scope for inculturation of liturgical expressions and for liturgical diversity should be created or expanded.
- 6.2 For this, a synodal church needs the trust of the worldwide church in those responsible locally, in their knowledge and abilities to find and use expressions of a living liturgy together with the people of God within their cultural space.

7 A church that goes out: the synodal process is a learning journey that is just beginning.

- 7.1 Dialogue with people who are distanced from the church and with young people is only rarely successful; the participants in the discussions mainly represent employees and church-affiliated people. A courageous understanding of the mission of the church is only just beginning.
- 7.2 Dialog with society also remains weak. This shows an advanced alienation of the church from society. At the same time, it is necessary to practice dialogue anew.
- 7.3 Likewise, there is little room for dialogue with people affected by poverty or marginalized people. What is needed is more proximity to the lives of the poor and openness to their experience of the gospel.
- 7.4 The strong participation of the baptized in decision-making is one of the central characteristics of a synodal church.
- 7.5 To promote the participation of the whole people of God in synodal processes and decisions, women and men should be included with voting rights at continental synodal assemblies and at worldwide synods.