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Synod on Synodality 2021 - 2023

National Synodal Summary

Slovenia

The Church of God is called to synod (PD 1). The Church in Slovenia has responded to this call in all six local Churches - dioceses, religious communities, ecclesial movements, groups, communions and the hearts of the faithful. We are grateful to Pope Francis for his prophetic invitation. And as we ourselves have embarked on the path of the synodal walk together in pursuit of Christ, we acknowledge that through the process itself we have learned the synodal mindset and concrete forms of cooperation. Starting from the concrete situation of our congregations, we wanted to listen, through a sincere conversation, to the Holy Spirit who shows us the way forward to a common walk together after our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Rereading the Synodal Experience

1.1 Past synodal experiences

In Slovenia, since the Second Vatican Council, efforts have been made for synodal renewal. The first pastoral councils were created and various processes of diocesan general assemblies took place in the dioceses, despite the restrictions imposed by the communist authorities of the time. Between 1997 and 2002, the Great Plenary Assembly of the Church in Slovenia took place. In 2012, the drafting of the Umbrella Document of the Slovenian Pastoral Plan took place. Synodal experience was gained at the Synods of Bishops on the Family and on Youth, where we carried out extensive consultations with the faithful. Each of these experiences has borne some fruit and a valuable network of pastoral structures has been established. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that many of the conclusions have not been implemented or have not come to full life as they were intended.

1.2 Synodal Process 2021-2022

In May 2021, Pope Francis invited the universal Church to a synodal process. In October 2021, the Slovenian Bishops appointed the Bishop in charge of the Synod and the members of the Secretariat of the Synod within the Slovenian Bishops' Conference (SBC). Ordinaries in all dioceses have appointed diocesan clerks or synod teams. The existing working bodies of the ILC were invited to participate in the synodal process. On the initiative of the Bishop responsible for the Synod, the Bishops also appointed a special study group at the national level. Religious communities also participated in the Synod, submitting their Synod summary



through the Slovenian Conference of Religious.



Each diocese has entered the synodal journey with its own emphasis. In one diocese, the local evangelical bishop was invited to the synod secretariat. Dioceses have organised special training for clergy and lay leaders of synodal talks. The key method of the training was to conduct a synodal conversation and to learn through personal experience. The response of the participants at the meetings was very good. Most dioceses used specific worksheets to work in groups with questions around the 10 thematic cores. Two dioceses had recently received a new Bishop Ordinary and linked the synodal journey with the search for a vision for their diocese over several years. Elsewhere, the synod was linked to existing animation groups for the renewal of pastoral structures and to diocesan pastoral services. The whole process was hampered by the coronavirus epidemic, due to the limited gathering of people, and the meetings were often held virtually. At the same time, the dioceses widely invited people to answer the synodal questions through special posters, leaflets, flyers and online questionnaires.

1.3 The challenge to reach remote

A particular challenge in the synodal process was to reach out to the peripheral and remote and to capture their experience of the Church. Despite innovative efforts through informal interviews and online questionnaires, we have found that as a church communion it is difficult to reach out to the outliers. However, we did receive some responses, which are all the more valuable as they represent a large group of Christians who have been moving away from the practice of their faith at an accelerated pace in recent years.

1.4 Response to the Synod on Synodality

In the first phase of the Synod on Synodality, we have seen, on the one hand, great enthusiasm among the faithful, but also great reticence (especially among the clergy) because of the conviction that the Synod will not bring about the desired changes in the established processes of the Church. The initial reluctance was overcome by presentations of the Synod at various levels and by involving everyone in the discussions. It turned out that even those who were initially reluctant, after a living experience of the synodal conversation, realised the value of this form of consultation. Overall, raising awareness of the importance of the Synod and entering into the synodal process has been slower than expected.

1.5 Media publications

From the very beginning, we have supported the synodal process in Slovenia through various publications in the Catholic and civil media. Bishops and priests have spoken about the Synod in special letters, sermons and public talks. The testimonies of the laity in round tables and interviews played a special role. The Faculty of Theology dedicated a central national theology course to the Synod. Numerous other regular study meetings were also held on the theme of the Synod.

1.6 Participants in the synodal process



Participation at national level cannot be quantified. We can only say very broadly that between 1/3 and 2/3 of the parishes (Parish Pastoral Councils and other groups) entered the Synod process. In addition, several thousand responses to the online questionnaires were received by the dioceses.

During the synodal summaries, we noted the participation of the following groups of believers: priests, catechists, prayer groups, men's groups, women's groups, family organisations, marriage groups, divorced and cohabiting groups, family catechesis groups, Alpha courses, the Roma community, Caritas and charitable institutions, Catholic spiritual movements, Pastoral Associates, Parish Pastoral Councils, Church musicians, young people, student groups, Catholic media, Vocation Pastoral Groups, Catholic schools and kindergartens, religious men and women, Sick, Health and Categorical Pastoral Groups, and remote persons.

In addition to the above, the synodal processes in the specially formed Synod Study Group of the UOC and in the organigram of the working bodies of the UOC took place in January and February 2022. The perspective of these two synodal consultations is important because, on the one hand, they confirm the conclusions of the discussions that took place at the level of parishes and smaller communities, and, on the other hand, they complement them with conclusions that are relevant for the whole Church in Slovenia.

1.7 Collecting Synodal Summaries

Synodal summaries of Slovenian dioceses, communities and individuals were collected at Slovenian level until the end of May 2022. At Slovenian level, we received six diocesan summaries, summaries of the organigram of the UOC and the UOC Synod Study Group, a summary of the Conference of Religious Institutions of Slovenia, and a few contributions from individual groups and individuals.

On the basis of all the material gathered, the Synod Secretariat of the Synod of the Council of the Church of Slovenia has drafted the present national summary, which was reviewed by the Slovenian bishops at the meeting of the Council of the Council of the Church of Slovenia in Ljubljana on 22 June 2022 and supplemented with their own views as shepherds of the Church during the synodal exchange of views.

2. Discerning synodal contributions

Despite the fact that the synodal process took place in different communions and with different approaches, the summaries reflect very similar emphases. In this fact we recognise the action of the Holy Spirit, who inspires his message in different places and times, which only when read together is given its true interpretation (Acts 10). The following is a summary of the main highlights of the synodal discussions in Slovenia.

2.1 Definition of competences and responsibilities

The process of the synodal discussions itself has yielded some insights that can serve as substantive guidelines for the future:

It was important to realise that each process must be preceded by a clear definition of responsibilities and accountabilities. We learnt that unrealistic expectations create the

opportunity for ill will. Expectations must therefore be set in line with the real possibilities and responsibilities of persons and groups. In line with the fundamental question of the Synodal documents, we have consciously focused our gaze first on good examples of walking together in our concrete reality.

Only then, in a prayerful atmosphere, did we seek the promptings of where the Holy Spirit is calling us. In this way we avoided the common temptation to negativism and unrealistic, overly high expectations. By asking questions, we encouraged the participants to recognise that we are all responsible for the Church as it is.

2.2 Gratitude for parishes

As participants spoke about their own experiences, the Synodal discussions showed a strong emphasis on the parish community and the small congregations that complement parish life. The parish community emerged as a fundamental community of the Church and one of the main points of reference for the future of the Church. The faithful want good and beautiful relationships in the parish, which are too often marked by personal conflicts.

At the same time, we are aware that formal membership of a parish community alone is not enough, as it does not allow for personal connection and growth in faith. For this reason, many have stressed the need to seek new forms of parish community, especially as a communion of small communities. Small communions allow the faithful to get to know each other better and to form bonds of friendship. The role of the Parish Pastoral Council needs to be re-evaluated and healthy forms of group decision-making and cooperation need to be introduced. A culture of genuine discernment in the Holy Spirit based on faith should be better developed.

2.3 Small communities and networking

Many small congregations and groups in Slovenia can be described as healthy nuclei of the Church. Among them in Slovenia we can count: the Church's charitable activities, church movements, home visits to the elderly, devotions and pilgrimages, especially for the elderly, parish feasts after Sunday Mass, dedicated co-workers, a large family pastoral, parish pastoral councils, prayer groups for spiritual vocations, marriage preparation, children's catechesis and catechist education, an annual pastoral course and theological symposium, scouts, oratorio, family catechesis, youth retreats, Alpha courses, and more.

On the one hand, while we are aware of the wealth of pastoral opportunities that exist, we are also faced with the challenge that the faithful are often not aware of, or, because of the particular local situation, do not have access to, all forms of pastoral care. This obstacle can be overcome through new forms of information and communication. At the same time, there is a need for more networking across parish, deanery, diocesan or church organisation boundaries, so that everyone really has the opportunity to participate.

The faithful stressed their desire for more adult catechesis, family catechesis and for the catechesis of children to be moved into the family environment. Participants wanted more opportunities to deepen their faith, spirituality and religious knowledge, where they could grow in their knowledge of the faith, joy and confidence, and thus witness more easily in the world.

2.4 Faith and ecclesial communion grow out of worship



The Synod talks showed that worship and celebration are central to the life of the Church's communions. The faithful want beautiful, prepared and understandable worship with

quality addresses, passionate pastors and faithful Christians who truly live and witness their faith. Singing and the participation of the worship team play a special role in worship. Participants find that their faith grows as they participate in worship. They therefore suggest that as many people as possible should be involved. Adequate education is also needed for participation and a proper understanding of the liturgy. The meaning of the sacraments, the conditions for worthy reception of the sacraments and the various attitudes in worship should be explained over and over again. In particular, it is necessary to raise awareness that the anointing of the sick is not a preparation for death.

Special attention must be given to young people, children and young families, to make them happy and to give them a place in the liturgy. Special family worship should be encouraged. We also need to listen to groups of believers who cry out for traditional worship and feel excluded.

The need for the faithful to come together after Mass in the form of simple, organised coffee (agape) gatherings was strongly emphasised. We believe that beautiful liturgies, combined with meetings for the preparation of the liturgy and gatherings after Mass, can bring more prayer, joy, smiles, faith and celebration to parishes. In the liturgy we touch the very heart of the Synodal challenges, because it is a question of our faith and what is essential in faith. In a beautiful liturgy we should strengthen the sense of the essential, of living fully, of authentic life and faith. In worship we encounter Jesus Christ and he binds us together in the communion of the Church.

2.5 Enthusiasm of the laity for cooperation

In many parishes, there is already a great enthusiasm among the laity to participate. The laity want to feel needed and wanted (as co-workers), not just as listeners and recipients. The participants in the Synodal talks stressed that the concrete tasks in which they participate increase their belonging, build their personality, strengthen their faith and bind the community together. It is therefore necessary to promote concrete activities, which, in addition to participation in worship and in parish groups, include pilgrimages, hikes, bike rides, picnics, work campaigns and other informal gatherings. The ideal is for each believer to take on a task in communion. Instead of 'co-workers', we should begin to speak of 'responsibility-bearers', who would be given responsibility and would be able, in agreement with the parish priest, to direct a particular activity with a high degree of autonomy. At the same time, care should be taken to ensure that the burden of tasks is properly distributed among several persons, so that it does not all rest on a few who are already overburdened or who are taking on too overbearing a role.

There is also a greater enthusiasm and thirst for spiritual content among young people. While the total number of young people active in the Church is decreasing (after confirmation), those who remain faithful have a growing desire to live a consistent and deep Christian life. They want serious and quality content. Young people like clear instructions, clear goals and a strong leader.

2.6 Cooperation between priests and laity

The commitment of the laity to collaboration is very much linked to the attitude of the priest.

The theme of cooperation between clergy and laity was expressed very often in the synodal discussions, and it is evident that there is a great challenge for the Church in Slovenia in this area. The initiatives of active lay people are often met with resistance from priests/priests who do not trust and support the laity.

Priests, on the other hand, often complain about disinterested lay people who do not want to take on tasks and do not want to expose themselves. There are, therefore, several reasons for tensions. Sometimes the laity do not feel competent and are not able to carry out a task themselves. At other times, priests hold things too much in their own hands and are unwilling to leave certain tasks in the hands of the laity.

Certainly, the role of the priest/parish priest, who ultimately decides whether and how a particular thing will be done in the community, is still very much rooted in our tradition. An example of good practice is when the laity propose a project on their own initiative and are prepared to take full responsibility for it, in agreement and consultation with the priest. It is important to bear in mind that lay people are often highly qualified professionally to organise and carry out various concrete works. It is generally accepted that lay people prefer to take on a task if they accept responsibility for it and can carry it out independently. The laity want to be not only doers but also bearers of responsibility. The Church in Slovenia needs to be declericalised in such a way that the laity take their share of responsibility for the life of the local Church.

2.7 Cooperation and Leadership Formation

We need more targeted formation programmes for priests and laity. Priests should be exposed to healthy leadership, teamwork, group decision-making, taking and delegating responsibility through formation programmes. The laity, on the other hand, should be given basic knowledge of the ministries and responsibilities of the Church, thus empowering them to function in the Church environment, to take responsibility and to cooperate with the clergy. We would like to see a culture of healthy leadership (among both clergy and laity), where the leader encourages group dynamics and listens to all.

All of the above aspects are particularly relevant when priests and laity also work together professionally in the context of different ecclesial institutions. For example, priests are afraid to take on a parish with a kindergarten or a home for the elderly, because they are not qualified to manage an educational institution and a team of staff members. Candidates for this work need specific formation. There are fewer and fewer priests, and it is right to leave as much of the work that is not ministry-related to priestly ordination as possible to the laity. It is good that many volunteers are involved in pastoral work in Slovenia, but we in the Church in Slovenia recognise the need for at least a certain number of professional lay workers in church ministries. We need to prepare specific formation for them and, at the same time, make sure that their work is properly valued.

2.8 Life of priests

The Synodal talks have repeatedly touched on the life and role of priests in our communities. These conversations have been held either by priests among themselves or by lay people about priests. It seems that there are many challenges regarding the life and role of priests in Slovenia. Objectively speaking, the number of priests is decreasing and their age is increasing. There are very few new clergy vocations. It seems that as a Church we do not have the right answers to these questions or are not really concerned about them. Concern for spiritual vocations must not stem only from the need to complete the existing structures of the Church.

The fundamental question of why God permits this state of spiritual vocations is that spiritual vocations will grow as fruit in a healthy Church.

The priests note that there is a lack of fraternal bonding, common prayer and sincere fellowship. There is a need for more frankness in the conversations between priests and also between priests and bishops. Priests note that they do not listen enough to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, to the faithful and to their confreres. The help of the laity, some of whom are willing to help, is important. The faithful are distressed when the pastor is not with his heart with the parish, when disputes arise between priests, or when they see the priest's living conditions untidy. It seems that priests are often lonely, they have no real friends on the human side and they do not find understanding. They often have no one to take care of their food, cleaning and washing. The employment status, social situation and financing of priests' work should be comprehensively regulated.

Many priests no longer have the energy for committed pastoral work. There is also the problem of excessive concern for the renovation of buildings, when this is linked to a flight from relationships. Some of the faithful still regard them as sexless creatures. Alongside all these issues, there is also the question of the obligation or freedom to choose celibacy.

The term clericalism was used repeatedly in the Synodal talks to refer to the excessive separation of clergy and laity, the rigid institutionalism and cold self-sufficiency of Church persons and structures. It is a feeling that priests are superior to other believers, which they show in their behaviour and actions. Clericalism is not only present among priests, but also among the laity, who expect everything from priests and bishops. We must be aware that the Holy Spirit speaks to the Church through all the baptized.

The sexual abuse of some priests has brought much suffering, stigma, ignorance, fear, doubt and suspicion into the life of the Church. The protection of children and minors must be a priority concern. It is necessary to resolve concrete cases and to put in place appropriate prevention procedures for the future. At the same time, it is necessary to put this issue in a healthy context and not lose sight of the other problems facing the local Church.

2.9 Remote, open communion and listening

It has to be admitted that, despite great desire, our invitations did not reach a large number of the remotest. This made us realise that our communions are not really open to the outlying. While in their daily lives, religious lay people are mostly surrounded by the unbelieving and the remote, they find it difficult to enter into an open conversation about faith with them. Organised contact with the peripheral is provided by the network of Caritas and other charitable institutions. However, it is important to realise that the largest group of outliers are the many Christians who have drifted away from the faith, as the Church's statistics show us again and again each year. The participants in the Synodal talks expect the bishops to make a thorough analysis of the statistics, as the falling figures do not seem to really worry anyone. We seem to have resigned ourselves to a Church that is dying. They advise us to be more concerned with quality rather than quantity in mass pastoral.

Also separated are divorced and cohabiting couples, homosexual persons, young people, especially those who move away after confirmation, the elderly, the infirm, the hearing impaired, the disabled, the blind and visually impaired, newcomers to the local area, the poor, etc. The faithful themselves can also be distant, when they do not join the Church's communion or do not feel accepted in it.

It is necessary to develop the skills of true listening, when we take our neighbour seriously, accept them and are prepared for the possibility that listening will change our beliefs. We need more of a culture of discernment, where everyone feels "heard", even if their individual wishes are not ultimately "heard". The Holy Spirit is calling us to open our communions and to actively reach out to those who are far away with personal invitations. All, believers and outsiders alike, should feel welcome and accepted in communion. Therefore, even those who cannot receive the sacraments must be given the opportunity to participate and to take on certain tasks. Intergenerational cooperation and the transmission of faith between generations should be developed. Sacraments and feasts which are attended by those who are far away and for which a suitable catechesis can be prepared are a special entry point.

Most of the time, the distant do not reject the Church's teaching and doctrine. It is often the case that they are willing to discuss fundamental issues of faith and are eager to hear the faithful's point of view. They have distanced themselves because of various bad experiences. They experience the church as an institution that is part of the culture, but is too much about power, money and connection to power. What they resent most about believers and priests is the duplicity of their actions. Believers and non-believers judge us by our actions. The language of the Church is often not even understandable to the faithful, let alone to outsiders. Synod participants say that, apart from members of the hierarchy, the Church listens most to the elderly, the rich and the politically powerful. This is also the public image of the Church.

2.10 Testimony of the faithful in public

Active Christians are a minority in Slovenian society today and are under pressure from negative public opinion. For this reason, they often avoid delicate situations and conversations in which it would be necessary to confront positions. Participants in the Synodal talks admit that they often lack the means, i.e. the knowledge and the reasoned positions, to present a Christian view. On the other hand, they acknowledge that they often live in their actions and decisions in the same way as everyone around them.

Participants in the Synodal talks say that the most important thing for their Christian confidence and witness is to experience authentic Christian communion in their own congregation, from which they draw joy, pride, belonging and a healthy self-confidence. Positive stories and public testimonies of Christians are also important. They want more and more accessible programmes where they receive knowledge and arguments for public debate on major moral issues. Many want the Church to develop a healthy distance from the state and from particular political options. And they expect Church leaders to speak more clearly on fundamental Christian moral and social issues, such as the family and the protection of life from conception to death. They want them to speak out in public debate on Christian grounds, with equal standards for all.

2.11 Raising real issues

There is a lot of tension in Slovenia because of scandals, because in the last 15 years we have been moving from one scandal to another. In moments of crisis, the faithful have not been given the right explanations by those in charge. Those who are distant from the Church observe a distinctly apologetic attitude and a legal-apologetic language that is repulsive to the

general public. In the Church, we are afraid to raise serious issues and often do not name

the real problem. We are too little aware that the Church's strength is that we are small. The challenge for the Church is that we all recognise ourselves as poor. We would also gain a lot from speaking out and being vulnerable in public, because we would be more credible and attractive. We need a healthy humility in which we can name problems and solve them instead of hiding them.

2.12 Cooperation between dioceses and bishops

The faithful, and especially priests and close collaborators, have high expectations of bishops. Participants in the Synodal talks note that in recent years there has been no real unity among Slovenian bishops. Cooperation between dioceses has also often been difficult. It is true that individual dioceses are autonomous in their activities. The diversity between dioceses is not to be feared, but can be seen as an asset. Tensions and conflicting tendencies can be a source of encouragement for further work. At the same time, there is a need for more systematic cooperation on issues at the Slovenian level that go beyond the individual diocese. The bishops see the Slovenian Bishops' Conference as a synodal body for networking among bishops, for communication within the Church and, above all, in relation to the state.

Many in the public lack the visibility and clear authority of the Church in Slovenia. The faithful do not experience bishops as leaders who give direction and vision. They feel uncertain about where the Church's boat is going. They would like to see a common search and for the bishops to take more time for synodal planning of the direction. There is still a great divide between the pastoral field and the leadership of the dioceses. There is a feeling that the hierarchy does not have a realistic view of reality.

The pain of the financial collapse of the Archdiocese of Maribor still reverberates in Slovenia. Especially in eastern Slovenia, the thought of (too) little (financial) solidarity between dioceses is still present. Some do not see a real future without a common search for solutions among Slovenian dioceses. There is also a strong presence of the idea of a rich Church and the criticism that a greater part of the financial resources should be directed to pastoral work, not to walls.

3. Future steps on the synodal path

The synodal journey in Slovenia showed a very honest picture of the current situation of our local Church. We are grateful for all the journey we have made. Many beautiful things have been revealed. We have faced many challenges with sincerity. We look forward with courage and trust that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to handle all the steps He lays before us. We are not afraid of the challenges, because we have the assurance that the Lord is always with us and that the Church as a whole will not fail (Mt 16:18).

The diocesan phase of the synodal process over the past year has been the beginning of a long journey that has no end. Synodality is fundamentally inscribed in the life of the Church, which, as communion with the Lord, travels through history. The fruits of the Synod will be reaped first and foremost by those communions which have themselves walked the path of the Synod. For all the others, their findings can serve as an encouragement and an invitation to



embark on the synodal journey themselves.



From the synodal discussions, we have identified the following calls for the future in Slovenia:

Let synodality continue! Synodal conversations, synodal forms of consultation and synodal mindset should continue at all levels.

Let us create beautiful and spiritually rich and understandable liturgies! Let us regularly participate in worship so that our faith is strengthened and we receive strength from it. Each believer should accept a task in the church/parish communion. Let us repeatedly explain the meaning of worship.

Let us be joyful and proud Christians! Let us join together in a living communion that reaches into everyday life. Let us witness confidently with life and word in all circumstances.

Let us open our communion! We foster a culture of dialogue, listening and mutual acceptance so that everyone feels accepted. Let us maintain our affection for the distant, despite their particularities. Let us begin a conversation on the fundamental questions of faith.

Let's strengthen the role of the laity and their collaboration with priests! Let us help priests in the issues of their life and work. Empower the laity to work effectively with priests. Let us offer formation programmes to strengthen faith, knowledge and skills for collaboration.

Building a culture of responsibility and decision-making! Let's clearly define responsibilities and accountabilities. Let everyone accept their share of responsibility. Let's build a culture of healthy leadership.

Let us renew our structures to respond to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit! Let parish pastoral councils become what they bear in their name. Let us learn to discern and decide collectively.

Let's work together and connect with each other! Let us offer and welcome good initiatives beyond the borders of individual parishes, dioceses and ecclesial communities.

We are aware that the Holy Spirit inspires all the baptised. Each one of us has the responsibility to shape the synodal Church of the future by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In a special way, this responsibility is borne by bishops and priests as leaders of communions. Together we are called to discern in faith the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to make key decisions and also to take concrete steps.

Mary, Queen of the Slovenes and Queen of the New Evangelization, lead us forward on the synodal path, so that we may courageously take the steps that the Holy Spirit is inspiring the Church in Slovenia!

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