

# SYNODAL PROCESS

diocesan phase



Roman Catholic Church  
Netherlands



National Synthesis

Aug. 15, 2022  
Feast of the Assumption of Mary

# SYNODAL PROCESS

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## TOGETHER

This report is based on the synodal activities of:

#### The Dutch dioceses

- Archdiocese of Utrecht
- Diocese of Haarlem-Amsterdam
- Diocese of Breda
- Diocese of Groningen-Leeuwarden
- Diocese of Rotterdam
- Diocese of Roermond
- Diocese of 's-Hertogenbosch
- The Military Ordinariate

#### Rural Catholic organizations

- Association of Catholic Social Organizations (VKMO).
- Officium Caritatis and listeners Catholic civil society
- Conference of Netherlands Religious (KNR)
- Network of Catholic Women
- Justice Chaplaincy
- Youth WYD@home
- Association of Catholic Gay Pastors.
- Marienburg Society
- Conference the Missionary Parish
- Catholic Association for Ecumenism (KVO).

## SYNODAL PROCESS

On Oct. 17, 2021, the Synodal process of consultation was also opened in the Netherlands in preparation for the 2023 Synod of Bishops in Rome that will deal with synodality.

In the consultation during the "diocesan phase" of the synodal process, the central questions were:

- In proclaiming the Gospel, how does a synodal Church walk together?
- To what does the Holy Spirit invite us to grow in that "going on the road together"?

The Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops proposed ten themes to explore these central questions in depth. From these, the Dutch Bishops' Conference selected three themes to guide the discussion. This did not preclude discussion of the other themes.

- celebrate
- co-responsibility for the mission
- dialogue in Church and society

The discussion guide from the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops suggested that the discussion take place along the lines of the Synod's three key words:

- communion: communion with God and communion of people
- participatio: active participation of all believers in the mission of the Church
- missio: proclaiming the Good News and making new disciples

Pope Francis' invitation to engage in conversation about faith was widely responded to. In the Dutch

dioceses, consultations took place in:

- Parishes (parishioners, work groups, choirs, etc.).
- Church bodies (Diocesan Pastoral Councils, Lay Councils, Priestly Councils, Chapters, Youth Groups, Religious Institutes, Church Movements and New Communities, Migrant Communities, etc.).
- Ecumenical groups (local councils of churches, etc.).

In the Military Ordinariate, talks took place of:

- Chaplains
- Military
- Citizen employees

Consultations took place in national Catholic organizations. Reports from ten national forums have been incorporated into this synthesis.

Usually the discussion manual of the Dutch bishops was used. Many meetings had the following format:

- A meditative moment: often the prayer "We stand before Thee, Holy Spirit
- Listen
- Inspiration
- Dialogue
- Distinction

PART 1 of this synthesis contains summaries of what has been heard. PART 2 contains distinctions and conclusions.

# PART 1

## 1 FOUR

How does the synodal Church celebrate its faith?

### 1.1 Celebrations

For many, celebrations offer moments of reflection and repentance, provide inspiration, help through their own language and symbolism, offer support and comfort. They help to discover and deepen the relationship with God, with Christ. 'Journeying together' is possible only if it is based on common listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. The "Celebration of the Eucharist together," experiencing the development between God and people in the liturgy, therefore strongly emerges as the centerpiece of church life in the conversations. We celebrate our faith. Many believers experience fellowship and deep communion with God in the celebrations. They find formation important to gain an increasing awareness of the Eucharist. Many emphasize that there are multiple forms of celebration besides the Eucharist: shooting prayers, lighting candles, rosary, tide prayer, walking the Stations of the Cross, wandelings with prayer moments, prayers around faith conversations and other encounters.

- There is a need for places of silence, reflection, prayer, where there is also formation and guidance.
- There is a need for more attention to catechesis so that understanding of the faith and sacraments can grow. Formation of liturgists and participating laity in celebrations is needed.

### 1.2 Liturgy

For many, the Eucharist is the most familiar form of celebration and, with its fixed form prayers, it provides support and peace. New prayers sometimes give more inspiration than "old" prayers. One finds contact with God in a good inspiring liturgy. The language of prayer, speech and song is important. There are also discussion participants who experience the prescribed texts in the official liturgy as pompous and inaccessible and not inviting to outsiders and newcomers. In addition, a number of participants found it painful that pastoral workers are less and less visible in the liturgy. Almost exclusively functional criteria are given as to when a celebration should or should not be judged as successful: are the texts understandable, has everyone who can lead a celebration been sufficiently addressed, does everyone who wanted to be involved feel that he or she has been sufficiently involved?

- Many desire equality in bearing responsibility in preparation and organization of the liturgy.
- One asks for space for accessible language in the liturgy and more variety in liturgical forms.

### 1.3 Variation

There is a need for a varied liturgy, good songs, beautiful music, well-crafted and intelligible homilies, where proclamation and social context are connected. There is a desire for variation in the range of celebrations. These include the Rosary, prayer of the Hours, Taizé, thematic celebrations based on current events, and celebrations aimed at target groups such as the elderly, children and youth. In these celebrations, lay people often have a leading role and this is experienced as close and less elevated than the Eucharist. Celebrating our faith together in the liturgy is experienced as the most important common denominator. A number of churchgoers like to participate actively during the celebration. Comprehensible, ordinary language increases involvement. People like to hear current events in the sermon and intercessions. A number of young people especially appreciated the spiritual aspect of the Church, prayer and silence. Differences in perception and celebration between Dutch and migrant communities provide opportunities to learn from each other.

- New forms are needed so that the liturgy is more appealing to people of our time.
- Many are asking for contemporary ways to use modern channels to reach young people and invite them to celebrations.

## 2 CO-RESPONSIBLE FOR MISSION

How are we missionary disciples?

### 2.1 Co-responsible

Jesus commissioned all of us to actively participate in the spread of the Gospel in word and deed. Many participants in the discussion want leaders who go and listen to people and who lead them on that road as opinion leaders, who spread their enthusiasm in talk shows. But it is also recognized that you have to be an influencer yourself just as Jesus was in his day. In your own actions you can be an example to others and bring up Jesus "unspoken. Declining numbers of priests, deacons and pastors, volunteers and churchgoers, of finances and of buildings call for a clear awareness of our mission and close mutual cooperation. To promote this, they say baptized people need to be made more aware of their responsibility for mission and to take action as believers and not wait to see what is asked "from above" and, on the other hand, to strengthen the community of faith by listening more to me-deparishioners.

- Be authentic, animated and appealing in your celebrating, speaking/proclaiming, and preaching.
- Get out there, connect with what is going on in society, be seen and heard, including in the media.
- Use your own rich tradition to radiate renewed positivity and involve the whole people of God.

### 2.2 Speechlessness

Many Catholics are speechless. They find it very difficult to put their faith and mission into words. We may find in our own saints an inspiration for ourselves, discover new creativity in ourselves and thus get moving. This provides momentum and hope for renewed momentum for our faith community. Jesus' radical invitation, the way he invites and touches people on the margins of society - sinners, the sick and strangers - is what makes Christian faith special and loving.

- It calls for more catechesis and more faith conversations, especially for young people to discover their relationship with God.
- There is a great need for dialogue and exchange on matters of faith, in-depth conversations about the things that drive and inspire us, stories of faith that we want to share with others and conversation to better discern your calling as a baptized person.

### 2.3 A healthy community

For some participants in the discussions, the mission of Rome and the Dutch bishops seems to be different from the mission experienced from within the community. A group of participants said they felt "orphaned," that our Church was not evolving along with social developments. Many warn that the Church is too preoccupied with itself and neglects its place in the world, thus alienating itself from the faithful and from the outside world.

- The idea that we would form a "sacred remainder" is an escape route. In a healthy commune, different generations believe together.

### 2.4 Visible

Pope Francis says we need to leave our homes and go out into the streets and be visible among people. That's where it starts. Parishioners are visible in their actions or by being present: in listening to each other and caring for each other. Diaconal commitment, however, is no longer directly linked to the Catholic faith. Many feel a shared responsibility to do something about the needs in the world. In this they often want to connect with other denominations. In several places, caritas works on ecumenical projects. Young people give to concrete

find examples of the Church's servant leadership inspiring. Religious report how volunteers experience a deepening of their faith in Christ in contact with people in need.

- People say we need to go back to places where people come together and connect.

### **2.5 Accessible**

Many participants in the conversations long for a Church that is accessible. Everyone should be able to experience that he or she is welcome. The Church must be much more actively open to newcomers and connect with young people and with seekers and be there more for people on the margins. Mission, going out to the other and propagating it also means listening, being open to other sounds and opinions. The Church is too inward-looking, say participants in the conversations. People ask for a new language as Church to pass on the sacred tradition and truth of faith to the next generations.

- Promote an accessible Church through: meeting, low-threshold activities, dialogue activities with diverse groups, equality, with volunteer involvement in liturgy, diaconate and catechesis and with equipping.
- Young people point out the importance of attention and knowledge for and from young people.

### **2.6 An inclusive Church**

Many agree that an inclusive Church welcomes everyone because the mission of the Church is to radiate God's Love. People experience a lack of acceptance of and space for diversity of people. Many believers see this as a serious impediment to the Church's mission and, in many cases, as contrary to God's love. Church practice, they say, is too far removed from what is going on socially. Some religious communities hold celebrations for people who otherwise feel excluded. They feel that church morality is interpreted too strictly.

- Offer an outstretched hand to everyone, including those Catholics on the margins of the Church, those who are divorced and remarried, lesbians and homosexuals.

## **3 DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

How do we have good dialogue in the church community and its environment?

### **3.1 Dialogue in Church**

It appears that engaging in dialogue is more helpful in bridging differences than discussing and persuading. People indicate that in practice true dialogue is often difficult or missed partly due to lack of equality in the Church. In the parishes we see different forms of dialogue. The call sounds: inspire and value one another and trust in the Holy Spirit. There are many who want to contribute to and support a living Church community, but also many who do not know how. The large attendance at the national conference on missionary parish on March 24/25, 2022 in Breda shows that there is much need for renewal and new impetus.

- One calls for further growing equality and balance between women and men.
- One calls for increasing the visibility of women in the Church in many ways, beginning with daily practice in parishes. This includes participation by women in governing organs, in the mission of the Church and also at the altar.
- A number of women advocate for theological research and conversation on the admission of women to deacon training.
- A number of discussion participants ask that women and other lay people be included in all selection procedures in the Church. Women ask to be taken more seriously and treated with respect and as equal interlocutors.

### 3.2 Dialogue with other Christians

Many conversation participants experience the connection with other Christian communities as a strength. They long for a new impetus in the ecumenical conversation. In the "being on the road together" as a Church, contacts with fellow Christians are experienced as especially valuable where they provide a bedrock for faith conversation. Christians who have fled from the Middle East and have come to live with us bring with them an authentic and deep faith.

- Learn from people who participate in the parish from other cultures.

### 3.3 Dialogue with non-believers

Many are looking for connection. People also see the Church as a platform of people seeking unity in the world. Conversation with people of other faiths helps Catholics become aware of what they themselves stand for. Amid the advancing secularization of society, being faithful in one another is recognized and valued. A number of priests, deacons and pastoral workers point out the importance of promoting conversation with Jews, both for the reading of Holy Scripture and for spirituality.

- There is a desire for cooperation with other believers and all people of good will, including those who do not belong to any religion, to promote justice and peace in the world.

### 3.4 Contribution to society

A common observation in the interviews is the absence of the Church from the public debate. It is felt that the Church has been too preoccupied with its clerical task and as a result has lost touch with society. It is observed that the Catholic Church is no longer at the center of society. There is a growing gap between Church and society especially when it comes to ethical positions. Due to shame about sexual abuse, positions on women in the Church, the position of pastoral workers, homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, marriage and divorce, Catholics are dropping out or are reluctant to express their faith in dialogue and social debate. According to many, the Church has only been able to serve as a moral compass for church and society to a limited extent in recent decades mainly because of the sexual abuse scandal. Dialogue takes shape, among other things, in consultation with the civil congregation, in presence with people on the margins, in neighborhood chaplaincy, in contact with schools. Dialogue also takes place where people act together around refugees, the food bank, in politics and everyday life. Many see the importance for the Church to engage in dialogue with the society in which it is rooted and to look with new eyes at today's people in order to fulfill its mission.

- One longs for a community of all the baptized that comes out with a faithful witness, merciful and committed, and from there contributes to good living together.

### 3.5 Community and connectedness

Synodal conversations about dialogue expose the desire for community and connection with one another, for a faith community that is nurturing and gives space to diversity. People long for a priest, deacon or pastoral worker who knows the faith community. The calls for places of encounter and encouragement emerge from the conversations. People are asked to see and promote togetherness. Listening to each other is seen as the basis for this.

- The need is felt for more connection between work groups, volunteers and parishioners and more connection with priests, deacons and pastoral workers.
- People are calling for more attention to community building, spirituality and faith deepening.

### 3.6 Open dialogue

Many parishioners want a faith community in which an open dialogue can be held about the role of women in the Church, about marriage and divorce, about the value of life, about other forms of relationships. People long for in-depth discussion meetings about people's questions of faith and life, about social themes, about policy issues, about

scientific insights, on Catholic social thought. This process, according to many, can be supported by equal commitment of priests, deacons, pastoral workers and well-equipped volunteers with respect for each other's position and role. The Church should not blow with all the winds, but should examine whether the Holy Spirit is also visible in the spirit of the age.

- Connection to society is seen as a great challenge for the Church.
- There is a desire for approachable forms of community, a listening ear and a helping hand so that the parish can pick people up in society, walk with them and bring them to God, based on the core of our faith: from the Father, through the Son in the Spirit.

### **3.7 Hospitable Church**

Many want a parish where outsiders are welcome. There are calls for a welcoming Church, where everyone is welcome, including when celebrating the Holy Eucharist. Hospitable also means that divorced people, gays and lesbians are welcome.

- One wants to have an open attitude, inviting and friendly, not excluding anyone and offering a listening ear to anyone who needs it.

### **3.8 Image of the Church**

For many, the Catholic Church has a negative image: dogma, hierarchy, clerical, sexual abuse. The image prevails that the Church does not tolerate rebuttal, is rigidly hierarchical and too focused on rules.

- One longs for appealing and contemporary publicity to show that Christian values have firm roots in our society.
- Themes that are seen as important and will appeal to others outside the Church are climate, charity, care, attention, justice and world peace.

## **PART 2**

### **1 AWARD**

- Synodality has ancient roots and dates back to the second half of the second century.
- The Second Vatican Council urged that the synodality of the Church flourish again. The Synod of Bishops is a fruit of that.
- The Synodal Process, which seeks to involve all sections of the Church in reflecting on the future of the Church, takes a step further.

#### **1.1 Catechesis**

It is necessary to start from the words of Jesus Christ and from the good of faith as it has come to us in the tradition of the Church. If believers could better articulate their faith, they would also be better able to assume their role in society and enter into dialogue with others. From this, tension sometimes grows with what the Church teaches. For this reason too, catechesis and study are important.

- An investment is needed in lived knowledge of faith, which can then be put into words.

## 1.2 Equivalency

We are dealing with different responsibilities and positions to which a leader - a bishop, pastor, parish council, etc. - can be called to account and which cannot be delegated to the democratic level. - that cannot be delegated to a democratic level. Being on the road together as the Church needs everyone's gifts: the specific gifts of the ordained ministers, the gifts of the religious, the gifts of the other faithful, women and men.

- Attention to the value of each person's gifts is necessary to continue to fulfill the mission of the Church, as a missionary task in today's world. Equal dialogue can be based on equality as Christians.

## 1.3 One mission

With St. Paul we confess one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one body and one Spirit (cf. Eph 4:4-5). Thus there can be no fundamental contradiction between the mission of Rome/bishops on the one hand and that of the local community on the other. Every Christian believer has the task of translating, at his/her level, the mission of Christ to his/her own environment according to his/her own talents, competencies and received authority.

- All share in the one mission Christ has given to the Church.

## 1.4 Diaconate

Many indicate that a servant attitude is important in the faith community. The contact with the sick, the lonely, the elderly, the person in financial need is part of the mission of the Church and should be more visibly linked to the celebrations in the community of faith, to bring the commitment in the community before the Lord and accompany it with prayer and be sent out again. The value of a diaconal presence in society is widely supported and can be developed further. The poor lose confidence in the Church because there is a gap between we of the Church and them. We have to learn from the poor. You have to dare to change places. A point of attention is the link between social commitment and faith as confession and personal experience. This link must not be lost. It is as Christians that we want to be socially active.

- It is from the one commandment of love of God that we make an effort for people.

## 1.5 Hospitality

A need for hospitality is widely felt. People want to be hospitable to people who want to join a celebration or other activities, especially to young people and young families. Hospitality also means that the message should be truthful, honest and clear.

- Be clear in your message.

## 1.6 Liturgy

The language of the liturgy many who participated in the talks do not find recognizable. Since the official liturgy is the expression of the content of the faith of the Church, it is not for us to dispose of it. The liturgy, especially the Eucharist, is "source and culmination" of Church life. In a number of places, being a believer or churchgoing has narrowed to a participation in liturgical gatherings, where the distinction between sacramental and other vi- rations seems to be blurred. Consequently, many people no longer experience the Eucharist as its source and culmination.

- The liturgy must be able to be carried and celebrated by everyone and worldwide.

## 1.7 Baptized people and the Church

Sometimes the Church is spoken of as being the Pope, bishops and priests. As a result, all desires are also projected onto these leaders without sufficient reflection on one's own position as baptized.

- Baptized persons participate in the synodal process. They may feel that they are taken seriously in the dialogue.

## 1.8 God

"God" sometimes seems to have become a concept filled with social values such as humanity, and caring for one another. These are great and good values, but God is incomparably more.

- What distinguishes us from non-believers is not humanity, but our faith.

## 1.9 Pain from the past

There is pain about the past. It is important to distinguish between the pain that one cherishes and the pain from which one wants to be freed. Most participants in the conversations want to grow together as a Church. They want a Church that listens to these desires, is visible and supports God's People to rebuild our Church together.

- There is distrust fueled by past experiences, but there is also a willingness to move forward together now.

## 1.10 Missionary

One of the principles of a missionary parish is that leadership is provided from a team and a shared vision. Here lies an opportunity to give everyone his/her own role, and especially also to do justice to the genius of women.

- All the baptized are co-responsible for the mission of the Church.

## 1.11 Co-responsible

There is a need for context, connection and shared responsibility. Give as many men- sen as possible as much responsibility as possible, but do not overcharge them. Co-responsibility appeals to one's own work and self-activity. Yet the first participation is a participation with the Lord who lives in His Church. Because of the humanity of believers, the Church is seen as too limited, which is understandable. Yet it is the Church of the living Lord that makes us Christians and not we, as if we were Christians by ourselves, who make the Church by coming together and working together. One did not get around to listening to Christ in the conversations. We will have to rely again and more strongly on Christ himself. A new language is also appropriate here. A language of stories and testimonies for people in our time.

- It is the Church of Christ. He provides the leadership.

## 1.12 Visible

The visibility of the Church is not an end in itself, but it is necessary in order to give shape to the missio of the Church in today's world and also to invite new people to participate in the path of the Gospel.

- Visibility is promoted in the degree to which the communion and participatio of all yellows in the Church are actually realized in content in liturgy, catechesis and diaconate.

# 2 CONCLUSIONS

## 2.1 Communio

- Many feel that the sharing of faith is fundamental in being on the road together in the Church as communion.
- There is a great desire for communio, for fellowship with each other and with the Lord. The local community is felt to be very important. That is where the faithful come together, meet God in celebration, commit themselves to community and look out for one another.
- Communion requires dialogue. Dialogue promotes and expresses community-ness.
- Turning several church locations into one parish is difficult. People feel less committed to one another. Celebrating the Eucharist together without working on community building is felt to be inadequate. People miss the familiarity, the pastoral closeness.

- Priests, deacons and pastoral workers are closer to parishioners than in the past on the one hand, but on the other hand they are also far away due to regional work. The declining number of priests, deacons and catechists is a concern many experience, both for the ability to have adequate access to celebrations and in terms of pastoral proximity.
- Communion in the Church concerns not only parish communities, but also the bond between them at the diocesan and global levels.

## 2.2 Participatio

- There are great differences between parishioners in the way they experience their faith: some experience it primarily in mutual contact, while for others it is primarily about the celebration of the sacraments.
- On the one hand, there is a great strength that comes from volunteers who have a close relationship and have worked together for years. On the other hand, there is the experience that this can exclude newcomers and innovations, while the Spirit asks that all who feel called be admitted.
- From the synodal conversations we note a great desire for a Church, inspired by the word of God, in which there is an eye and ear for the individual person, for the concerns and needs in the world, in which all believers are heard.
- A servant commitment of the Church appeals to many and is part of the essence of the Church.
- Many long for a Church that awakens and supports the vocation of all members, and makes a connection to life today.
- Equality of women and men in carrying responsibility in the Church is seen by many as important for the credibility of the Church's message.

## 2.3 Missio

- In the conversations, it became clear that we cannot talk about mission outward without also talking about mission inward.
- Mission is described as: following in the footsteps of Jesus, looking out for one another, excluding no one, believing from the heart and being ready for others.
- By going back to the core of faith, we can do something for society.
- The first step in the mission of the Church and the faithful is kindness. "Your kindness should be known to all people, the Lord is near."
- A community that prays is missional. Prayer and missionary action intertwine.
- Believers explicitly ask to be made co-responsible in the propagation of faith, missionary and in dialogue with others. For recognizing one's own vocation and carrying out mission, conversation and praying together is important.
- Faith formation is important. This applies at all levels: parents need help in the faith education of their children; children and youth need catechesis and pastoral formation; teachers in schools need materials and support.

## 2.4 Way of life

Synodality is a way of life and action that is realized through listening to the Word together and celebrating the Eucharist together. It is a way of being Church in history, a tradition that is constantly renewing itself. The members of the Church are always in need of conversion. Conversion requires a spiritual attitude. Spirituality gives a soul to the institution.

- Synodality is a spiritual process to be promoted at the grassroots, in local churches and at all levels. It is a way of life that supports and develops the cooperation of all.

## 2.5 Listening to each other

Being on the road together requires a change of attitude: from the individual to the common, from the small (parish) community to the world church. A challenge for the follow-up process is to continually open this view to the big picture of the church community: from faith community to parish community to world church. To speak of the future of the Church in this way requires a changing attitude from the "I" to the "we. The synodal path invites listening. This listening concerns the whole community: each member of the community listens to the whole community, precisely also to the voice of those who are often not listened to. Open listening to each other is a beneficial result of this process. The conversations revealed a great source of inspiration and creativity among the new generation. One asks that it be allowed to grow and flourish and then we will eventually reap the benefits.

- Hearing and being heard, without judgment or condemnation: a listening community.

## 2.6 Listening to the Spirit

Many see the synodal method as a fruitful tool for engaging in dialogue with one another about all kinds of difficulties and in meeting one another to be inspired and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Listen to the Holy Spirit! This requires a spiritual attitude, faith and trust in God anchored in prayer and Eucharist.

- Dare to let the Spirit blow, have faith in that. Dare to let go in that, too.

## 2.7 Call for change

Synodality is a call to change within a Church on the move, listening to the Spirit. Many yearn for new forms and new ways. It is also about a change in mentality that makes one abandon old patterns of thinking and set oneself up for the Church of the future that will be communal and missional and much more a working together as one community at the service of the Gospel.

- The path to new forms comes through conversations, meeting and sharing.

## 2.8 Leadership

To make synodality a reality at all levels, leaders are needed who can guide that with personal, pastoral attention and empathy for parishioners. Leaders are needed who put people in on their knowledge and skills and inspire them.

- Needed is leadership in collaboration, horizontally.

## TOGETHER

The conversations during the diocesan phase of the synodal process stirred up a lot and provided important material for deepening and shaping faith in parishes, work groups, organizations, etc. What do the words of Jesus mean for my life, for our community, for our Church?

The key words *communio*, *participatio* and *missio* hold an important mission when it comes to the vitality of the Church in today's world.

Even after the conclusion of the diocesan phase of the synodal process, many parishes and groups will continue the conversations to ignite in each other the faith that drives us, inspired by what the Spirit tells us.

Christ has laid his hand on each of us. This forms the spiritual foundation for holding, accepting and building a community of faith and love.

In all our diversity, in the power of God's Spirit, we are moving together to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ visible in today's world.

Utrecht  
Aug. 15, 2022  
Feast of the Assumption of Mary