



FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS  
CONFERENCES OF OCEANIA

# Oceania Discernment on the Working Document for the Continental Stage



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission





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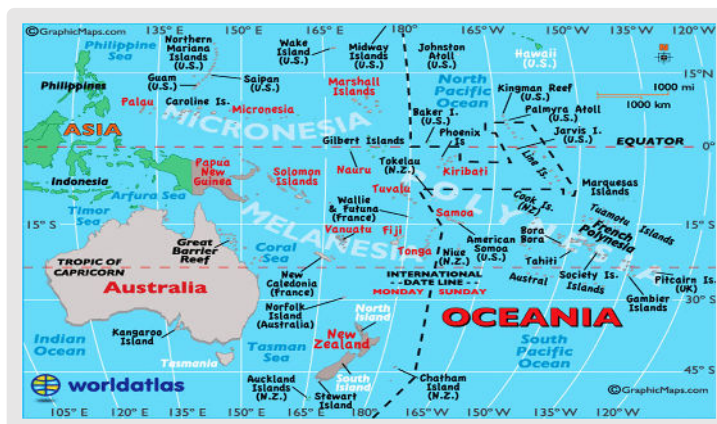
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# Introduction

This document reflects the voices of the People of God in Oceania in response to the Working Document for the Continental Stage. It includes a Pastoral Reflection by the bishops of Oceania gathered at the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) Assembly in Fiji (5-10 February 2023), on what they have heard from their people.

## Description of Oceania

1. The vast continent of Oceania is a sea of islands, large and small, situated in the Pacific Ocean, which occupies one third of the planet. Oceania has a unique feature that no other region shares. The international dateline passes through the middle of this continent. The position of the dateline means that each new day begins and ends in Oceania. The prayer of the Church, the first Masses of the day, happen in Oceania, each day. The last prayers and activities of daily life also happen in the countries of Oceania.
2. Oceania is rich in diversity. There are 21 countries, from small island states to large land masses, with a wide range of ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups. The region is rich in a natural abundance of flora, fauna and marine life. There is wide variance in access to resources, communications and community infrastructure across the region. For all countries, the impact of the ecological crisis is a considerable threat and preoccupies the political, economic, social and ecclesial discourse. The global commercial expansion in and around the region poses a threat to the survival and existence of the livelihood, culture and home of the many diverse and unique minority indigenous groups of people in Oceania.
3. Rising sea levels threaten the very existence of the small island states in Oceania and, increasingly, catastrophic floods, cyclones and fires are a reality in many countries. Our region is the focus and location of geopolitical conflict between world powers and is impacted by colonial and neo-colonial dynamics driven by transnational economic entities. Like all other continents, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant impact on lives and livelihoods, as well as Church life.
4. The Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) comprises four episcopal conferences – the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (CBCPNGSI); the *Conferentia Episcopalis Pacifici* (CEPAC); the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC); the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC); and representatives of the Eastern Catholic Churches (ECC).
5. The countries in Oceania are: American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna.



# Context of Episcopal Conferences and Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania

6. Common organisational and ecclesial principles coexist alongside the richness and diversity in the episcopal conferences across Oceania. In the Eastern Catholic Churches there is a variety of administrative arrangements with some operating within a single country and others in multiple countries, or across the continent. Our region includes both developed and developing countries – as a result, there will inevitably be different issues to be addressed, pastorally and as a matter of urgent advocacy.

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## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE (ACBC)

7. According to the 2021 Census, Australia’s population was around 25.4 million, of which almost 5.1 million (20%) identified as Catholic. In recent years, the number of Australians not identifying with any religious group increased to almost 10 million in 2021, and now comprise 38.9% of the population.
8. Almost one in five Australian Catholics (19.9%) were aged 65 and over, while 17.9% were aged under 15. Twenty-seven per cent were born overseas, of whom four in five were from non-English-speaking countries. Just over one in five Catholics (21.5%) spoke a language other than English at home. Around 2.7% of Australian Catholics – or almost 136,000 people – identified as Indigenous Australian.
9. The Catholic Church in Australia comprises 28 geographical dioceses, seven of which are archdioceses. There are also five Eastern Rite eparchies and two ordinariates, each of which covers all of Australia, and beyond, in some cases. All bishops, eparchs and ordinaries meet twice a year, working through 11 episcopal commissions and are supported by numerous advisory councils. There are around 175 religious institutes whose members live in community and adhere to a way of life under vows. Most are governed under their own constitutions, but in some cases by the local bishop. They work in a diocese with the consent of the bishop.
10. A particular feature of the Catholic Church in Australia is the range of ministries it undertakes and for which it has responsibility. It is the largest non-government provider in welfare and education, with Catholic schools educating just over one in five Australian children, and Catholic hospitals and aged care facilities caring for the sick, vulnerable and elderly. Increasingly, the governance of these services is by Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (MPJPs) – entities established in canon law with a specific function, such as stewardship for ministries. They have been created by religious institutes who have transferred their ministries to canonical stewards.

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## EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF THE PACIFIC (CEPAC)

11. CEPAC comprises 16 jurisdictions – 14 dioceses (five of which are archdioceses) and the Prefecture Apostolic of the Marshall Islands and *Missio Sui Iuris* of Funafuti and Tokelau are also members of CEPAC. There are 750,000 Catholics in a region of some 2.3 million people. This Catholic population is supported by 485 priests and 126 deacons (some of whom are affiliated to religious orders), 133 brothers and 666 religious sisters.
12. The tradition of Basic Christian Communities (BCC) is alive in many parts of the Pacific with groups gathering to pray and read the Bible – often with sparse contact from a priest or religious due to seasonal and geographic challenges.
13. The Catholic Church coexists alongside majority Protestant and evangelical Christian communities in many Pacific countries.

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## EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES (ECC)

14. The Eastern Catholic Churches of Oceania comprise five Eparchies (dioceses) — the Ukrainian, Melkite, Chaldean, Syro-Malabar and Maronite Churches. There are also other Eastern Catholic Churches who do not presently have an Ordinary of their own churches, including the Coptic, Armenian, Russian, Syriac and Syro-Malankara Catholic Churches. The Eastern Catholic Churches collaborate on exercises such as a response to synodality, but are not formally associated in a single entity comparable to an episcopal conference.<sup>1</sup>
15. There is a wide array of experiences amongst the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania.<sup>2</sup> They operate as autonomous entities and are flourishing. They are made up of diverse liturgical and theological heritages, in both the Antiochian-Syriac and Byzantine traditions. Each of the Churches also presents unique cultural perspectives. This diversity is marked by the different components that form the identity of each of these Eastern Catholic Churches including:
  - i. special liturgical and theological heritages,
  - ii. Chalcedonian Churches faithful to “the mystery of salvation”;
  - iii. Patriarchal Churches, many with a unique ascetic and monastic aspect; and
  - iv. Churches in full union with the Apostolic Roman See.
16. In the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania there are:
  - Two Eparchies of East-Syriac Liturgical Rite:
    - o Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne for the Syro-Malabar faithful (13 Parishes, 82,000 Catholics)
    - o St Thomas the Apostle of Sydney for the Chaldeans (7 Parishes, 70,000 Catholics).
  - Two Eparchies of the Byzantine Liturgical Rite:
    - o St Michael the Archangel of Sydney for the Melkite Catholics (13 Parishes, 52,000 Catholics)
    - o Sts Peter and Paul of Melbourne for the Ukrainian Catholics (10 Parishes, 7,046 Catholics).
  - One West-Syriac Rite: St Maroun of Sydney for the Maronites (14 Parishes, 161,370 Catholics).

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## NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE (NZCBC)

17. There are almost half a million Catholic-affiliated people living in Aotearoa New Zealand, making up 10% of the total population. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination and largest faith group. New Zealand is an increasingly secular country; in the last Census, undertaken in 2018, almost half of all people in New Zealand stated they had no religion (48.6%), compared to 34.6% in 2006.
18. The population of New Zealand is increasingly diverse, with a large migrant population. Māori, the indigenous population, make up 16.5% of people, with the Asian population 15.1% and Pacific peoples 8.1%.
19. There are six dioceses in New Zealand. The Archdiocese of Wellington is the metropolitan Archdiocese. The Catholic Church in New Zealand also consists of many Catholic religious orders and lay organisations, some that are undertaking significant pastoral ministries. NZCBC has embraced the bicultural relationship

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to being members of the Episcopal Synod of their respective *sui iuris* Churches, the Eastern Catholic Bishops are also members of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

<sup>2</sup> In 2016, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference issued a document on the presence and reality of the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia, and how the wider Church can relate to them -

[https://www.catholic.org.au/images/pdf/2016\\_Eastern\\_Catholic\\_Churches\\_in\\_Australia.pdf](https://www.catholic.org.au/images/pdf/2016_Eastern_Catholic_Churches_in_Australia.pdf)

(Māori and Pakeha [non- Māori]) in respect of the *mana* [authority, spiritual power, mandate] of the people of the land.

20. Within the territory of the dioceses of New Zealand, there are also Eastern Catholic parish communities that fall under the pastoral care of Eastern Catholic Eparchies in Australia.

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#### **CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THE SOLOMON ISLANDS (CBCPNGSI)**

21. Papua New Guinea (PNG) is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It encompasses the eastern half of New Guinea, the world's second-largest island. It is a diverse country with more than 800 languages and 640 islands. The spectrum of PNG society now ranges from traditional village-based life, dependent on subsistence and small cash-crop agriculture, to modern urban life in the main cities.
22. It has a total population of 8.9 million (Worldometer of United Nations Data) out of which 95.5% are Christians. Catholics comprise 25.1% of the population and are the largest church.
23. The neighbouring country of Solomon Islands (SI) has a population of 732,000 (Worldometer of United Nations Data) and 20% are Catholics. There are 63 distinct languages in the country, with numerous local dialects. English is the official language, but Solomons' Pidgin is the *lingua franca* for the majority of people.
24. There are 19 dioceses in PNG and three dioceses in SI. Both countries belong to one Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (CBCPNGSI).
25. Both PNG and SI have a mix of expatriate and local priests and religious working in parishes and other ministries such as schools and hospitals.



# Discernment Process in Oceania

26. In the first stage of the Synod on Synodality from 17 October 2021 until 15 August 2022, there was an open invitation to all the baptised to engage in a process of prayerful discernment, spiritual conversation, reflection and deep listening using a Preparatory Document and *Vademecum* (Guide) prepared by the Synod Secretariat. In Oceania, each of the episcopal conferences, the Eastern Catholic Churches and many religious institutes, lay movements and other groups and individuals contributed to the local discernment. Each episcopal conference and the Eastern Catholic Churches prepared a response which reflected the discernment process and outcomes in their jurisdiction.
27. Of the 114 episcopal conferences around the world, 112 submitted a national synthesis to the Synod Secretariat by the deadline of 15 August 2022. In addition, over 1,000 responses were received from religious institutes, lay movements, other groups and individuals. To discern the issues in these responses, some 30 people from a range of backgrounds and expertise were invited to a monastery in Frascati outside Rome from September to October 2022 for two weeks together of prayer, reflection, discernment and synthesis. At the end of this process, the Council of Ordinaries, which governs the Synod Secretariat, joined the Frascati group to familiarise themselves with the Working Document for the Continental Stage (DCS), and approve it.
28. The release of the DCS on 27 October 2022 was the start of the second stage of the Synod: the Continental Stage. In preparation for this stage, the FCBCO created the Oceania Taskforce. This Taskforce worked alongside the Suva Assembly Taskforce to ensure the two planning processes were integrated. The Oceania Taskforce requested that the FCBCO also create a Discernment and Writing Group (DWG) to take the fruits of the responses from the five jurisdictions and create a draft submission for episcopal consideration at their Assembly scheduled for early February 2023. The DWG comprised a diverse range of people from across ecclesial, geographic, age, sex and experiential backgrounds.
29. The four episcopal conferences and the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania were well prepared, despite the concurrence of the discernment period with Christmas and summer holidays in the Southern Hemisphere. In addition, the FCBCO had been planning their regional assembly for some years which had been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was rescheduled to 5-10 February 2023 in Suva, Fiji, and the FCBCO agreed to include discernment on synodality as part of their program, necessitating a draft submission in time for their consideration ahead of the Assembly.
30. From late October to mid-December 2022, the episcopal conferences and Eastern Catholic Churches undertook a discernment process with representatives of the People of God (with an emphasis on reaching those at the margins). The prayerful process enabled participants to discern the DCS through the lens of their lived experience of the Church in Oceania. A process of discernment and synthesis was conducted in each jurisdiction in mid-December, and responses were sent to the Oceania Taskforce by late December.
31. Similar to the approach taken in developing the DCS, the Oceania Discernment and Writing Group gathered in a retreat-like mode to authentically and prayerfully discern together the common themes across the five responses from Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (PNG/SI) and the Eastern Catholic Churches (ECC) and to identify differences, gaps and priorities for the consideration and finalisation of the FCBCO members at their Suva Assembly. Some members of the Oceania Taskforce attended the FCBCO Assembly to present the draft submission and support the episcopal discernment process, leading to the bishops' pastoral reflection on the document.
32. The Oceania submission was finalised at an online meeting of the FCBCO Executive and the members of the Discernment and Writing Group prior to sending the submission to the Synod Secretariat by the deadline of 31 March 2023.

# Experience of Synodality

33. Responses to the DCS were generally positive in relating people's experience of synodality as God's will for the Church in the third millennium. There were, however, a few negative views, but with quite different reasons for this negativity.
34. There was fundamental resonance that synodality is grounded in the primary sacrament of Baptism, noting that "Baptism is not an abstract concept but identity. The synodal process is further encouraging and aiding towards this experience to a more deep and enriching level with the emphasis to create an environment where every baptised individual and people of good will feel at home in the Church. The synodal way is a way for the Church to reach out to everyone and it is a way to create a welcoming atmosphere for all its children" (PNG/SI, 2.2). The very opportunity to participate in responding to the DCS was experienced with gratitude: "There was great gratitude for the [synodal] process, being able to speak freely and to be listened to. 'Young and old, women and men, so glad to have this chance – they must be heard.' The participation of so many people was commented on by many" (New Zealand, 10).
35. The ancient vision and practice of the Church as synodal was affirmed: "Synodality has been a large part of how the Eastern Catholic Churches have functioned for a long time. There is much to be learned from the Eastern Catholic Church about synodality" (ECC, 6). Another element of the positive experience of discerning the DCS was people encountering the global nature of the Church (for some for the first time); it expanded their view of "Church" and of the many common issues across the Universal Church.
36. There were, however, some negative responses regarding synodality. For some, this disquiet expressed itself in doubts that the bishops would in fact consider the fruits of discernment and with that a fear that the synodal work would not make any real difference in the end. For others, there was concern that synodality will harm the Church. Both these reasons were captured in the New Zealand document: "There were some fears and cautions expressed during the process. People are waiting to see if their voices have been heard, or if they will be lost as the process reaches the Rome Assemblies. Some are anxious and even angry about people talking about change and see the synodal process as potentially 'wounding the Church'" (New Zealand, 14).
37. The breadth of experience is reflected in another response: "Many participants were greatly impressed by the global calls for a synodal Church. This resonated with local experiences because some dioceses and parishes are growing in synodality by listening to diverse voices, being open to new approaches, and including a diverse range of people in leadership and ministry. At the same time, other regions remained 'inward-looking', with a passive laity and clergy" (Australia, 32).
38. On the whole, however, all regions of Oceania saw the DCS as capturing a truly global experience of synodality. This was seen as a welcome direction for the Church's inner life and mission in the third millennium: "The synodal process of prayerful discernment, spiritual conversation, deep listening, and respect for each person and their views is a powerful process. Most people see synodality as the way to move forward in their own spiritual journey, individually and collectively, and agree with the DCS: 'In fact, it is the way of being Church. The Holy Spirit is asking us to be synodal [DCS, 3]'" (New Zealand, 15). This positive embrace of synodality is also captured in the report of one diocese of the Pacific: "Reflecting on the Working Document for the Continental Stage, it is clear that the Church needs to make a radical decision to bring a sense of welcome and inclusion among its members, even those outside of the faith. The Synod can be the catalyst ... to promote collegiality, unity, and synodality in our Church and society" (Pacific).

# Fruits of the Discernment

## Common Themes, Issues, Insights

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### TENT METAPHOR

39. In the larger countries of Oceania, the image of the tent (Isaiah 54:2) was received with enthusiasm and joy, seeing it as very relevant for a Church which is deeply wounded by the abuse crisis. “The tent is a much humbler building than great edifices, such as cathedrals, so enlarging space in the tent is a very good image to use” (Australia, 58).
40. The tent image did not have the same resonance among the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania, as some of their people have been “forced by difficult circumstances, including war, persecution, and economic hardships, to settle in other countries” (ECC, 2). For some of their members, tents are associated with impermanence, lack of safety, and even refugee camps, while they seek safety and permanence in their new lives in Oceanic countries.
41. The tent also did not have a strong resonance in the Pacific countries of Oceania. For people who live on small islands, the DCS description of the Church “as a tent, indeed as the tent of meeting, which accompanied the people on their journey through the desert: called to stretch out, therefore, but also to move” does not accord with their experience as *tagata o le moana*, people of the sea, who have travelled throughout history in boats as they moved through their region (Pacific).
42. Care is needed to ensure that continuing with the image of the tent does not exclude people for whom the tent has little resonance, or for whom it may be an unwelcome image because of their life experiences.
43. The DCS description of the tent as an image of the Church means that all those who are baptised are inside the tent, whether they are active participants in the tent community or not. People such as those in an irregular marriage situation are not able to take part in aspects of the sacramental life of the tent community, but they are not excluded from the tent. Similarly, people who do not participate in Sunday Masses are not outside the tent. All the baptised are in the tent, whether they are active participants in the community or not.
44. There are many reasons for non-participation: “Many Church members such as gay and lesbians, feel that they are outsiders and not part of the Church. The poor, because they cannot afford decent clothes, are also scorned. Some feel unwanted because they are not members of the ruling clique in the parish. New people in the Church feel they cannot help in the Church as it is taken over by selected families” (Pacific).
45. In parts of Oceania there is a very visible gap between the poor and the rich, between ethnic groups, between migrants and those who consider the country to be theirs, and between people from different islands in the same country or diocese. These societal issues are experienced within the Church: “The gap between the poor and the rich is visible and emphasised even more by priests who offer special treatment to the rich and well-dressed. Different races compete for dominance in parishes, making it almost impossible for racial minorities to participate. Discrimination because of gender seems to be a lingering struggle within the Church, particularly towards the LGBTQIA+ community” (Pacific). There are concerns in the responses about “gatekeepers” in the Church who are perceived to exclude, either overtly or in more subtle ways, those they deem unacceptable.
46. Reflection upon the tent image has sharpened our focus on barriers to participation and inclusion. In doing this it has exposed and named the reality of the situation the Church is facing globally: “The DCS reports a rather inconvenient truth about the Church: her children are divided and scattered, some are lost, and some intentionally walked away. Walls seem to separate people making it harder for everyone to live in true communion with God and people” (Pacific).

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## BAPTISM AND SACRAMENTS

47. The responses affirmed that Baptism is the source of common identity, that this needs to be recognised as such, and that Baptism calls all members of the Church to communion, participation and mission. “[P]eople are gaining a deeper appreciation of the sacrament [of Baptism], not just as their entry point to the Church, but as the basis of their participation in ministry and mission” (New Zealand, 36).
48. Some responses also argued that the call for all the baptised to be recognised is as yet unrealised: “There is a yearning for the acceptance that all the baptised are called to full, active, and equal participation in the Church” (New Zealand, 38). “One theme that resonated with many was the growing recognition of the baptismal dignity of all, as well as the realisation that the Church’s mission of making Christ present was a responsibility shared by all the baptised; however, greater formation for a deeper understanding of this reality was critical to empower people” (Australia, 34).
49. Obstacles to the full realisation of our baptismal call were recognised in the responses. For instance, some argued that greater participation is needed for the laity, especially women. The New Zealand response argued that the Second Vatican Council emphasised Baptism as the source of our communion and participation (New Zealand, 36). This fruit of the Second Vatican Council, however, has not been realised because the understanding of “The Church as the People of God... was undermined by structures that did not facilitate this new model” (New Zealand, 37).
50. The responses highlighted the centrality of the Eucharist to the experience of community and what it means to be Church. The ECC highlighted their “common love of the liturgy – which is steeped in beauty, richness, and authenticity (ECC, 10)”, in which participants “experience our Lord in a mystical and monastic way” (ECC, 18). The Pacific response emphasised: “The liturgy, especially the Eucharistic Liturgy, the source and summit of Christian life, which brings the community together, making communion tangible, enables the experience of participation and nourishes the momentum towards mission with the Word and the Sacraments” (Pacific).
51. The Australian and Pacific responses noted: “calls for a more synodal and participatory style of Eucharistic celebration, liturgies that are inclusive of other cultures and relevant to young people, a broader understanding of what it meant to be Eucharistic in essence, and a greater outreach to Catholics who have lost appreciation for these rituals” (Australia, 35; Pacific).
52. There was a statement that ecumenical relationships are affected by Church teaching. There was a view that “there needs to be more Eucharistic hospitality to members of other churches in place of the exclusive line currently practised” (New Zealand, 70).
53. The Australian and New Zealand responses noted the desire by some for the Third Rite of Reconciliation to be used (Australia, 52; New Zealand, 71). Some women said that the Sacrament of Penance places “a lay person in an inferior position to the priest” (New Zealand, 71).
54. The PNG/SI response noted that while there were calls in other parts of the world for greater recognition of same-sex relationships, “Same-sex marriage (DCS, 39) is disturbing the Catholics and those who consider it a sin. LGBTQ is not accepted by the tradition and the society of PNG” (PNG/SI, 3.2).
55. Eucharist and marriage coalesced around the issue of communion for the divorced and remarried, particularly in the New Zealand response, which said that “Although *Amoris Laetitia* opened potential pathways for the divorced and remarried to receive communion, these are perceived as narrow and difficult” (New Zealand, 69). The Australian response referred to the exclusion that the divorced and remarried feel (Australia, 44;57) and the need for greater compassion.
56. Finally, lay prison chaplains in New Zealand observed that, having accompanied “some of our most disadvantaged people on a life-changing faith journey [they then] have to step back when sacraments are required” (New Zealand, 85).
57. Polygamous marriages are a social reality in some parts of our region and need attention, whereas this is not the case in other parts (PNG/SI, 4.3). Issues related to marriage appeared in various ways throughout the responses. The Australian response recognised that there was a gap in the DCS: “the absence of any mention of the role of marriage and family, particularly in the transmission of faith” (Australia, 26).

58. It noted that “A number of participants called for a re-examination of the Church’s position on married men becoming priests, and on the requirement for celibacy.” It also raised concerns about the “lack of understanding of the [permanent] diaconate” (Australia, 49). While the issue of women’s ordination was raised in the Australian response, the New Zealand response noted that “there was no request for the consideration of ordination of women as priests, although one group asked for their [women’s] ordination as deacons” (New Zealand, 65).

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## INCLUSION

59. All the responses supported calls for the Church to be more inclusive, particularly of those whose relationships present challenges to participation in the Eucharist. They also desired a more inclusive approach to people living with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and others who were marginalised and neglected, such as the elderly, terminally ill, street children, orphans, criminals, addicts, prostitutes, widows, and victims of rape, abuse and domestic violence. There was also a desire to welcome those with “diverse thinking”, “non-practising Catholics and unbaptised people” (Australia, 44).
60. There was particular emphasis on the need for the inclusion of the poor in the Pacific region, where poverty was seen as a discernible force dividing the Church: “In many cases, the poor are sometimes reduced to an opportunity to raise funds for seasonal outreach and photo opportunity to make the Church look good” (Pacific; PNG/SI, 2.4).
61. Lack of inclusion of people with diverse experiences of sexuality and gender appeared to affect community life even in small island nations: “The LGBTQ community resonates very strongly in the Mariana islands, a reality that was not evident in the past” (Pacific).
62. However, as noted in para 54, people with diverse experiences of sexuality and gender are “not accepted by the tradition and the society of PNG” (PNG/SI, 3.2). Nevertheless, many responses called for greater inclusion of people in this group, particularly “to recognise and give them a space for ministry, for participation, and involvement in the life of the Church” (Pacific).
63. In Australia, the inclusion of First Nations peoples was named as a priority: “Our listening needs to include the Uluru Statement, our Church elders [to] include our Aunties and Uncles caring for Country” (Australia, 46).
64. From the perspective of Eastern Catholic Churches, the call to being inclusive meant creating an environment of hospitality and welcome within their churches to invite Catholics from other liturgical rites to experience their liturgy, theology and disciplines (ECC, 18) as full and complete expressions of the Catholic faith. However, this call to hospitality to include other Catholics in experiencing the venerable Eastern Christian traditions also means that Eastern Catholics must hold on to what is truly theirs and not assimilate rituals. The Eastern Catholic Churches have a duty to show that to be Catholic does not mean one has to be Latin.
65. While all the responses called for the Church to focus on inclusion and representation of those in the excluded groups, there were calls for “radical inclusivity” from a few groups, urging the Church to be “brave, bold and innovative”, rejecting the notion of being “a ‘gatekeeper’, excluding those Christ would welcome into the tent” (Australia, 28). However, challenges were identified in the call to proclaim authentic teaching (PNG/SI, 4.5), alongside being called to respect others, avoid judgment and take a compassionate and pastoral approach (Australia, 44).

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## CHURCH TEACHING

66. Some participants raised concerns that “the rules and regulations of the Church were at odds with the Gospel message, and that greater weight should be given to the ‘primacy of conscience’ and supporting people in a compassionate and pastoral manner to develop a more mature relationship with God” (Australia, 54).
67. There was also a “call for the Church to reform some areas of its theology, teaching and dogma related to the formation of seminarians and the professional supervision, development and support of priests” while, for some participants, the priority was to “address afresh the whole concept of the priesthood in the Church, including that of the laity” (Australia, 75).
68. While there was consensus on the need for an enhanced role for women in the Church, the issue of women’s ordination was only explicitly raised in one submission, so that “acting on the inequalities of women called for equal, just and full participation of women in Church governance, mission and ministry” and “recognising their admissibility to any role, such as deacon, priest, or representative on decision-making councils” (Australia, 60). The New Zealand submission noted that “there was no request for the consideration of ordination of women as priests, although one group asked for their ordination as deacons” (New Zealand, 65).
69. Some aspects of Church teaching were perceived as “exclusionary or hurtful” and understood to “cause people to walk away from the Church or deter them from returning”. These include teaching on sexuality, contraception, the situation of the divorced and remarried, and intercommunion with other Christian denominations whose Baptism we recognise (New Zealand, 117).

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## AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING

70. A synodal Church needs a cultural and structural change in Church leadership (Australia, 61; New Zealand, 79; PNG/SI, 4.1). Leadership in a synodal Church must be re-thought, lest the current problems with clerical power and authority are simply transferred to lay people who are participating in shared decision-making. To avoid this trap there must be “formation of individuals as leaders dedicated to God’s Word, who can facilitate dialogue, are trained to listen and discern, and are appointed to serve rather than assume power over others” (Australia, 62).
71. In the responses from the Oceania conferences, there were many comments from participants who expressed their love for the faith and their desire to continue to belong. They were grateful for the pastoral care they received from clergy and were aware of the challenges they faced: “We are grateful for all the Church has given us and the way we have been supported” (Australia, 36).
72. There were also deep concerns about governance and decision-making in the Church, at parish, diocesan, national and global levels. The renewed emphasis on Baptism in the synodal process revealed “a deep desire for acceptance that all the baptised are called to and capable of full, active and equal participation in Church” (New Zealand, 76). There was a perception that canon law creates a power imbalance between bishops, clergy and lay people which could undermine the embedding of synodality as the way of the Church in the future (New Zealand, 82).
73. Shared governance and decision-making, involving both laity and clergy, were seen as necessary if we are to be a truly synodal Church. Current governance structures and the power they give bishops and priests are seen as “one of the mechanisms which exclude lay voices, and women’s voices in particular” (New Zealand, 80).
74. Dominance of governance and decision-making by the ordained is seen by some as fostering clericalism and impeding laity in the exercise of their gifts. “Clericalism separates the clergy from the lay people and gives the clergy a superior role over the lay people, limiting the full participation of lay people in the decision-making in the parishes, dioceses and higher levels of the Church hierarchy” (PNG/SI, 2.5).

75. Frustration was expressed by some lay people at being shut out of decision-making, especially when they often have a better understanding of the needs of the people. "Our attitude needs to shift from hierarchical to communal. For example, a priest may have a theoretical knowledge of raising a family, but parents are the ones who live out this life" (Pacific).
76. Clericalism and abuse have triggered distrust among the people towards the hierarchy of the Church. Greater openness and accountability have allowed the people "to see the truth about the Church, that bishops, priests, religious, and lay workers are flawed. However, they do whatever they can to do good and become responsible workers in God's vineyard" (Pacific).
77. Clericalism is not confined to the ordained but is also found among lay people who support and facilitate the exercise of power by the clergy. That power and "superior role" the priest assumes is the antithesis of the servant leadership people yearn for and need from their priests: "Their servant leadership should lead to humble service" (PNG/SI, 5.1). The people know a good pastor when they have one: "The people's desire is to witness a true pastor moulded in the heart of Christ" (Pacific). This can be particularly the case in traditional ceremonies following priestly ordination where the newly ordained priest is accorded treatment befitting that of a high chief (Pacific).
78. The effects of clericalism are widely felt in dioceses and parishes: "Clericalism in clergy and lay people perpetuates abuse of power and isolates groups, stymies evangelisation efforts, and impedes youth engagement, servant leadership development and the implementation of necessary change" (Australia, 30).
79. The challenges for ministry reported by clergy and religious include "grief and powerlessness" in the aftermath of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, the increasing demands on their time due to the pressure of priest shortages and the experiences of "loneliness, isolation and burnout", particularly among "the elderly, those in country dioceses and those who come from overseas" (Australia, 31).
80. There was a call for leadership to be more participatory with "a less exclusive role given to bishops" (New Zealand, 81). The selection process for bishops is considered to be opaque (PNG/SI). "People want to know how the current process works and want to ensure that the selection is the product of genuine discernment involving a wide range of people, clergy and lay. There is a desire for specific scrutiny of a potential bishop's record on abuse, and a close examination of his attitude towards abuse" (New Zealand, 81).
81. It was noted that "people see canon law, not Church teaching, creating a power imbalance between bishops, clergy and lay people which has major effects in relation to authority and governance in parishes and dioceses. People are aware that there have been changes to canon law in recent years and know that this is possible" (New Zealand, 82).
82. In the absence of a priest, lay people have shown in Oceania that they can take ownership of both the pastoral ministry and governance of their local Church. For example, "during the crisis of Bougainville (PNG), for almost 10 years the families and the Basic Christian Communities kept the faith alive in absence of effective clerical presence" (PNG/SI, 2.12). The importance of the Eucharist in Basic Christian Communities and family life was emphasised: "[Basic Christian Communities] can empower and strengthen the families through the holy presence of Jesus in the Eucharist" (PNG/SI, 5.4).

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## THE CHALLENGES OF MISSION

83. There are multiple challenges in Oceania for "bringing God's kingdom to a contemporary world" (Australia, 40). A primary difficulty is the lack of agreed understanding about what mission is and the vast number of perspectives on its meaning: "The word 'mission' was mentioned many times, but as in earlier parts of the synod process it is not clear what 'mission' means when people talk about it. It does not seem to have a concrete or active form for many people. There is a need for shared understanding, and work needs to be done in this area" (New Zealand, 104).

84. There was a strong emphasis on “mission” being the responsibility of all the baptised: “The Diocesan Synod creates in each one of us a mission-driven and mission-focused attitude and spirit. Mission is no longer a monopolised endeavour of the clerics and religious, but a shared journey within all peoples. This shared journey implies sharing in the brokenness and woundedness of others” (Pacific). The Church was seen as “a mission-driven institution that Jesus Christ himself designed” (Pacific).
85. The mission activity of the Church was hindered by “discrimination based on matrimonial/relationship status, financial status, customs/traditions (gender and age status), and disability status” (Pacific). The lack of formation in understanding the baptismal call to evangelise and proclaim God’s love in unity with others was also a barrier to transition from a “maintenance Church” to a “missional Church” by establishing communities that “join with all humanity in journeying together” (Australia, 69).
86. The diversity of liturgical rites and cultures in Oceania was seen as important to our unique contribution to the mission of the Church: “The Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania must preserve their identity and be recognised by the wider Catholic community as being more than just ethnic communities, but rather, *sui iuris* Churches who through their rich spiritual tradition can contribute to the mission of the Church” (ECC, 19).
87. The richness of the synodal experience should ultimately “lead us to experience the person of Jesus within the Church and to share this good news to others; it leads us to mission; mission to evangelise; to preach the good news” (PNG/SI, 5.7).

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## ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

88. The ecological crisis was emphasised as an urgent issue for the whole Oceania region, for all of humanity and for the earth community. “If we are people of the Tent then we must understand the importance of the earth as our common home, respecting the ground, the sea and the environment within which we assemble the Tent” (New Zealand, 93).
89. From the Torres Strait Islands of Australia to the Solomon Islands, and the small island states of Micronesia and Polynesia, the ecological crisis and rising sea levels are a real and present existential threat: “Islands in the Pacific are relatively smaller and scientifically proven to be getting even smaller due to the rising ocean water level. Climate change, the driving force that ignites catastrophic typhoons, heatwaves, drought and flooding, directly affects people” (Pacific). Highland and inland communities in our region are also directly affected by these phenomena.
90. The responses from New Zealand acknowledge that integral ecology and care for creation “is not an area in which the Church’s teaching is lacking” but note that “there is a need for formation and prophetic witness, and encouragement to act” (New Zealand, 93). Australian respondents also relayed concerns regarding the Church’s responsibility for “stewardship of creation”; however, some “reported on the work being undertaken in their particular community” (Australia, 50).
91. As Pope Francis presents in *Laudato Si’*, the interconnectedness of ecological, social and economic justice means the “mistreatment of our planet disproportionately affects the poor” (New Zealand, 92). The People of God in Oceania want to listen to the cry of the earth and the ocean, the land and waterways, as well as the cry of the poor, and to “collaborate with others who share a common purpose” (New Zealand, 95).
92. The ecological crisis must be understood as a mission field in which the whole Church, globally and locally, must be engaged given the “urgent struggle to preserve our planet and its life, and to provide economic justice for its people” (New Zealand, 114). The fact that the “threat to human life posed by climate change to the island nations in the Oceania region caused significant anxiety to some participants” in Australia is a promising sign of solidarity and a renewed understanding of mission (Australia, 50).



## INCULTURATION AND LOCALISATION

93. Oceania is expansive, yet the numerous nations and cultures flourish in their connectedness to the land, ocean, creatures and indigenous spiritualities. While numerous Catholic missionaries to the region have shared the gift of their faith, this has sometimes undermined the contribution of the local culture to the Gospel. The Church in Oceania today is both encouraged and challenged by inculturation as Christianity and indigenous spiritualities often co-exist in the everyday lives of people.
94. Inculturation of the Christian faith positively impacts liturgical celebrations: “Cultural differences connect strongly as well among the islands in the Marianas, and the Pacific in general. This is visible in churches during Eucharistic celebrations. The colours, music and language freely shift to celebrate the Lord through various faith expressions” (Pacific, 10). Others in Australia have similar experiences: “Some groups described positive and enriching experiences of Church and parish life such as multicultural engagement” (Australia, 36).
95. Indigenous perspectives are also used to re-envision and contextualise the meaning of Church. For example, a Te Ao Māori worldview could see the Church as *tūrangawaewae*, a place to stand “where we feel connected, empowered and accepted” (New Zealand, 18).
96. There are challenges when people are unable to see the compatibility of traditional cultures with Catholicism: “How can the Church keep her reverence to the sacredness while at the same time make it accessible for the faithful? In our culture, our sacred sites are kept away from the people to maintain its sacredness. Likewise in the Church, we try to keep the sacredness from being profaned. The question is how to keep the sacredness of the Church while at the same time making it accessible to the people” (PNG/SI, 4.4).
97. Real difficulties emerge when specific indigenous ways of being are in stark contrast to Church teaching: “Cultural beliefs and traditional practices such as sorcery and polygamy continue to be a big challenge to Christian values and teachings. For example, cultural polygamous marriages are still practised in PNG while the Church is against it” (PNG/SI, 4.3). In some parts of Oceania, the Church is also severely lacking in its genuine engagement with indigenous peoples: “The Church’s role in recognition of and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples was highlighted. In particular, the need to ensure that attention was paid to the spiritualities of the Indigenous peoples of Australia and in Oceania was prominent” (Australia, 46).
98. Overall, it is important to emphasise the importance of cultural diversity to the life of the Church: “We must start by being fully ourselves. It is only in our distinctiveness that we can make any kind of contribution to the larger society. It is only by being what we are that we retain a reason for existence at all” (ECC, 16).

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## WOMEN

99. The theme of women’s roles and participation in the Church resonated strongly across Oceania, though women’s experiences varied across the region. The DCS was praised for naming global concerns about women’s roles and vocations in the Church, and many groups in Australia and New Zealand expressed strong concern about the lack of women’s participation in Church leadership and governance structures, including the diocesan marriage tribunal (New Zealand, 41-42). A minority concern was expressed that women were still barred from the permanent diaconate and ordained ministry. Although many women serve in leadership and governance roles that do not require ordination, this was a significant issue affecting Church life in these countries.
100. Other groups stated that they had not experienced a lack of equality for women in the Church. One group of young lay women, for example, saw themselves as equals with a unique role in the Church, whereas a group of priests described their experiences with women being present and influential in parish bodies and ministries (New Zealand, 41). Similarly, the PNG/SI response stated that women play a “very active role in the life of the Church” and that there is a growing positive change in terms of equal participation in Church work (PNG/SI, 2.6).

101. Some responses were concerned about women being treated as “cheap labour” (DCS, 63) and two responses called for women to be adequately remunerated for their work (Australia, 29; PNG/SI, 2.6). Other issues identified in the responses affecting women in the region included family and domestic violence, abuse, sorcery-related violence, divorce and remarriage, women being shunned for crimes that men are forgiven for, those alienated by Church teachings on sexuality, and misogyny and sexism particularly perpetrated by the clergy (Australia, 47).
102. Many responses reaffirmed the call for Catholic women to be valued as equal members of God’s People, stating that “the continued exclusion of women from aspects of Church life was disempowering” (Australia, 29). There was a call for more emphasis on “using the gifts and experience of women in discerning and providing advice, guidance and challenge in decision-making beyond the managerial and parish roles many women occupy” (New Zealand, 42), as well as a need for greater listening, particularly to the realities and needs of poor, marginalised and neglected women (Pacific).

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## YOUNG PEOPLE

103. The absence of young people participating in the Church features in nearly all of the Oceania responses, which reveal great anguish and profound worry about the future: “We are only ever one generation from dying. It only takes one generation to say NO. The Church is fragile. Our young people – God is on their hearts, but they don’t feel drawn to the Church ... They have their prayer groups in their *whares* (houses)” (New Zealand, 45-46). There was also reference to young people who are very committed participants in their faith communities. “Irrespective of the challenges that our Church is conflicted with during unprecedented times, it remains a home, providing strength, warmth, and optimism. This would not be possible without the leaders and volunteers who are constantly ready to serve” (ECC, 11).
104. Our baptised young people are in the tent, but many are not participants in the life of the tent community. Reasons given for this vary. Some young people feel they are inside the tent, but invisible and ignored. Others feel unable to participate due to a fear of being judged or not fitting in (New Zealand, 47). Their local parish can appear to be “owned” by older people, with power being exercised in ways that make young people feel that it is not a place for them (Australia, 37-38).
105. The response from PNG/SI spoke about young people leaving their parish communities to join other churches (PNG/SI, 2.13), and others “being pulled away from spiritual and faith programs by the strong attraction of the secular activities, social media and modern technology, which is causing distraction to the traditional youth formation programs in BCCs, parishes and dioceses” (PNG/SI, 4.7).
106. Young people see the urgency of the ecological crisis, which is of intense interest and concern to them, but do not see its urgency being recognised in their local Church. Many also struggle with aspects of the Church’s teaching on sexuality: “LBGTQIA+ issues are also of intense interest to young people, who have to work through them at a personal level and among their friends. Responses have indicated that the Church’s teaching on this and other aspects of sexuality are a major barrier for many young people in maintaining their connection to the Church” (New Zealand, 49).
107. There are very few ideas about how to respond to this genuine crisis for the Church. Nevertheless, one Pacific diocese has found a way to engage with marginalised young people: “Some young, marginalised, excluded and some of those who are not in good standing with the Church are welcomed in choirs, prayer groups and catechesis as catechist assistants. Young people are listened to more today because there are more youth groups in parishes” (Pacific). Other suggestions included accompaniment and formation for leadership using “platforms that allowed them to utilise their skills and passions” (Australia, 76).
108. In contrast to those who feel the Church needs to “modernise” to remain relevant (Australia, 38), some young people are seeking a stronger proclamation of the faith of the Church. They believe that personal conversion is needed rather than institutional change (New Zealand, 55). In the Eastern Catholic Churches’ response, a young woman described her faith journey and the support she had received at all stages to share her gifts and to remain faithful and engaged with her Church community (ECC, 11). In other responses, some young people described feeling persecuted and alone while promoting strong faith-based values (ECC, 13; Australia, 38).

109. Concern was expressed by some young people about feeling excluded by the language of the DCS: “The DCS is largely inaccessible to young people, in terms of language, process and practical application. New terms such as, ‘dialogical sharing’, ‘fraternal conviviality’ and the Eucharist as a ‘generative tension’ are not accessible to young people” (New Zealand, 47).
  110. While there is a deep concern about the loss of young people as individuals, their disengagement from the Church in numbers is also seen as preventing the embedding of synodality as the way of the Church: “How do we impart synodality to the young, as the future of the Church, when there are so few young people in the Church today?” (Australia, 48).
  111. There was a call to investigate “how the faith needs of young people could be met and how youth could be better formed and provided with platforms that allowed them to utilise their skills and passions” (Australia, 76).
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## FORMATION

112. There are calls for formation of various kinds throughout the region. The formation of seminarians and priests received special attention, with the observation that this needs to be holistic: “spiritually, socially, psychologically, mentally, emotionally and economically” (PNG/SI, 5.1). In some dioceses, women already do work in this area (Australia, 66; New Zealand, 102). Formation for marriage and family life is also a fundamental need (ECC, 18; Australia, 77; PNG/SI, 5.3). Catholic educators need “more appropriate” formation (Australia, 77). Formation for young people is essential, but difficult to achieve (Australia, 76; New Zealand, 44). We also need to provide formation to respond to Pope Francis’s call to missionary discipleship.
113. It is unclear whether “formation” meant the same thing across the documents. Formation in a general sense involves shaping the way that people respond to the world around them. At times the word “formation” refers to training (PNG/SI, 5.1) and at other times, to personal faith development (Australia, 77). While the desire was expressed that Catholic Social Teaching be the basis for formation across the Church (Australia, 65), formation is possible and perhaps also desirable in other areas and works best when addressing an identified need in the light of Scripture and Church teaching.
114. As our Church becomes more synodal, ongoing formation is needed for all (New Zealand, 100). A synodal Church will need participants formed in listening and dialogue (Australia, 62). Furthermore, leadership in the Church will require a different mode of formation, so that there is “servant leadership at all levels” (PNG/SI, 5.1).

## Tensions and Differences

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115. As indicated earlier, the Oceania region includes both developed and developing countries, and so there are different pastoral issues to be addressed as a matter of urgent advocacy.
116. A “tension” is an area of differing views that need further discernment or attention. The sections above have already identified some tensions. These are:
  - a) Different attitudes toward those with diverse experiences of sexuality and gender in the region.
  - b) The roles of women in the Church.
  - c) Some voices in the responses call for change in Church teaching, according to a “dying and rising” cycle (New Zealand, 52-56). Others asserted the need to retain teaching and provide formation in unchanging Church teaching of the present (ECC, 18).
117. In some areas of the region, the wounds of sexual abuse within the Church are not as much to the fore: “The scandal of sexual abuse by the clergy and abuse of minors ... is a growing issue of concern. Although there are a few abuses, the scandals do not greatly affect the faith of the people yet” (PNG/SI, 3.1). In other areas, the scandal is clear and public. The ongoing wound for the whole Church, not only those of the victims and survivors of abuse but also their families and parish communities and other clergy, needs attention directed toward ongoing healing.
118. There is a tension in understanding the issue of inculturation, where a local Church adopts local customs and cultural expressions. Some regard the traditions of the universal Church as a kind of imposition on local culture, and even a form of colonialism. Others consider God present in every culture so that every culture already expresses Christian truths. Another view is that Christians cannot adopt and adapt some pre-Christian cultural practices. For instance, when a priest takes on the symbolism of the chief of a village, the priest becomes a symbol of power rather than of service (Pacific).
119. Questions about Church teaching, or the application of Church teaching, were raised by many participants. While there was a desire to remain faithful to Church teaching, there was also a desire to embrace the paschal cycle of “dying and rising” (New Zealand, 51).
120. Some participants said that while the Church might appear to be dying “we are meant to die and rise. This is the cycle of the life of Christ in us. Some things are brought to death so that other things may rise. We need to let go and go with the dying and rising. This is what this moment is asking of us” (New Zealand, 52). For others, the Church was seen as “an unchanging rock in a sea of social change” and the “re-statement of its teaching and further catechesis” is the “necessary response to this change” (New Zealand, 55).
121. Meanwhile, the Eastern Catholic Churches suggest that “our position on Catholic teachings is not to be compromised by potential external forces that require a change in the Church for their agenda rather than accepting the truth, love and beauty that the Church offers to all people” (ECC, 18).

## Gaps and Omissions in the DCS

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122. In the lived experience in Oceania, the following areas were identified as gaps, or matters inadequately dealt with, in the DCS:
- a) The ecological crisis including the threat of rising seas and environmental and marine degradation in Oceania, also being experienced in other parts of the world, should be amplified in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. This includes loss of cultural identity, psychological stress and for some a sense of hopelessness.
  - b) Religious life, including the contribution of religious men and women and the exemplar of relevant spiritualities, good governance and shared leadership in many of the religious institutes warrants further reflection.
  - c) Greater acknowledgement of the vocation of marriage and the role of families in faith formation would be valuable (Australia, 26).
  - d) In the DCS, the absence of lay men from sacramental programs and decision-making is not explored adequately.
  - e) The ongoing effects of the sexual abuse crisis have not received adequate attention in the DCS. During the life of the synodal journey launched by Pope Francis in April 2021, there have been further damaging revelations of mishandling of sexual abuse cases within the Church. This needs to be acknowledged, alongside a reflection on whether existing Church structures impede or enable adequate safeguarding, good governance and fair redress. For some parts of Oceania and more broadly, this would also include a positive recognition of the efforts in local churches to improve professional standards and safeguarding.
  - f) Beginning- and end-of-life issues such as abortion and euthanasia need greater attention than given to them in the DCS.
  - g) Growing restrictions on religious liberty is a concern that has not been adequately addressed in the DCS.

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### VOICES NOT HEARD OR UNDER-REPRESENTED IN THE OCEANIA CONSULTATION

123. Many voices could not be heard directly for reasons such as remoteness and lack of access to information and communications technology, or due to disabilities or language differences. Accordingly, “advocacy” was implied throughout the five responses — advocacy for diverse groups of people in the Church or wider society which could not be directly part of a synodal listening, dialogue, discernment and decision-making process. For example: “The plight of the poor and the marginalised people, disabled, elderly, street children, orphans, criminals, prostitutes, widows, divorcees, victims of abuses, victims of sorcery-related violence and refugees is a great concern for the Church” (PNG/SI, 2.4).
124. The decrease in the number of young people in the Church was lamented in the documents. Their voices have not been sufficiently heard in the synodal process.
125. Another problematic issue that was raised was the issue of inaccessibility for many countries in Oceania. This is related, first of all, to the geographical isolation of many ecclesial communities, either due to mountainous terrain, the distance between islands or the lack of roads. Also, many areas lack the technological infrastructure that would facilitate access to the internet and online communication. All these factors impeded responses from people in these regions.
126. For a variety of reasons, CEPAC was unable to submit a synthesis document.
127. Other voices that were identified as missing or inadequately represented from all countries in the region were: the voice of West Papuans; the adequate representation of migrants; the voice of those affected by “neo-colonialism” (the workers of the multinational extractive companies), the voice of those still affected by “the old colonialism” and the Church’s role in colonialism; lay men; members of other Christian

churches; religious movements; and victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, slavery, exploitation and other abuses.

128. It was also noted that the voices of bishops in some parts of the region were missing, not only for hearing their perspectives on the style of synodal leadership but also about isolation and other challenges that they experience in their pastoral ministry.

# Priorities and Calls to Action

129. Many themes, issues and insights emerged as the fruits of the discernment process in Oceania, and the 11 key themes outlined in the earlier sections of this document. These are the priorities that emerged from the five syntheses which the People of God in Oceania consider appropriate for consideration at the First Session of the Synod Assembly in October 2023. In doing so, we have concentrated on those matters which are more properly considered by the Universal Church (such as Church teaching) and left other matters for consideration at the level of continental, episcopal conference or local Church. Other important topics such as the relevance of the tent metaphor, the centrality of baptism as our identity and forming the baptised to understand their call to mission may be helpful in the writing of the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

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## MISSION

130. Mission was identified as a key priority in each of the responses, with a strong sense that the mission which Christ entrusted to the Church is truly linked to the inclusion of all the baptised. Below are the issues for the Synod Assembly to consider:
- a) Ways of more effectively engaging the whole People of God in their baptismal invitation to participate in God's mission (Pacific).
  - b) Making a transition from a "maintenance" to a "mission-focused" Church (Australia, 69).
  - c) Inviting and encouraging all Catholics "to accept their baptismal call to evangelise and proclaim God's love in unity with others" (Australia, 69).
  - d) In the absence of priests, validating and strengthening lay pastoral ministry in prisons and hospitals to ensure that people receive the healing ministry of Jesus (New Zealand, 116).
  - e) Recognising the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania as "*Sui iuris* [self-governing] Churches who through their rich spiritual tradition can contribute to the mission of the Church" (ECC, 19).

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## ECOLOGICAL CRISES

131. As a sea of big and small islands, Oceania is uniquely impacted by the devastating consequences of the ecological crisis – from rising sea levels threatening the very existence of island communities to catastrophic cyclones, floods, fires and droughts and the resultant loss of human life and biodiversity. While acknowledging that the DCS made reference to the climate emergency, **the Synod Assembly should consider this as an urgent existential global issue:**
- a) Stand in solidarity with those communities severely impacted by the ecological crisis, noting the differential impact on the poor and vulnerable.
  - b) Promote *Laudato Si's* integral ecology as critical to our care for the earth and for the oceans and urge local churches and ministries to implement action plans.
  - c) Consider the ecological crisis **as a mission field in which the whole Church, globally and locally, should be engaged** in the "urgent struggle to preserve our planet and its life, and to provide economic justice for its people" (New Zealand, 114).

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## CHURCH TEACHING

132. Questions about Church teaching, or the application of Church teaching, were raised in the Oceania responses. There are differences in the region about whether change is needed in Church teaching in some areas, and about whether Church teaching can change or develop. These issues listed below need to be addressed for the sake of our unity in diversity.
- a) Those aspects of Church teaching which are perceived as “exclusionary or hurtful” or understood to “cause people to walk away from the Church or deter them from returning” (New Zealand, 117). These include teaching on sexuality, diverse sexual relationships, contraception, the situation of the divorced and remarried, intercommunion with other Christian denominations whose Baptism we recognise, priestly celibacy and the restriction of ordination to men.
  - b) Improved communication of Magisterial teaching, in accessible language and modes for the People of God.
  - c) Liturgical reforms to implement the teachings of Vatican II on inculturation and reflect contemporary theology, such as “a better translation of the Missal, inclusive language, lay people giving homilies, flexibility in different contexts ... Overall, it was agreed that liturgy should always allow for active participation and be inclusive and open to all” (Australia, 68).
  - d) Liturgical norms which enable and facilitate local cultural approaches to worship (Pacific).

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## BECOMING MORE SYNODAL

133. The majority of respondents valued the experience of synodality and expressed a desire for the Church to become more synodal. This was seen as a priority in each of the responses. The Synod Assembly should consider ways of embedding synodality in the life and teaching of the Church:
- a) Using discernment processes in Church decision-making, which requires that “those in leadership positions listen to the Holy Spirit and try to seek the will of God in affairs of the Church” (Pacific).
  - b) “Developing further resources for discernment and synodality in the ordinary life of the Church” (New Zealand, 113).
  - c) Shifting attitudes and practices within the Church to be more communal (Pacific).
  - d) Transforming the culture of Church leadership to emphasise “the importance of accountability, transparency and openness at all levels of the Church, for parishes, dioceses and Church agencies and for the bishops themselves” (Australia, 61).
  - e) Embedding “synodality as the ‘way of being Church’ at every level” (New Zealand, 113) by identifying “those bodies in the Church at all levels which are synodal by nature” (New Zealand, 113), and “establishing forums at all levels of the Church” where they are lacking (Australia, 61) in order to promote “subsidiarity within the Church” (Australia, 61).



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## AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING

134. Discernment in Oceania revealed a common view that a synodal Church needs a cultural and structural change in Church leadership, including shared governance and decision-making, involving both laity and clergy, to reduce the possibility of a culture of clericalism and enable the laity in the contribution of their gifts.

The Synod Assembly should consider:

- a) Ways of embedding a culture of servant leadership for those in leadership positions – clerical, religious and lay people.
- b) Changes to current governance structures to enable shared governance and decision-making, involving both laity and clergy.
- c) Those areas of canon law which do not enable lay women and men to participate in appropriate forms of decision-making, while not derogating from episcopal authority.
- d) Removing provisions that restrict certain diocesan and tribunal roles to clerics to allow qualified lay people to take up these roles (New Zealand, 116).
- e) How initiatives to improve transparency and accountability in the Vatican might be modelled in the local churches.
- f) Investigating “pathways for people from diverse backgrounds to be trained in governance roles, such as pastoral councils or other areas of governance” (Australia, 67).

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## YOUNG PEOPLE

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

- a) Listening and “investigating how the faith needs of young people could be met and how youth could be better formed and provided with platforms that allowed them to utilise their skills and passions” (Australia, 76), including documents in a language they can understand (New Zealand, 47).
- b) Accompanying young people in discerning the gifts and talents “that they can offer for the growth of the Church” (Pacific).
- c) An increased focus on “a union of family, parish and school to work together” to enrich the Catholicity within Catholic schools (ECC, 20).
- d) More pastoral activities and faith formation programs that cater to young men’s and boys’ unique perspectives (PNG/SI, 5.6).

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## WOMEN

136. The role and place of women in the Church was a uniform concern in Oceania. The Synod Assembly should consider the experience of women in the Church:
- a) Hearing directly from women on all matters under consideration during the Synod Assemblies.
  - b) Ensuring the spirit of synodality continues to cause the Church to listen to those women who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church (Pacific).
  - c) Change the perception of women in the Church as being homogenous in their views, the way cultural influences impact them at a local level or their way of life (New Zealand, 118).
  - d) Full and just participation of women in Church governance, decision-making, mission and ministry (Australia, 60; New Zealand, 118).
  - e) A just remuneration for lay women working in the Church and “religious women, especially in the pastoral field” (PNG/SI, 2.6).
  - f) A greater involvement of women in the formation of seminarians and priests (New Zealand, 118).

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## FORMATION

137. In the five responses from the region, formation was seen to be essential. As this was seen as a priority, the Synod Assembly should consider:
- a) Creating a formation framework for all the baptised to help them participate in a synodal Church and be courageous missionary disciples.
  - b) Ensuring that formation identifies needs within the light of Scripture and Church teaching, includes Catholic Social Teaching, and addresses the reality of people’s lives.
  - c) Prioritising formation resources for ecological conversion and specific resources for the formation of young people in the faith.
  - d) Ensuring that there is an adequate emphasis on formation for catechists and other lay leaders.

# Conclusion

138. The experience of synodality became for many people a new experience of Church. During the process people recognised the presence of the Holy Spirit in listening to one another, in the joy and freedom they experienced and in the common ground they found. Those who reflected upon the DCS found the emergence of clear themes across the world amazing – evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church. “The experience with the DCS has given many people a global perspective of the Church which they did not have before, which has induced a sense of wonder at the diversity and breadth of the Church to which we belong” (New Zealand, 13).
139. As the *Instrumentum Laboris* is prepared for the Synod Assembly, we note that the many people who have taken part have already been changed by this process. An outpouring of people’s hearts has taken place which has created new bonds and strengthened people’s understanding of their shared identity as members of Christ’s Church. Many lay people now have a deeper knowledge of their Baptism and what it means, and a strong desire to act upon that new knowledge.
140. People are awaiting with interest the next stage of the global process. There is great hope that the First Synod Assembly in October 2023 will be aligned with the synodal process, Christ-centred and Spirit-led, focused on God’s call to us at this point in the Church’s history. To be truly synodal the lay and religious participants need to reflect the diversity of the People of God.
141. There have always been “experts” and “auditors” at Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops in the past. We invite the Synod Secretariat to discern carefully how those people are chosen for this Assembly and recommend a transparent process be adopted. The “experts” should have expertise in areas such as pastoral care, missionary work and synodality, alongside theology, ecclesiology and canon law. “Auditors” should include people such as migrants, the poor, priests and religious who work among the marginalised, and survivors of abuse. Whether the traditional roles of “experts” and “auditors” are retained, or a modified structure is adopted, women, lay men, young people and indigenous people should participate with the bishops in the Assembly, and some of these should be from Oceania.
142. The title of the Working Document for the Continental Stage is *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent*. The People of God need the Assembly to heed this call as we continue the synodal journey.

# Pastoral Reflection by the Bishops of Oceania Gathered at the FCBCO Assembly, on the Oceania Response to the DCS

143. As we considered this Oceania document, we had a sense of a very real confidence in the presence of Christ in the Church, and that He is moving the Church forward. The document captures the hopes and concerns of our people, and this might give the impression that the Church is in disarray. However, it is precisely in places and times of pain and suffering that Christ reveals himself. This confidence and faith in His presence can guide us in our response. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we continue our synodal journey.
144. We trust the process and the people we appointed, who have collated well the responses of the People of God to the questions posed in the Document for the Continental Stage of the Synod. We believe that this document is a fair representation of the reality of the People of God who participated in this synodal process. However, we acknowledge that this document is not a census of all Catholics in Oceania but an expression of the views of those people who responded to the invitation to discern on the DCS. Acknowledging the limited participation due to time pressures, we hope for broader participation as the synodal process unfolds.
145. We noticed in the people's responses a desire for practical applications of synodality in the present moment. However, we also realise that while we are a synodal Church, giving practical expression to synodality will take time. It will be a long journey, both in Oceania and in the Universal Church. This document is not a catechetical or magisterial document. It is more like a postcard at this point in our journey, showing where we are now.
146. We do not want to build a different Church, but rather to renew and revitalise the Church which we love. This renewal and revitalisation will begin with personal conversion, and it will also find communal and structural expression. A renewed and synodal Church seeks not to leave anyone behind. In such a Church we will walk together, loving one another.
147. Reflecting on the responses of the people, we were pleased to see they appreciate that their Baptism is foundational and that it receives great attention in this document. However, we noticed that Eucharist is less prominent.
148. For Catholics, the Eucharist is central. Through Baptism, we gain entry to the Eucharistic community gathered at the Table of the Lord. With Christ, we as a people are invited to die to self and rise again with Christ as we participate in his sacrificial self-emptying and self-giving. The Lord Jesus gives us Himself as food for the journey until we share in the banquet of heaven. He gives us priests, whom He calls to have a shepherd's heart to care for their people, proclaim the Word of God, celebrate Eucharist with and for them, and so nourish the Church as she strives to fulfil her mission for the life of the world. Similarly, the Sacrament of Penance reunites the sinner with the Eucharistic community.
149. Not every bishop found every part of the document wholly convincing or complete, and some had doubts and concerns about where this might be leading us. Jesus appeared to the disciples with their pain, shame, loss and shattered hopes. In the same way, we bishops feel doubts, anxieties and fears about certain parts of this document. We also feel joy and hope. The crucified and risen Christ showed his wounds to his disciples and despite their shame, doubts, and fears, they were filled with joy and hope. His words were "peace be with you". He invites us bishops to trust in his mercy and proclaim the truth with love, as Jesus did.
150. In the face of our doubts and fears, Jesus sends us to a broken world. We receive the griefs and anguish, the joys and hopes of the people of Oceania expressed in this document. With trust in the Holy Spirit, we will continue to journey together, people and pastors, as the pilgrim People of God. Jesus Christ is walking with us in our synodal journey, offering us His peace and urging us to have courage.

151. Our sharing of the Gospel in Oceania takes place in quite varied contexts. This document is an example of the voices of the peoples of our nations revealing the contexts of our mission. The document has a lively sense of mission, which is at the heart of the laity being Church in the world.
152. We have a desire and responsibility to listen to and accompany our young people and assist them to draw on the life-giving Gospel in responding to the challenges they face in their search for meaning, hope and healthy relationships. We are conscious that reaching out to our young people in more courageous, creative and engaging ways is an essential aspect of mission for our Church in the context of our world today.
153. We are also committed to our shared responsibility expressed in this document to better care for and advocate for our common home. In our region, the ecological crisis is an existential threat to many people and communities. It is experienced in sea level rises, the acidification of the oceans, droughts, flooding rains, and more frequent extreme weather events. The destruction of some island nations becomes increasingly likely as the melting of the Antarctic ice cap on our southern periphery continues with global warming. Ecological conversion is an urgent mission priority.
154. Formation for all members of the Church, including the bishops, will be essential to support our journey of becoming a more synodal Church.
155. Having reflected on this document together at our Assembly, we feel peace and joy. We also feel called to be prophetic. The apostles were accepted by Jesus even though they had let him down. He offered them peace. We are called to be ready to sacrifice ourselves in the process of being prophetic. We need to model ourselves on the love we proclaim. We are sent forth just as Jesus sent forth the apostles.

## On Synodality

After the explanation of the three key words of the synodal process – communion, participation, mission – the people in the village shouted confidently and loudly, “We are synodality! We are synodality!” Why? “We are doing it ever since we became Catholics.”

(Balimo Village, Papua New Guinea, became a parish 27 years ago and people are NO READ, NO WRITE)

When the explanation went on to emphasise the idea of “WALKING TOGETHER”, they said, “Every day we ONLY WALK and all the time we walk in numbers because it is strange walking ALONE and CAR ride not possible for we don’t have road!”

If synodality expressed the Church-people’s ordinary way of living and working, then I must say, people in Balimo are right in one sense in their simplicity as Church and in their display of faith practice.

Bishop Joseph Durero

7 February 2023

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FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCES OF OCEANIA

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