



Catholic Church Reform Int'l.

A global network seeking renewal of the Church

Submission from Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) Agenda Issues for 2nd Assembly of the Synod on Synodality

The following submission responds to the directions approved by the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod in “*HOW can we be a synodal Church in mission?*” This document signifies global discernment of cross-generational, cross-continental, cross-cultural reflections upon which, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we reached full consensus of the faithful. CCRI requests that these matters named below be included in the agenda for the 2nd Assembly.

Key Terms

The terms **Synodality, Clericalism, Subsidiarity, Governance, and Sense of Faith of the Faithful** (*Sensus Fidei Fidelium*) are key to issues addressed by the Synod; meanings are appended.*

Principles, Issues and Actions

The Synthesis Report of the 1st Assembly includes a wide range of substantial proposals. We submit our priorities for what we believe are the central issues, reflecting teachings of Vatican II and the ‘sense of faith of the faithful’*. In that regard, after numerous online synodal gatherings representing different countries, ages, and cultures, our global consensus strongly agrees that the most urgent priority of the 2nd Assembly to be held in 2024 is the equality of women in governance and ministry. Principles and priorities must guide the wide-ranging agenda of reform if the extensive issues in the 2023 Synthesis Report are to be properly addressed. Further, the **ten** study groups recently **established** by Pope Francis should not in any way pre-empt consideration of matters by the 2nd Assembly. The following five agenda principles are accordingly proposed, identifying key issues and priority actions to achieve “a synodal Church in mission.”

1. Our God-given Mission

ISSUES below identify fundamental failings we experience in pursuing our Christian mission:

- i. Our Church far from being “*a missionary Church capable of transforming everything*” as noted in *Evangelii Gaudium*
- ii. The Church’s loss of trust, credibility, and relevance amongst the faithful and in dialogue with the wider world
- iii. Massive alienation of Catholics, particularly young people, from the Church in many countries
- iv. Dysfunctional Church governance* as shown by clerical sexual abuse and particularly the widespread cover-up
- v. Considerable financial malpractice and numerous bankruptcies in the Church
- vi. Many bishops’ loss of their moral **footing**, pastoral legitimacy, commitment to synodality, and listening to the *sensus fidei fidelium*. *

ACTIONS we submit that the 2nd Assembly propose to Pope Francis:

- i. Synodality* to be **the** core element of all Church structures, practices, and culture including small Christian communities.
- ii. Strong accountability, transparency, and inclusion while recognizing subsidiarity.*
- iii. Involve the faithful in the selection and evaluation of bishops and parish priests/pastors.
- iv. Standing up for **all** social justice issues and **educating the faithful of its** primary purpose in the mission of the Church.
- v. **Due process of sexual abuse issues given to civil authorities** even amid financial bankruptcy, prioritizing care of victims.
- vi. A committee established of staff and the faithful to evaluate the bishop and parish clergy every 2 years.
- vii. National synods called to address the massive loss of Catholics from the Church
- viii. Strategically respond to the needs of young adults for whom the Church has become increasingly irrelevant.
- ix. Pursue the Church’s mission synodally* by both teaching and modelling **the example of Jesus Christ**.

2. Equality of all, ensuring gender diversity in governance and ministry - rejecting male clerical autocracy

ISSUES below identify fundamental failings we experience in pursuing our Christian mission:

- i. Male clerical autocracy is neither theologically nor biblically based on clear teachings of Jesus, is anti-synodal, and reflects past cultural practices now exposed as inadequate and discriminatory.
- ii. Male autocracy **dismisses the voice of women and** is damaging to institutional decision-making and efficacy.
- iii. Critical issue of women’s equality in leadership roles within the Church is still being approached as a matter for analysis and study as opposed to being viewed as a matter for immediate, strategic action.
- iv. Consideration of women **only as** deacons is in itself inadequate.
- v. The exclusion of women from Church ministry (c. 1024) and Church governance (cc.129 and 274§1), and from

preaching the homily (c.767§1), deprives the Church of the benefits of gender diversity and balance in leadership, as well as being contrary to the inclusivity of Jesus' teachings.

- vi. Dissonance between welcoming LGBTIQ+ and simultaneously judging them to be "intrinsically disordered"
- vii. Ongoing refusal to return mandated man-made priestly celibacy to optional as done in 23 eastern rites.

ACTIONS we submit that the 2nd Assembly propose to Pope Francis:

- i. Replace male autocracy with co-responsible models of ministry as we are all created/baptized as equals.
- ii. Canon law revised to enable deliberative participation of laity and clergy at every level of leadership.
- iii. All synodal structures and practices must be truly inclusive of all.
- iv. Repeal canon 1024 which excludes women from sacred ordination.
- v. Repeal canons 129 and 274§1, which exclude women from governance.
- vi. Amend cc.767§1 to permit **qualified** non-ordained to preach the homily.
- vii. Following the example of the Eastern rites, amend cc.194 and 1394 to remove the ban on marriage of priests.
- viii. Take tangible steps to **increasingly** do together ecumenically what we do not need to do apart (cf. Lund Statement 1952).
- ix. Actively welcome divorced /remarried, LGBTIQ+ Catholics, young people, and the marginalized.

3. Synodal structures and practices at every level of the Church

ISSUES below identify fundamental failings we experience in pursuing our Christian mission:

- i. Church's lack of a synodal approach in its structures, devalues *sensus fidelium*, and prejudices Church's efficacy.
- ii. Widespread active resistance of many bishops to the call to synodality.
- iii. Many bishops appoint as delegates to synodal structures only those who align ideologically with them.
- iv. Many dioceses lack **effective and monitored** diocesan pastoral councils despite the default provision of canon 511.
- v. The current male governance and leadership model adopted by bishops is autocratic and the antithesis of synodality.
- vi. "Shortage of priests" caused by current institutional restrictions is creating Eucharistic famine in parts of the world.
- vii. Parish pastoral councils, although provided for, are not required by canon law.
- viii. Finance Committees often operate independently of the Pastoral Council.
- ix. The faithful are inadequately involved in diocesan and parish administration.
- x. Liturgies are often overly stereotyped with language much too formal and exclusive.
- xi. The essential nature of Small Christian communities is inadequately recognized in the Church.

ACTIONS we submit that the 2nd Assembly propose to Pope Francis:

- i. Synodal structures and practices be canonically mandated, guided by pastoral inclusion rather than episcopal control.
- ii. Delegates to synods and consultative bodies be chosen synodally by both clergy and faithful.
- iii. **Representative body of the parish/diocese be given deliberative authority when serving on pastoral councils.**
- iv. Bishops to be accountable **to their council** for adoption of diocesan councils, synodal structures, and culture in their dioceses.
- v. Structures and practices to reflect the principles of both synodality and subsidiarity, respecting the *sensus fidelium* and ensuring Christian discernment through Conversations in the Spirit.
- vi. Eucharistic famine in Global South to be addressed by appointing qualified candidates to serve as presbyters.
- vii. Diocesan and parish pastoral councils to be mandated with responsibilities for local decision-making with regular synodal reporting to the faithful.
- viii. Mandate Finance Committees to serve the mission of pastoral councils.
- ix. Priority given to the education of the whole People of God in scripture, theology, synodality, and subsidiarity.
- x. Mandate diocesan synods to be convened every 3 years.
- xi. Periodic dialogue **about the day's readings** needed to discern among the faithful how to live out the Gospel in their lives.
- xii. Liturgies to be more diverse and participatory, accessible, and responsive to local needs and cultures.
- xiii. Canonical endorsement of Small Christian Communities essential as part of a synodal Church structure.

4. Clericalism to be eradicated

ISSUES below identify fundamental failings we experience in pursuing our Christian mission:

- i. Clericalism is a social sin rooted in a medieval mindset reinforced by the structure of the Church and male autocracy.
- ii. Clericalist attitudes reinforced by clergy's pressure/incentive and silent complicity of laity conditioned over centuries.
- iii. Clericalism, **in an effort to control the faithful, often neglects teaching the primacy of conscience**, and leads to a massive loss of talent that could build up the Body of Christ.
- iv. The concept of a presbyter as ontologically different is a catalyst for clericalism, the antithesis of synodality.
- v. The baptismal call of "Priesthood of the faithful" is ignored in the current structure of the Church.

ACTIONS we submit that the 2nd Assembly propose to Pope Francis:

- i. Create specific structures that enculturate synodality, including both women and men in governance and ministry.
- ii. Accountable, inclusive, humble, and accessible leadership as an active remedy for clericalism and male superiority.
- iii. Education of clergy and laity **be required** in the synodal process for the church to become a synodal community.

- iv. Co-responsible pastoral leadership to become normative in every diocese and parish, having additional benefit for parishes without priests.
- v. Seminaries **completely** reformed to integrate with university programs intermingling their studies with women and men.
- vi. Beginning in seminaries, priesthood taught **to follow Christ's example "by taking the very nature of a servant."** (Phil 2:7)

5. Enculturate synodality (1-4 above) throughout the Church and reinforce the *sensus fidelium*

ISSUES of concern that must be addressed:

- i. Effective Church reform requires a shared culture of synodality, valuing cultural diversity, rejecting male autocracy.
- ii. The actions in 1-4 above will require both decrees and synodal programs of learning throughout the Church from Small Christian Communities to parishes to dioceses, all the way to the Vatican in accord with Pope Francis's example.

ACTIONS we submit that the 2nd Assembly propose to Pope Francis:

- i. A **qualified, synodally approved** program of learning for bishops, priests, and laity, including all church organizations
- ii. Ongoing servant leadership formation at every level
- iii. Review of all catechetics and Church activities including liturgy to achieve understanding and commitment to the actions proposed in #1-4 above to achieve:

"a synodal Church in mission."

*** Key Terms**

Synodality (cf. International Theological Commission and the Catechism) pertains to the essence of the Church, and every aspect of the Church's life and mission, and means "walking together". It is a constitutive dimension of the church. The concept of synodality was implicit in Vatican II's teaching, meaning much the same as communion, or union with God the Trinity and union with others in the Church. Consulting and listening to the faithful, who make up a great majority of the church, before the hierarchy makes decisions at all levels of the Church, is an essential aspect of the synodal process. The whole body of the faithful cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the *sensus fidei* of the whole people of God.

Clericalism is the antithesis of synodality. Clericalism involves an expectation that ordained ministers are better than and should rule over everyone else among the People of God. Pope Francis has stated: "*It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's people. ... Such is the case with clericalism, an approach that not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people.*" (Letter to the People of God, August 20, 2018). Sexism and misogyny are corollaries of clericalism among some clerics.

Subsidiarity is a social principle that ensures individuals, groups, and associations have maximum freedom to exercise personal responsibility as they pursue their goals, consistent with the requirements of the common good. The principle was expressed by Pope Pius XI 1931 in a papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*:

Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organisations can do. (n.79).

Governance is a concept encompassing all the means by which an organisation is directed and controlled to achieve its mission and strategic objectives. Good governance has regard to leadership, authority, processes, systems, structures, relationships, standards, delegations, and organizational culture; these are the tools of good governance. Organisational leaders are responsible for all aspects of the organization's performance and ethical standards. Good governance requires high standards of accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness, with full regard to gender balance and diversity, and guided by the principles of synodality and subsidiarity.

Sense of Faith of the Faithful – '*sensus fidei fidelium*' (cf. International Theological Commission) The Church teaches that the congregation of the faithful cannot err in matters of faith. While the faith of the universal Church is authoritatively expressed by her prelates, each believer has a personal instinct of faith. The ITC further stated that the sense of faith of the faithful "is a sort of spiritual instinct that enables the believer to judge spontaneously whether a particular teaching or practice is or is not in conformity with the Gospel and with apostolic faith. While the validity and importance of different church teachings cannot be the subject of a popular vote, the degree to which they are or are not accepted by most Catholics is important."

The Second Vatican Council's teaching regarding the laity, the document on Revelation says:

"All of the baptized participate in the prophetic office of Jesus Christ ... The Holy Spirit anoints them and equips them conferring on them a very personal and intimate knowledge of the faith of the Church. ... As a result, the faithful have an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, which enables them to recognize and endorse Christian doctrine and practice, and to reject what is false."