

Catholics For Renewal Inc.



Responses to some key parts of the Final ‘Synod on Synodality’ Report, October 2024

For issues particularly focused on by Catholics For Renewal this document briefly comments on and/or directly extracts selected parts of the Final Report of the ‘Synod on Synodality’ 30 October 2024 (XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Second Session, Oct 2-27, 2024).

Introduction

The 52-page document, which was approved by 355 synod members in attendance, outlines the proposals reached by consensus for Church renewal. The proposals include expanded women’s leadership roles excluding ordination, greater lay participation in decision-making, and some structural reforms, the most significant being strengthening pastoral and diocesan councils. In comparison with the 2023 Synthesis report, the text does present more concrete recommendations and clearer structural guidelines. [Click here](#) to read a summary of the key documents shaping the next steps for the future of our Church.

Further to the Catholics For Renewal responses below, [Click here](#) to read the Final Synod report in English. [Click here](#) to read the Final Synod report in its original Italian. [Click here](#) to read the **response of Women's ordination advocates** to the Synod report. [Click here](#) to read **New Ways Ministry's disappointment** with failure of the 2024 Synod to again address the LBGTQ+ issues. [Click here](#) to read **NCR's report** on the call of the Synod for all baptized Catholics to become involved in shaping the future of our Church. [Click here](#) to read the **Vatican News** on the five parts that make up the structure of the report. [Click here](#) to read **America Magazine's perspective** that controversial issues are here to stay.



1. Catholics For Renewal responses:

Extracts of comments by Mick Leahy from his translation of the original Italian version of the Synod Final Report, 30 October 2024*

Overall Comment relating to Church Governance:

“The Final Synod document encouragingly calls for reforms of Canon law ahead in a synodal key!”

".....I have just finished reading the Italian version. In many ways it is a very rich document, marking some significant developments on the teachings of Vat II. Of particular interest is its call to reform canon law 'in a synodal key'.

Indeed, in this section it goes into some interesting specifics of clarifying the meaning of 'consultative' and 'deliberative' votes in the church, insisting that there can be no opposition between them, and that a view expressed by participants in an assembly cannot be ignored by competent authority, but, if overruled, it can only be so in light of overwhelming arguments, and must be expressed with justifying reasons.

It is disappointing inasmuch as it defines 'transparency' with the qualifications about charity etc which enable it to refrain from publishing canonical judgments in such cases as laicisation for child abuse.”

***Dr Mick Leahy** is a former Melbourne Catholic Priest with Licentiate from the Gregorian University in Rome where he also studied Italian, a retired philosopher of education and politics, and a Committee Member of Catholics For Renewal

2. Some other initiatives endorsed in the Synod 2024 Final Report, including many initially proposed independently in the Catholics for Renewal book *Getting Back on Mission - Reforming Our Church Together (GBOM, 2019). Parallels between the Final Synod Report, GBOM and in various Catholics For Renewal Editorials ([Here](#)) are highlighted below in yellow). Item numbers below match those in the Final Report**

* *Getting Back on Mission*, Catholics For Renewal, Garratt Publishing, 2019 (335 pages),

From **Dr Peter Wilkinson**, President Catholics for Renewal, 6 November 2024

Re: The Lay Faithful.

77. The lay faithful, both men and women, should be given greater opportunities for participation, also exploring new forms of service and ministry in response to the pastoral needs of our time in a spirit of collaboration and differentiated co-responsibility. In particular, some concrete needs have emerged from the synodal process. These need to be responded to according to the various contexts:

a) **increased participation of laymen and laywomen in Church discernment processes and all phases of decision-making** processes (drafting, making and confirming decisions);

b) **greater access of laymen and laywomen to positions of responsibility in dioceses and ecclesiastical institutions, including seminaries, institutes and theological faculties;** more fully enacting existing provisions;

c) greater recognition and support for the lives and charisms of consecrated men and women and their employment in positions of ecclesial responsibility;

d) a greater number of qualified lay people serving as judges in all canonical processes;

e) effective recognition of the dignity and respect for the rights of those who are employed in the Church and its institutions.

79. In prayer and dialogue, we have recognised that ecclesial discernment, the care for decision-making processes, the commitment to accountability and the evaluation of our decisions are practices through which we respond to the Word that shows us the paths of mission.

80. These three practices are closely intertwined. Decision-making processes need ecclesial discernment, which requires listening in a climate of trust that is supported by transparency and accountability. Trust must be mutual: decision-makers need to be able to trust and listen to the People of God. The latter, in turn, needs to be able to trust those in authority. This integral vision highlights that each of these practices depends on and supports the others, thus serving the Church's ability to fulfil its mission. Formation is needed in order to engage in decision-making processes grounded in ecclesial discernment and which reflect a culture of transparency, accountability, and evaluation. The formation required is not only technical; it also needs to explore theological, biblical and spiritual foundations. All the baptised need this formation in witness, mission, holiness and service, which emphasises co-responsibility. It takes on particular forms for those in positions of responsibility or at the service of ecclesial discernment.

87. In the synodal Church “the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions” (ITC n. 68) for mission. The way to promote a synodal Church is to foster greater participation of all the People of God in decision-making processes. If it is indeed true that the Church's very way of living and operating is synodal, then this practice is essential to the Church's mission, requiring discernment, the reaching of consensus, and decision-making through the use of the various structures and institutions of synodality.

94. Implementing the processes of decision-making correctly and resolutely, and in a synodal style, will further the progress of God's People in a participatory way, especially by utilising the institutional means provided for in Canon Law, in particular participatory bodies. Without concrete changes in the short term, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible, and this will alienate those members of the People of God who have drawn strength and hope from the synodal journey. Local Churches need to find ways to implement these changes.

95. Decision-making does not conclude the discernment process. It must be accompanied and followed by practices of accountability and evaluation undertaken in a spirit of transparency inspired by evangelical criteria. Accountability to the community for one's ministry belongs to our oldest tradition: to the Apostolic Church itself.

96. Thus, when we speak of transparency we are referring to a fundamental attitude grounded in the Sacred Scriptures and not to a series of administrative or procedural requirements. Transparency, in its correct evangelical sense, does not compromise respect for privacy and confidentiality, the protection of persons, their dignity and rights, even in the face of unreasonable demands of civil authorities. However, this privacy can never legitimate practices contrary to the Gospel or become a pretext to circumvent or cover up actions to combat evil.

97. The attitude to transparency ... safeguards the trust and credibility needed by a synodal Church that is attentive to relationships. When this trust is violated, the weakest and the most vulnerable suffer the most. Wherever the Church enjoys trust, the practice of transparency, accountability and evaluation help to strengthen its credibility. These practices are even more critical where the Church's credibility needs rebuilding. They are particularly important in regard to the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults.

98. In every situation, these practices contribute to keeping the Church faithful to her mission. The absence of these practices is one of the consequences of clericalism, which is thus fuelled. Clericalism is based on the implicit assumption that those who have authority in the Church are not to be held to account for their actions and decisions as if they were isolated from or above the rest of the People of

God. Transparency and accountability should not only be invoked when it comes to sexual, financial and other forms of abuse. These practices also concern the lifestyle of pastors, pastoral planning, methods of evangelisation, and the way in which the Church respects human dignity, for example, in regard to the working conditions within its institutions.

99. If the synodal Church wants to be welcoming, then **the culture and praxis of accountability must shape its actions at all levels.** However, those in positions of authority have greater responsibility in this regard and are called to account for it to God and to His People. While accountability to one's superiors has been practised over the centuries, the dimension of authority's being accountable to the community is in need of restoration. The structures and procedures established through the experience of consecrated life (such as chapters, canonical visitations, etc.) can serve as an inspiration in this regard.

100. Similarly, **it is necessary to have structures and methods for regularly evaluating the exercise of ministry.** Such evaluation is not a judgement upon an individual. Rather, it allows a way of assisting the minister by highlighting positive aspects of their ministry and bringing to light areas for improvement. The evaluation also assists the local Church in learning from experience, adjusting plans of action, determining the outcomes of its decisions in relation to its mission, and remaining attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

101. Local churches and their groupings are responsible for developing effective forms and processes of accountability and evaluation in a synodal way in addition to adhering to the criteria and oversight of structures already established by canonical norms. These should be appropriate to the context, including the requirements of civil law, the legitimate expectations of society and the availability of experts in the field. It is also necessary to draw on the skills of those, especially laypeople, who have greater expertise regarding accountability and evaluation. Best practices within civil society should be discerned and adapted for use within Church contexts. The way in which reporting and evaluation processes are implemented at the local level should be included in the report presented during the visits *ad limina*.

102. It seems necessary to ensure, at the very least, the establishment everywhere of the following in forms appropriate to different contexts:

a) effective functioning of finance councils;

b) **effective involvement of the People of God, in particular of the more competent members, in pastoral and financial planning;**

c) preparation and publication (appropriate to the local context and in an accessible form) of an **annual financial report**, insofar as possible externally audited, demonstrating the transparency of how the temporal goods and financial resources of the Church and its institutions are being managed;

d) the preparation and publication of an **annual report on the carrying out of the local Church's mission, including also safeguarding initiatives (the protection of minors and vulnerable adults), and progress made in promoting the laity's access to positions of authority and to decision-making processes, specifying the proportion of men and women;**

e) periodic evaluations of all the ministries and roles within the Church.

We need to realise that this is not a bureaucratic task for its own sake. It is rather a communication effort that proves to be a powerful educational tool for bringing about a change in culture. It also enables us to give greater visibility to many valuable initiatives of the Church and its institutions, which too often remain hidden.

103. The baptised participate in decision-making, accountability and evaluation processes through institutional structures, primarily through those already provided for the local Church set out in the existing Code of Canon Law. In the Latin Church these are: **Diocesan Synod** (cf. CIC, can. 466), Presbyteral Council (cf. CIC, can. 500, § 2), **Diocesan Pastoral Council** (cf. CIC, can. 514, § 1), **Parish pastoral council** (cf. CIC, can. 536), Diocesan and Parish Council for Economic Affairs (cf. CIC, cann. 493 e 537). In the Eastern Catholic Churches these are: Eparchial Assembly (cf. CCEO, can. 235 ss.), Eparchial Assembly for Economic Affairs (cf. CCEO, can. 262 ss.), Presbyteral Council (cf. CCEO can. 264), Eparchial Pastoral Council (cf. CCEO can. 272. ss.), Parish Councils (cf. CCEO can. 295). Members participate on the basis of their ecclesial role and their differentiated responsibilities and capacities (charisms, ministries, experiences, competencies, etc). **Each of these bodies plays a role in the discernment needed for the inculturated proclamation of the Gospel, for the community's mission in its milieu, and for the witness of the baptised. They also contribute to the decision-making processes through established means.** These bodies themselves become the subject of accountability and evaluation, as they will need to give an account of their work. Participatory bodies represent one of the most promising areas in which to act for rapid implementation of the synodal guidelines, bringing about perceptible changes speedily.

104. A synodal Church is based upon the existence, efficiency and effective vitality of these participatory bodies, not on the merely nominal existence of them. This requires that they function in accordance with canonical provisions or legitimate customs and with respect to the statutes and regulations that govern them. For this reason, **we insist that they be made mandatory**, as was requested at all stages of the synodal process, and that they can fully play their role, and not just in a purely formal way, in ways appropriate to their diverse local contexts.

105. Furthermore, the structure and operations of these bodies need to be addressed. It is necessary to **start by adopting a synodal working method.** The suitability of conversation in the Spirit for adaptation may constitute a reference point. **Particular attention should be given to the way members are selected.** When no election is envisaged, a synodal consultation should be carried out that expresses as much as possible the reality of the community or the local Church, and the relevant authority should proceed to the appointment on the basis of its results, respecting the relation between consultation and deliberation described above. It is also **necessary to ensure that members of diocesan and parish pastoral councils are able to propose agenda items in an analogous way to that allowed for in the presbyteral council.**

106. Equal attention needs to be given to the membership of the participatory bodies so as to encourage **greater involvement by women, young people, and those living in poverty or on the margins.**

107. The Assembly paid special attention to good practices and positive experiences of reform. These include **creating networks of pastoral councils within communities, parishes, pastoral areas, and among diocesan pastoral councils.** The regular hosting of ecclesial assemblies at all levels is also encouraged. Without limiting consultation to members of the Catholic Church, **these gatherings should be open to listening to the contributions from other Churches and Christian Communions.** Attention should also be paid to the religions in the territory.

108. The Assembly proposes that **the diocesan Synod and eparchial Assembly be more highly valued as bodies for regular consultation between the Bishop and the portion of the People of God entrusted to him.** This should be the place for listening, prayer and discernment, particularly when it comes to choices pertaining to the life and mission of a local Church. Moreover, the diocesan Synod may provide scope for the exercise of accountability and evaluation whereby the bishop gives an account of pastoral activity in various areas: **the implementation of a diocesan pastoral plan, reception of the synodal processes of the entire Church, initiatives in safeguarding and the administration of finances and temporal goods.** It is, therefore, necessary to strengthen the existing canonical provisions in order

to better reflect the missionary synodal character of each local Church, making provision that these bodies meet on a regular, and not rare or infrequent, basis.

3. Other key Final Report Items

Re: Equal dignity and reciprocity between men and women.

52. The need for conversion definitely concerns the relations between men and women. The dynamics of relationships is inscribed upon our condition as creatures. The difference between the sexes constitutes the basis of human relationships. “So God created humankind in his image [...] male and female he created them” (Gen 1: 27). Inequality between men and women is not part of God’s design. In the new creation, this difference is reconsidered in the light of the dignity of Baptism: “As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3: 27-28). Our vocation as Christians is to welcome and respect, in every place and context, this difference, which is a gift from God and a source of life. We bear witness to the Gospel when we seek to live in relationships that respect the equal dignity and reciprocity between men and women. The widely expressed pain and suffering on the part of many women from every region and continent, both lay and consecrated, during the synodal process, reveal how often we fail to live up to this vision.

RE: Further Paragraph concerning women:

60. By virtue of Baptism, women and men have equal dignity as members of the People of God. However, women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and roles in all the various areas of the Church’s life. This is to the detriment of serving the Church’s shared mission. Scripture attests to the prominent role of many women in the history of salvation. One woman, Mary Magdalene, was given the first proclamation of the Resurrection. On the day of Pentecost, Mary, the Mother of God, was present, accompanied by many other women who had followed the Lord. It is important that the Scripture passages that relate these stories find adequate space inside liturgical lectionaries. Crucial turning points in Church history confirm the essential contribution of women moved by the Spirit. Women make up the majority of churchgoers and are often the first witnesses to the faith in families. They are active in the life of small Christian communities and parishes. They run schools, hospitals and shelters. They lead initiatives for reconciliation and promoting human dignity and social justice. Women contribute to theological research and are present in positions of responsibility in Church institutions, in diocesan curias and the Roman Curia. There are women who hold positions of authority and are leaders of their communities. This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain under-explored. There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped. **Additionally, the question of women’s access to diaconal ministry remains open.** This discernment needs to continue. The Assembly also asks that more attention be given to the language and images used in preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the drafting of official Church documents, giving more space to the contributions of female saints, theologians and mystics.

RE: The Local Parish

117. One of the main places of coming together in the local Church given to us throughout history is the parish. The parish community that gathers in the celebration of the Eucharist is a privileged place of relationships, welcome, discernment and mission. Changes in how we experience and live our relationship with locality require us to reconsider how parishes are configured. What characterises the parish is that it is a community that is not self-selecting. People gather there from different generations, professions, geographical origins and social classes and status. Responding to the new needs of mission requires opening up to new forms of pastoral action that take into account the mobility of people and the “existential territory” in which their life unfolds. By placing a special emphasis on Christian initiation and offering accompaniment and formation, the parish community will be able to support people in the different stages of life in fulfilling their mission in the world. In this way, it will become more evident that the parish is not centred on itself but oriented towards mission. The parish is then called to sustain the commitment of so many people who in so many ways live and bear witness to their faith in through their profession, in social, cultural and political activities. In many regions of the world, small Christian communities or basic ecclesial communities are the terrain where meaningful relationships of closeness and reciprocity can flourish, offering the opportunity to experience synodality concretely.

RE: Episcopal Conference

“The para on the **Episcopal Conference** is most interesting. Now, if a bishop signs on to a joint decision of his Episcopal Conference, he has an obligation to carry through on that decision. In the past, all that was agreed to were ‘Proposals which bishops might wish to consider for possible action in their dioceses’. Now it will be: ‘if you sign on you must follow on’.”

125. Episcopal Conferences express and implement the collegiality of the Bishops in order to foster communion between Churches and respond more effectively to the needs of pastoral life. They are a fundamental tool for creating bonds, sharing experiences and good practice among the Churches, and for adapting Christian life and the expression of faith to different cultures. With the involvement of the entire People of God, they also play an important role in the development of synodality. Based on the outcomes of the synodal process, we propose the following:

- a) to gather the fruits of deliberations on the theological and juridical statute of Episcopal Conferences.
- b) to specify precisely the domain of the doctrinal and disciplinary competence of Episcopal Conferences. Without compromising the authority of the Bishop within the Church entrusted to him or putting at risk either the unity or the catholicity of the Church, the collegial exercise of such competence can further the authentic teaching of the one faith in an appropriate and enculturated way within different contexts in addition to identifying fitting liturgical, catechetical, disciplinary, pastoral theology and spiritual expression (cf. AG 22). 41
- c) a process of assessment of the experience of the concrete functioning of Episcopal Conferences, of the relations among the bishops and with the Holy See so as to identify the particular reforms needed. The visits *ad limina Apostolorum* can provide appropriate occasions for this;
- d) ensuring that all dioceses are part of an ecclesiastical province and to an Episcopal Conference;
- e) specifying that **decisions made by an Episcopal Conference impose an ecclesial obligation on each Bishop who participated in the decision in relation to his own diocese;**

RE: Plenary Councils

129. To realise a “sound decentralisation” (EG 16) and an effective inculturation of faith, it is necessary not only to recognise the role of Episcopal Conferences, but also to reevaluate the institution of particular councils, both provincial and plenary. The periodic celebration of these councils has been an obligation for much of the Church's history and is currently provided for in the canon law of the Latin Church (cf. CIC can. 439-446). **They should be convened periodically. The procedure for the recognition of the conclusions of particular councils by the Holy See (*recognitio*) should be reformed to encourage their timely publication by specifying precise deadlines or, in cases of purely pastoral or disciplinary matters (not directly concerning issues of faith, morals, or sacramental discipline), by introducing a legal presumption equivalent to tacit consent.**

RE: Catholic schools and universities, and seminaries (also saying ‘there should be a significant presence of women’.

146. In addition to specifically pastoral settings and resources, the Christian community is present in many other places of formation. In particular, Catholic schools and universities play an important role in the dialogue between faith and culture and in providing moral education on values, offering a formation oriented towards Christ, the icon of life in its fullness. Thus, they become capable of promoting an alternative to the dominant models that are often driven by individualism and competition, thereby also playing a prophetic role. In some contexts, they are the only settings where children and young people come into contact with the Church. When inspired by intercultural and interreligious dialogue, their educational engagement is also valued by those of other religious traditions as a form of human development.

148. Throughout the synodal process, a widely expressed request was that discernment and formation of candidates for ordained ministry be undertaken in a synodal way. **There should be a significant presence of women,** an immersion in the daily life of communities, and formation to enable collaboration with everyone in the Church and in how to practise ecclesial discernment. This implies a courageous investment of energy in the preparation of formators. The Assembly calls for a revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in order to incorporate the requests made by the Synod. They should be translated in precise guidelines for a formation to synodality. Formation pathways should awaken in candidates their passion for the mission to all peoples (*ad gentes*). **Formation of Bishops is just as necessary** so that they may better assume their mission of bringing together in unity the gifts of the Spirit and exercise in a synodal manner the authority conferred on them. The synodal way of formation implies that the ecumenical dimension is present in all aspects of the paths towards ordained ministries.

RE: Ecclesial Context of Safeguarding:

150. Another area of great importance is the promotion in all ecclesial contexts of a culture of safeguarding, making communities ever safer places for minors and vulnerable persons. The work to equip Church structures with regulations and legal procedures that enable the prevention of abuse and timely responses to inappropriate behaviour has already begun. It is necessary to continue this commitment, offering specific and adequate formation to those who work in contact with minors and

vulnerable adults so that they can act competently and recognise the signals, often silent, of those experiencing difficulties and needing help. It is essential that victims are welcomed and supported, and this needs to be done sensitively. This requires great humanity and must be carried out with the help of qualified people. We must all allow ourselves to be moved by their suffering and practise that proximity, which, through concrete choices, will uplift them, help them and prepare a different future for all. It is imperative that throughout the world, the Church activates and promotes a culture of prevention and safeguarding, making communities ever safer places for minors and vulnerable persons. Although steps have been taken to prevent abuse, it is necessary to strengthen this commitment by offering specific and ongoing formation and training for those working with minors and vulnerable adults. Safeguarding processes must be constantly monitored and evaluated. Victims and survivors must be welcomed and supported with great sensitivity.