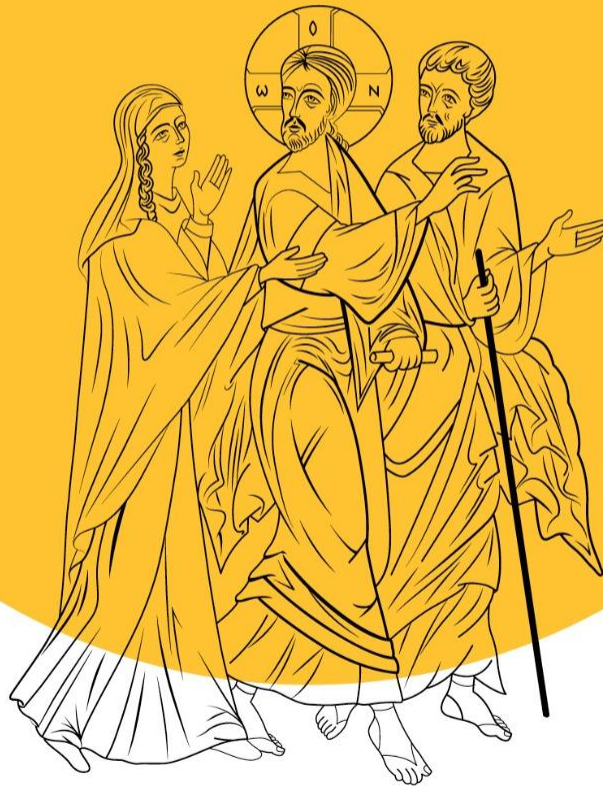


August 2022
Preparatory Committee for the Synodal Process in the Holy Land
Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries
of the Holy Land

*"He talked to us
on the way"* Luke 24



#Synod2021_2023

Synthesis of Stage 1

Synod on Synodality

Introduction

"Synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working."

(<https://www.synod.va/en/what-is-the-synod-21-23/about.html>)

The basic question that prompted and guided this first stage of the Synod on Synodality in the dioceses of the Holy Land is: *"How does this journeying together allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?"*(<https://www.synod.va/en/what-is-the-synod-21-23/about.html>)

This report, drawn up by the members of the Preparatory Committee for the Synod in the Holy Land, is based upon the following sources:

1. Reports from the dioceses and vicariates in the Holy Land, submitted to the Committee:

For the Latins:

- Latin Vicariate in Cyprus
- Latin Vicariate in Israel
- Latin Vicariate in Jerusalem and Palestine
- Latin Vicariate in Jordan
- Latin Vicariate for Hebrew -Speaking Catholics
- Latin Vicariate for Migrants

For the Greek Catholics

- Patriarchate of Jerusalem
- Archeparchy of Galilee
- Archeparchy of Jordan

For the Maronites

- Archdiocese of Cyprus
- Archdiocese of Haifa

For the Syrian Catholics

- Exarchate of Jerusalem

Men and Women Religious

Ecclesial Movements

2. Questionnaires circulated among the Catholic faithful (in Cyprus, Israel, Palestine and Jordan), in the Latin, Greek Catholic and Maronite communities and among men and women religious.

3. Media input:

- "Faces and Words" (<https://en.synodholyland.com/faces-and-words>)
- Synod Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/synod.holyland>)
- Radio Mariam interviews on the Synod

This stage of the Synod adopted as its central image the two disciples on the way to Emmaus who encountered the Risen Lord. The image chosen, used in Rome for an earlier occasion, boldly showed the two disciples as a man and as a woman. This image had been produced by the renown Jerusalem Benedictine Sister Marie-Paul. It also underlined the necessity to listen to all

the faithful men and women. The text of the Gospel of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) was a constant reminder of the process that the Church was undertaking.

The Synod was launched in the region at a series of masses on October 30, 2021:

- Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Pierbattista Pizzaballa, concelebrated with the Catholic bishops in Israel and Palestine at the shrine of Our Lady of Palestine in Deir Rafat;
- Rev. Jamal Khader, Latin Patriarchal Vicar, celebrated with the other Catholic ordinaries, at Saint Mary of Nazareth Church in Sweifieh, Amman;
- Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Adolfo Yllana, concelebrated with the Catholic ordinaries at Our Lady of Graces Maronite Church in Nicosia, Cyprus.



The central Preparatory Committee was established during the last two weeks of October by Rev. David Neuhaus SJ, appointed Synod coordinator by the members of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries. Members represented the regions of Israel and Palestine as well as the different rites (Latin, Greek, Maronite and Syriac), clergy, religious and lay people, men and women. Parallel committees were established in Cyprus and Jordan. The central committee proposed a series of documents in order to stimulate parishes, religious communities, movements and institutions to engage in the synodal process. These documents are:

1. Proposed letter for parish priests
2. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission from Jerusalem
3. From Pope Francis's opening address (9.10.2021)
4. From the letter of H.B. Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa (15.10.2021)
5. The road to Emmaus – the image
6. Proposal for the faithful
7. First activity of the synodal process
8. Letter for religious and movements
9. Getting to Emmaus
10. Art project
11. Second activity of the synodal process
12. Patriarch on the questionnaire
13. Synod and ecumenism

- 14. Third activity of the synodal process
- 15. Synod and justice and peace
- 16. A synodal day in Emmaus

Report on the outcome of the synodal process

Companions on the journey

The various reports underline the great diversity of the Church in the Holy Land: four countries (Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Cyprus), six Catholic rites (Latin, Greek, Maronite, Syrian, Armenian and Chaldean), diverse ethnic and linguistic communities (Arabic speakers, Hebrew speakers, migrants and asylum seekers from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, etc), diverse Church vocations (laity, clergy, men and women religious, consecrated and members of ecclesial movements).

This diversity is both a rich treasure and a challenge to Church unity. One important proposal has been to discover those parts of the Church that are as yet unknown and how each part of the Church lives its life and proclaims the Gospel. This is not easy in lands which are separate national and political entities, in which walls (physical and psychological) restrict freedom of movement and national, political and ideological enmities are rooted in the hearts and souls of people, including Christians.

Furthermore, the Holy Land is home to indigenous Christians but also to a vast array of expatriate Christians. Many of our Church hierarchies and religious institutions are administered by expatriates. Tensions between indigenous and expatriate Catholics are part of the reality of the Church.

The Catholic Church in the Holy Land underwent an extensive synodal process in the 1990s (1991-2000). This long synodal journey, which led to the publication of a Pastoral Plan common to all the Catholic rites, is still remembered as a time of energy and grace. However, this dynamic was abruptly brought to an end about ten years after the conclusion of the synod, a fact that still arouses resentment among the most active lay leadership in the Catholic community. This reality provoked a certain suspicion with regard to the present synodal process, based upon the disappointment and loss of trust resulting from the past experience of synodality.

The first stage of the synodal process coincided with the ongoing crisis due to the COVID19 virus. The health, economic and social consequences of the pandemic created numerous difficulties in implementing the synodal process. In fact, the pandemic has disrupted the life of the Church at every level. The synodal process coincides with the urgent need to attract the faithful to come to church again rather than limiting their religious expression to what can be found on the internet (including watching mass on line).

Nonetheless, some positive activity has begun, especially in connection with the beginning of a conversation in the milieus of the committees that were established in the different parts of the dioceses, among the laity and the religious congregations and ecclesial movements. Many reports stressed that this is just the beginning of an essential conversation that must continue.

Listening

The central theme of the Synod, listening, is also the greatest challenge in church communities in the Holy Land in which the model is clearly a hierarchical one, according to which the priest speaks and the others listen. The various reports underline the burning necessity to listen to the laity, particularly women and young people, who feel ignored and excluded. Interestingly, the most engaged in the synodal process were women, who seemed to understand that they not only had the most to gain but also had the most to offer because of their relegation to a prophetic margin where they observe what is going on in the life of the Church.

Many posed questions about the selection of candidates for the clergy and their subsequent formation. To what extent does the seminary curriculum focus on training candidates for the priesthood and religious life to listen and to welcome the faithful into full participation in the life of the Church. Some suggested that an initial stage of the synodal journey should have focused on the clergy, assisting them to acquire strategies of listening. Many priests ignored or even resisted participation in the synodal process, unsure of what was expected or what might be opened up by the process and they seemed unwilling to endanger a status quo that guarantees a certain calm in parish life.

The reports and especially the questionnaires, pointed to the need for places of spiritual nourishment, peace and a sense of community. Many feel that the parishes provide the sacraments as a formal obligation but that the clergy are not consecrating enough energy to pastoral care, to home visits and to catechism both of children, youth and of adults, who want to know more about their identity as Catholics and their mission in the world.

One challenge of the synodal process was to reach the many people, especially young professionals, who have left the churches and to try and find out why. Most of the reports admitted failure in this regard. It is not clear how to engage with those who no longer see the Church as a relevant address in their lives. There is a widespread admission that the absence of these people in parish life is an extremely serious weakness that endangers the functioning of the Church as a whole.

Whereas there has been progress with regard to integrating the migrants (labor migrants and asylum seekers) into the life of the Church much remains to be done in listening to their voices, particularly as they constitute a very important segment of the Catholic Church's faithful (in Cyprus the vast majority and in both Israel and Jordan a very large percentage of the faithful).

Speaking out

The synodal process attempted to facilitate free expression about the Church. Questionnaires which were distributed allowed the faithful to express their opinions freely. Unfortunately, these questionnaires were mostly distributed through the social media rather than constituting a starting point for discussion in parishes, religious communities and other forums. Among the faithful, about one thousand responses were collected and summarized (Latins (in Cyprus, Israel, Palestine and Jordan), Greek Catholics (Galilee), Maronites (Israel) and male and female religious).

A journalist interviewed a wide array of lay people from various rites, diverse walks of life, all ages and very different milieus. These twenty-four interviews, constituting an internet page entitled "*Faces and Words*", are a precious resource for understanding what the Church is for the lay faithful and what their dream for the Church is. Another synodal initiative, undertaken by a woman religious, interviewed bishops, priests, men and women religious and laity with regard to the Church they belonged to and dreamed of. These interviews, more than thirty in number, are another important resource that allowed the faithful to speak out and have their voices heard.

Women in the dioceses of the Holy Land made their voices heard and testified that they are not listened to enough. In a Church in which almost all decision makers are men, there are few forums in which women can make their voices heard. However, women constitute the backbone of the church communities, predominant by their presence and they being among the most active Church agents.

Young people also called for more dialogue with them so that their desires and dreams can be taken into account. Many hold that the youth should be a priority for the Church as they are "*the present and the future*". In their opinion, the youth are not sufficiently present and implicated in the life of the Church. The youth movements, particularly "Jesus's Homeland" in Palestine played an active part in the synodal process and organized special events in which young people were able to express themselves with regard to their dreams and desires.

The central committee tried to mobilize school children as well. The proposition to have an art project, in which children could express themselves on the Church and its future and their dream for it was taken up by the Latin schools in Palestine.

Celebration

The Sunday Eucharistic celebration is the center of life of the Church. However, a vast majority of Christian faithful does not attend the weekly liturgy, many claiming that the commitments and pressures of daily life and making a living prevent their attendance. It is true that in some parts of the diocese Sunday is a regular working day (particularly in Israel). The percentage of mass attendance in some parts of the dioceses approaches the very low rates that characterize Western Europe (particularly in the cities in Israel). There is very little outreach on the part of the clergy in order to encourage mass attendance.

Many of the faithful complain about the formalism of the celebration of the sacraments as well as about the homilies at mass. Homilies are too often not well prepared, have little to do with the concerns of the faithful, failing to actualize the Sunday readings in the life of the people. Furthermore, the lack of representativity in the celebration (men and women, young and old) alienates some.

Sharing responsibility in our common mission

Many feel that there is too little sharing in the mission of the Church. This weakness is due to a number of factors according to the reports however the most common issue cited is a certain weakness on the part of the priests. Clericalism is definitely a dominant feature in the life of the Church. Many have commented that the priests do not always seem capable of listening and responding to the faithful. Some argue that too many priests are unwilling to collaborate, are

unresponsive to demands or criticism, mediocre in their intellectual abilities and yet sure that they know everything, lacking in spiritual depth and moralizing. Some priests are seen as lacking in empathy and seem unapproachable. Many of the questionnaires lament a lack of pastoral care for families, young people and point to the rarity of visits to the home, even for blessing homes during the times traditional for such activity. An additional problem is that the parish undergoes major upheaval every time a new parish priest is named as there seems to be little or no continuity from one priest to the next. It is almost as if the parish needs to be re-founded each time a new priest arrives.

Some ask whether there is a policy in place when it comes to accepting young men applying to the seminary? What criteria are in place to make sure that only candidates who have the prerequisite human capacities and skills are put forward for ordination to the priesthood. To what extent does seminary training prevent the development of clericalism, rooting out tendencies to nurture attitudes that are unhelpful in pastoral life and curbing ambition, materialism and favoritism. The choice of good candidates from the priesthood, mendetached from desire for material possessions and power, humble and accessible, is an essential element in the success of the work of the Church. Candidates for priesthood need to see their desire to be a priest as a mission and not as a job. One lay person commented, *“The real reason for people staying away from the church is the behavior of the clergy, their material greed and immoral behavior as well as the hostility of the clergy towards each other and the dissensions among them.”* The person added that *“this reality weakens the faith of the people”* and thus *“the clergy play a negative role model.”*

Scandals relating to the personal lives of priests, cases of abuse (even if few have been reported in the Holy Land but much covered in the media worldwide) and a lack of trust because of the absence of accountability for finances adds to the negative image that some have of the clergy.

Some of the faithful are also very critical about the Church's fostering of dependence, financial and other, creating an unhealthy situation of patron/client relationship in the Church. This is unhelpful when it comes to both listening and speaking out. Although the faithful demand housing, jobs, preferential treatment and financial aid, some comment that this should not be the role of priests and religious.

The issue of collaboration is raised not only with regard to individual priests but also with regard to Catholic communities (parishes, movements), institutions (schools, hospitals, homes) and jurisdictions (Latins, Greek Catholics, Maronites). Instead of collaboration, there is a spirit of competitiveness that sometimes seems to pervade, weakening the witness of the Church. One particular manifestation of this is the conflictual relations that sometimes exist between the parish priest and the women religious that work in the parish. Sharing responsibility for the common mission necessitates modalities of relationship that facilitate communication and complementarity.

Sharing responsibility would necessitate the strengthening of all structures of communion, parish councils, regional councils, pastoral councils, which can promote communication and unleash new forces of creativity in the life of the Church. This is also true of collaboration at the highest level of Church leadership: among the bishops and vicars.

Dialogue in Church and Society

Catholics in the Holy Land live with a heightened sense of being overwhelmingly in the minority (with regard to Muslims in Jordan and Palestine, with regard to Jews in Israel and with regard to Greek Orthodox in Cyprus). This mentality often conditions engagement in society and even impedes it completely in some cases. Some speak of a ghetto mentality and a minority complex. Church leadership rarely formulates the mission of the Church in clear enough terms, especially with regard to the role the Church and Catholics can and should play in society. The Church sometimes seems to exist for itself, often only seeking to survive. Divergences of vision and even conflict are sometimes evident within the Church with regard to where the Church situates itself in society. To what extent should the Church be engaged in social, political and economic affairs. There is all too little open discussion of these issues.

Some of the faithful express an expectation that the Church would speak out more prophetically when it comes to what is happening in the world. Among these, many remember with nostalgia the courage of leaders like Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah.

However, at the same time the overwhelming role of Catholic institutions within society is impressive. This is especially true in Palestine, where government institutional structure is weak and fragile. Throughout the region, Catholic schools, hospitals, homes for the elderly and the disabled, orphanages, social welfare organisms and other non-governmental organizations are active, efficient and offer high standards of service to the general population. These institutions are to a large extent the face of the Catholic Church within society. Unfortunately, these institutions do not collaborate enough and do not present a coherent and well-formulated Catholic partner for a fruitful dialogue with society at large.

When it comes to the burning questions of justice and peace, particularly in the context of Israel and Palestine, the bishops and clergy seldom encourage discussion or give expression to a particular Christian witness in the face of the conflict. The active Commission for Justice and Peace, which regularly makes its voice heard, receives little support from the bishops and priests and their statements resonate more in the secular and international forums than they do in the parishes and Church institutions.

Ecumenism

Many lay Catholics live deeply embedded in the diversity of Christian communities, one extended family often including members of various communions so that faithful are familiar with an array of liturgies, celebrate feasts according to the divergent calendars and mark rites of passage in different traditions.

However, Church leadership remains divided and conflictual despite the instruments of inter-church dialogue that bring Church leaders together with some regularity. Many of the faithful complain that there is not much fraternal contact even among the various Churches of the different Catholic rites. The situation is even more dire when it comes to the non-Catholic Churches.

The synod initiative that reached out to other Churches passed largely unnoticed and there was no significant conversation on the synod process with the other Churches in the Holy Land. One exception to this was the initiatives promoted by the Sabeel Center, an ecumenical Christian organization promoting liberation theology in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The synod was promoted at an ecumenical retreat and at an ecumenical Christian celebration.

Many lay believers see Christian disunity as a scandal. They cite how Christians seem to appear in the eyes of Muslims and Jews, divided in their practice and faith. In particular, the subject of the differing calendars, leading to the celebration of major feasts at different times is the source of much discontent. The unification of the feasts is supported by many among the lay faithful.

Authority and participation

There is still much to be done to transform an overly hierarchical Church into a body that fully relies on team work and co-responsibility. Parish and pastoral councils where they exist are still weak and their activities sporadic. The model of leadership at the local, regional and diocesan levels is seen to be overwhelmingly authoritarian and non-consultative.

The almost total absence of mechanisms to involve the faithful in consultation and decision making is a consequence of the absence of instances of shared authority. Many lay people seek formation in order to understand the Church and share in its life. Such formation sessions are sorely lacking and there is a real need to develop courses that can mobilize the laity and conscientize them about their role in the life of the Church.

Secularism is a powerful force throughout the diocese. Many of the laity are well educated and able to discern and judge the functioning of the Church at the local and diocesan levels. Many of the brightest, the most educated and the most motivated have withdrawn from the Church because of the lack of opportunities for their participation and contribution. The pandemic strengthened the existing tendency to withdraw from the real life of the local parish as many supposed alternatives to liturgy, teaching and activity could be found on the social media.

Many have noted the loss of the spirit of Sunday as a Christian day of worship and family (this being true especially in Israel). Others point to levels of affluence among some Christians that mean that they are busy with other pursuits and see little interest in attending church.

One of the central ideas proposed by the synodal process was to reach out to those who no longer come to church, especially younger professionals. However, the priests and engaged laity did little to realize this goal, unsure how to go about it. It would seem that a real abyss exists between those who attend church services and those who do not. Furthermore, some expressed the opinion that those who are absent from the church would not be interested in explaining what might be done to attract them back. They do not trust the Church hierarchy and do not believe anything can change.

Discerning and deciding

The Church of the Holy Land lacks a common up-to-date Pastoral Plan that lays out a vision of how the Church understands its identity and mission. This is also true for each sui juris Church. Forums of discernment and formulating a vision, even in the different sectors like

parishes, schools, hospitals, welfare institutions, etc., are lacking. Many express concerns about how the Church will face the challenges of tomorrow when instances of discernment and decision making are absent.

Many of the faithful understand that the Christians constitute an ever-diminishing percentage within the population, dealing with ongoing political conflict, social unrest, secularization, religious radicalism, etc. There is a real sense of malaise among the faithful that needs to be addressed.

Forming ourselves in synodality

In conclusion, some have welcomed the synodal process because it has provided an occasion to speak out and to listen to others, perhaps moving towards a more active and fuller participation of the people in the life of our Church. Those who are more positive affirm that this is simply the beginning of a conversation that must continue. This walking together in conversation must focus on clarifying the challenges and the needs of the Christians in the Holy Land, so that the necessary planning can be undertaken. The Church must have an updated Pastoral Plan, based upon a study of the needs of the faithful so that the Church can define who it is and what it is called to do in the Holy Land today. This process must engage one and all, committed together to the synodal way.

Some of the engaged faithful are particularly concerned that this synodal process lead to decisions and changes. They express despair at the fact that documents are written and remain without any practical implementation and lead to no change in the status quo. There is a definite expression that the faithful seek the support and formation to be active agents in the Church; a Church that will help them remain in their homeland and promote a better world for them and all.

Preparatory Committee for the Synodal Process in the Holy Land
July 29, 2022

◀◀ A Church that does not stand aloof from life, but immerses itself in today's problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God. ▶▶

-Pope Francis

