

## SYNOD 2021/2023 REPORT FROM PORTUGAL

In response to the innovative call launched by the Holy See, lay people, consecrated persons, deacons, priests and bishops of the Catholic Church in Portugal, and throughout the world, lived months of union, consultation and reflection on the action that they have been carrying out, in an attempt, in a true synodal spirit, to discern what is intended for the Church of the present and the future, making a survey of processes, methods and means that can help us to move from an exaggeratedly focused Church in the authority and action of the clergy for a synodal and missionary Church, in the communion and active participation of all its members.

The expressions of gratitude on the part of those who participated in the synodal process are unanimous. The experience of being able to pray and converse together was consoling and encouraging, listening to one another with open frankness. And the art of leaving the path and destiny of His Church in God's hands was reinvigorated, so that, through the pastors he gave to the People of God, it may lead everyone to Him, who is the only source of Good, Truth and Beauty.

### I – INFORMATION GATHERING PROCESS

The synodal method, started in 2021, called for participation to be manifested mainly through the creation of listening and dialogue groups, in order to provide a better opportunity for the different groups to listen to each other, rather than online platforms, although these allow to amplify participation, particularly of voices that have not been heard in the past.

The collection of information carried out by the Portuguese dioceses was essentially based on group meetings and on-line surveys prepared for this purpose.

The groups met mostly in a face-to-face format. However, due to the constraints caused by the pandemic, some opted for ways of meeting by telematic means. Other information collection tools were also used in order to generate a diversified participation that included all age groups, such as, for example, a box for collecting opinions on the subject, sharing at Sunday Eucharists, distributing the synodal

survey in the boxes community residents' postcards, informal and email conversations and also the placement of survey response collection points in public places.

For the most part, the scope of synodal listening was restricted to the diocesan reality, in part due to a weak dissemination strategy, weakened by the inability to simplify the explanation of the relevance and dynamics of synodal consultation. The communities that had little or no information about the synod, and that were not framed in ecclesial realities, despite being composed of Christians, did not organize themselves spontaneously, with the exception of some groups, as was the case of the consultation of university professors, who involved believers and non-believers in their reflection.

In fact, there was a lack of careful dissemination at the national level, which would facilitate the convening of those who do not attend the ecclesial space and who are not inside the parish dynamics.

The dioceses warned of the difficulties created by a tight schedule, which made it difficult for the dissemination time necessary for the desired mobilization. For this reason, the listening made use of groups that had already traveled some distance within the parish, with the priest emerging as an important figure, not only in the constitution of teams, for knowing his community better, but also in disseminating the process. However, in some dioceses, it was possible to go beyond this network, with the involvement of the so-called peripheries, such as prisons and social housing, having been successful, although the majority had confined themselves to ecclesial structures with work in these areas. Although they also managed to receive some individual reflections, their number was still residual.

The use of Christian-inspired press, namely diocesan newspapers and parish bulletins, as well as the local press, in the form of interviews, opinion articles and news, and social networks were also essential in publicizing the synodal consultation, helping to mitigate any feeling of mistrust associated with this process.

With regard to information and training materials, most dioceses have gathered, prepared and made available on-line documentation on the Synod for the general and specific public, creating new web pages for this purpose, having tried to simplify

the language in order to favor understanding and facilitate reflection, a fundamental decision for the success of listening.

Many dioceses pointed out the fact that the survey questions were prepared in a very complex way, which led to the need to re-elaborate the questions with a language open to believers and non-believers and in a different way depending on the target audience.

Other adversities were raised either in relation to the dioceses in Sede Vacante, which showed difficulty in promoting the synodal process, since the absence of a bishop altered the diocesan and parish dynamisms/rhythms and, consequently, the participation, or in relation to the dynamics of group, especially in listening with availability and sharing opinions, realizing a great difficulty in reaching a consensus on controversial issues. However, the synodal journey was welcomed by the population, representing not only a great opportunity to listen to the peripheries and minorities, but also to promote encounter, dialogue and open sharing between members of the same community, encouraging a joint journey in the Church, in following Jesus.

## II – PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

We were all invited by Pope Francis to participate in the Synod, to give suggestions, to help to see further and more clearly, to study the subjects, to be light for others and for the world. Participating clearly, with love, with respect, with the desire for a renewed Church and with reinforced dynamism, to fulfill the mission that Jesus Christ has entrusted, means having to interpret reality as it presents itself, analyzing it and studying it in its vicissitudes and its weaknesses so that, in the Church, ways can be found to value what must be valued and correct what needs to be corrected.

It is a question of listening to the present reality and the causes that gave rise to it in order to better discern this enriching experience that constitutes the very DNA of a Christian. And, the participation of all, especially those who were or felt challenged by this dynamic, whether those who are in ecclesial bodies and who felt motivated to participate, or those who were directly or indirectly questioned and accepted the

challenge, without fear or complexes, it is clear that everyone wants a renewed Church, more friendly to the needy, holier and more evangelical, which encourages the involvement of all. From this point of view, the involvement and receptivity of the participants at this moment in the local Church can be considered satisfactory, with the majority of opinions characterizing synodal listening as an indispensable reality in the Church, reinforcing the will to walk together on a regular basis. and systematic, through the creation of formal and informal groups of dialogue within the Church and the Church with the world, especially with the peripheries.

Despite the indifference declared by some lay people, duly signaled, the synodal journey was welcomed with enthusiasm and expectation by others, representing a great opportunity to reach and listen to the peripheries and deepen the communion between the members of the same community, promoting the encounter, the dialogue and sharing.

A greater indifference was felt in the young population, who showed little confidence with the result of the synodal process, believing that changes will not be implemented in the Church, at the pace and visibility they yearn for. In addition, in some cases, the weak adherence to the challenge of synodality was interpreted as an attitude of resistance, especially on the part of the clergy, or of alienation from the universal dimension embraced by the Church.

In a generalized way, there is a desire for a synchronous walk, in harmony with the members, a will fueled by the awareness born in a pandemic context, that we are crew of the same boat, having underlined the importance of the Word and Listening , as a starting point on the synodal path.

The different diocesan communities believe that participation, co-responsibility and synodality are not yet effectively practiced in the Church, which has consequences for the way in which the Church is lived and perceived, a vision mirrored in the following statements: - a Church that is spiritually and humanly not very inclusive and welcoming, discriminating against those who are not integrated or do not live according to Christian morality, that is, divorced, remarried and people with different sexual orientations, identities and gender expressions (LGBTQ+ group), which puts people with disabilities in the background, the poorest, the marginalized and,

consequently, unprotected, favoring welfare attitudes in situations of poverty and institutionalization in the most vulnerable groups;

- a Church that has difficulty making way with young people, neglecting the importance of providing them with a space where they can show their individual talents and will in the Church, and of putting their abilities at the service of the community. In this regard, young people mention that the main reason that separates them from the Church and prevents them from walking together is based on the difference between their way of thinking and the doctrine of the Catholic Church, referring that the Church has a retrograde and maladjusted mentality of the times we live in. As a result, young people move away and the Church inevitably becomes older, a process that makes the gap between generations widen;

- a Church with an attitude that is too hierarchical, clerical, corporate, not very transparent, stagnant and resistant to change, which prioritizes the maintenance of its image instead of preserving the safety of its community, with cases of pedophilia emerging as the most obvious example;

- a Church that has a somewhat haughty attitude and that shows little willingness to listen, marginalizing the desires and expectations of the members of its community, all too often attributing to them the role of passive recipients;

- a Church in social decline in terms of its reputation and relevance, which has not been able to use the transforming force of the Gospel as an opportunity for social conversion, valuing a humanist culture capable of counterpointing globalism, which ties the poor and sediments inequalities and localism that generates xenophobia and promotes populism;

- a Church that is not very willing to discuss in an open and uncomplicated way the possibility of making the celibacy of priests and the ordination of married men and women optional, and still very attached to a theoretical and doctrinal model based on a traditional and asymmetrical conception that conceives the human from the masculine;

- a Church in which there is ambiguity in relation to certain movements and groups, recognizing, on the one hand, the existence of a positive spiritual experience and, on the other hand, a work lacking in dynamics of communion and without dialogue with the world through the various environments inhabited by Christians;

- a Church that does not consider women equal with men in the mission, both being baptized and, therefore, disciples, and which is little open to updating rituals and liturgical language, very closed and codified, which make celebrations heavy and too formal;

- a Church where the decision-making and leadership selection processes are not very transparent and inclusive, restricting the Church to the body composed of the priest and the laity who play a role in parish groups/ecclesial movements, generally regarded as an overly elitist body, who occupies positions almost for life and is incapable of delegating in a divided and rotating way the various functions, preventing a more democratized and consistent experience with society. The resistance to giving space and the estrangement of the baptized community from the responsibility of exercising authority and participating in the identification of objectives to continue in this journey together still compromise any attempt and exercise of renewal, preventing the Church from accompanying some social changes and being able to welcome new people. that they approach and integrate in the communities;

- a Church that does not promote acceptable levels of formation for the various pastoral workers, especially priests, who have a deficient formation both in dealing with the human problems of contemporary life and in working with lay people, who require teamwork , co-responsible and sharing authority, with accompaniment emerging as a complementary dynamic and guarantee of the fruitfulness of training. On the other hand, ordained ministers do not have adequate training to respond to emerging issues, such as those resulting from gender diversity, which makes it difficult to truly welcome people with different sexual orientations and who should deserve pastoral attention. It is recognized that individual initiative is essential to achieve a joint path, but the importance of paying attention to people's lives is underlined, promoting the community's openness to the participation of all and not just of a group, so that everyone can respond in the same way. Similarly;

- a Church that still cannot train its priests through the path of beauty and culture, making them men of their world and of their time, with a human, spiritual and social dimension, which enables them to understand and interact with the society in a credible, mature and relevant way;

- a Church that does not yet assume the causes of integral ecology and the defense of the Common Home as an imperative;

- a Church that seeks to inhabit the digital planet, but which cannot counteract the logo technical devices that devalue face-to-face presence, pushing adults and young people into enormous social solitude, without them being truly aware of it;

- a Church that does not adapt to the rhythms and demands of today's family, in its wide variety, from issues related to the experience of conjugal sexuality to the new rhythms of families, especially those with children. The question of contraception presents itself as a contrasting element between tradition versus normality brought about by secularization, a position that, in the eyes of young people, appears to be out of date with reality. Hence, a Church that is not very attentive to the rhythms and challenges of society, even from a functional point of view, revealing inappropriate opening hours, overlapping and uninviting to true participation. Closed temples, overlapping Mass schedules and simultaneous activities within the same community stand out, preventing everyone from participating even when it is desired;

- a Church that has in its main pastoral expression – catechesis – vices and disagreements that make evangelization unfeasible, with the dissociation between what is taught and what is practiced being notorious: parents, students and even catechists, who then do not live their faith in a community way and do not experience the true encounter with God, leaving the moment of catechesis as an extension of the school, where religious content is learned but the true encounter with Jesus is not promoted;

- a Church that cannot find harmony in the definition and fulfillment of requirements for access to the sacraments, thus causing disparities within the same diocese, which feed the conviction of the lack of communion between priests, conducive to reading that there are two worlds: one where everything is possible and another where everything is forbidden, with the prohibition superimposing itself as an overvalued negative factor in the general perception of the Church. It is also important to underline the Church's difficulty in taking advantage of moments of social celebration, such as weddings, baptisms and funerals, as true moments of evangelization;

- a Church that communicates poorly in and out, reacting rather than proposing, more informative than communicative. And, therefore, the perception of the Church's communication is divergent: some consider it successful from an informative point of view, but with little scope, in addition to being too reactive, not suggesting a different agenda, according to the criteria and the language of the Gospel;

- a Church where ecumenism and dialogue with other sectors of society continue to be insufficient, revealing in some cases an enormous ignorance regarding other religions, and even Christian confessions, and where there is no audacity in building bridges between believers and non-believers;

- a Church that is struggling with financial problems, which, although little appreciated by the overwhelming majority of dioceses, worries some leaders, who see the need to guarantee greater sustainability of the Church, even so that it can fulfill its social mission and assume the demands of justice that its social doctrine advocates. This aspect was placed at the functional level, namely with regard to Private Social Solidarity Institutions, with particular emphasis on Social and Parish Centers which, unfortunately, continue to be presided over by priests, when they should be presided over by competent lay people hired on a full-time basis. , motivated to encourage partnerships between various institutions;

- a Church that excessively concentrates on the priest's various functions, which prevent him from taking care of his pastoral mission, in the dimension that the community requires. Despite these negative aspects, in fact, the Church is globally regarded as a credible institution, present in places where no one dares to go and in solidarity with the most disadvantaged, to whom it provides assistance, even when all other social responses fail. In general, the Catholic Church's ability to welcome is highlighted, especially in the support of poverty, capable of providing a space for the experience of faith, which is conducive and facilitator of prayer, revealing itself as urgent for the Church to materialize. the paths pointed out by the Second Vatican Council and return to the essence and joy of the Gospel, counting on the Holy Spirit for this mission so beautiful and so responsible. What is at stake is not a process of mass conversion, but the conversion of every heart for a better future; a more Holy and Missionary Church, to live more at the rhythm of the Gospel, more humble servant, imitating Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the Good Samaritan. For everyone, the main fruit of the synodal process is the extension of the synod until it is



established as a way of life in the Church. Attitudes of listening, welcoming, dialogue and walking together are an acquisition for the Church that everyone greatly desires.

### III – VISION OF THE CURRENT CHURCH AND PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

For many of the participants in the synodal journey, the Church is considered a safe haven, widely recognized as a space for communion and encounter, protagonist in the promotion of Christian and human values, making itself present in responding to the human and spiritual needs of communities.

The social-charitable nature is one of the dimensions that gives the Church a positive vision in the eyes of society, as it appears at the forefront in the defense of the poorest and in the promotion of a dignified and quality life, reaching places that other sectors of society cannot, a mission usually carried out without the desire to play a leading role in the media.

It highlights the relevant role in the areas of education, health and support for the elderly, and its humanizing presence in the most difficult moments in an individual's life, accompanying him in mourning and pain management. It was also recognized that, by accepting and correcting the mistakes of the past, as in the case of abuse of minors, the Church continues to be a positive reference within society.

The celebration of the sacraments with dignity is also a trait cherished by the participants, as is the teaching of Pope Francis, which is received with joy and hope within the communities. But given the challenge launched by the Holy See, which asks us to make a profound assessment of the Church and proposals for change, we cannot fail to notice that the current vision of the Church is, therefore, marked by a mostly unfavorable image, as was expressed in the point earlier, giving rise to several areas where conversion is urgently called for.

We call for an open-door Church that embraces diversity and welcomes everyone, excluding discriminatory attitudes that leave the LGBTQIA+ community and divorced and remarried on the sidelines; a Church that rethinks the participation of all the baptized, regardless of their affective-sexual life, which is often lived as a taboo; a

Church that provides open spaces for sharing, dialogue and reflection, without excluding any topic, that promotes an intergenerational dialogue between movements and parishes, based on projects of synodal methodology in permanent process and not merely the organization of ad hoc events for this or that group; a Church that gives voice to minorities and establishes a dialogue with the peripheries, above all, those closest to us, denouncing poverty and supporting the poor, valuing what is essential for a dignified life and paying greater attention to the planet's resources which, as we know, are finite.

The urgency of a more transparent and rigorous Church in its forms of decision and management was highlighted, less hostage to the logic of "hierarchies" and "power" and that involves the community in these processes, so that everyone responds to their vocation baptism and take a more active role, even in the choice of bishops and the transfer of parish priests.

A Church that is a family, willing to walk together, both at the parish level and as a universal Church: there is therefore a need for greater and better integration between parish groups/movements and the life of the parish itself, so that everyone feels an integral part of a living Church and where they can dispose of and surrender the gifts received.

What is needed is a more transparent Church, capable of giving a coherent and truthful witness in the midst of the world, in the fight against sexual abuse, but also in terms of financial resources.

It is requested that there be greater rotation of priests in the service of the communities and in the assumption of responsibilities, thus avoiding the occupation of the same functions for a prolonged period of time. In this sense, it is important to free parish priests from bureaucratic work and from the administration of institutions and services, strengthening diocesan structures and proposing the involvement of lay people capable of replacing them in these functions, so that their main focus is their pastoral mission and the meeting close with your community. It is also important that there is greater demand and continuity in formation in various dimensions, both for priests and lay people.

A theological, biblical, human formation for the exercise of liturgical, sacramental and priestly ministries, and for dialogue with society and culture. A continuous formation

of readers, singers and acolytes, in order to maintain the beauty and dignity of the Eucharistic celebration. In this training aspect, it is essential to restructure the training path of the seminaries, which shows gaps in the human, spiritual, affective and cultural dimension, and must fit the challenges and demands of our time.

The importance of renewing the way of communicating is highlighted, promoting a more careful, open and adapted language to the realities, capable of clarifying the contents of the faith, and that makes regular use of digital communication and social networks for better evangelization, dissemination and proximity.

A language that abandons certain formalisms and dichotomies exclusive to baptized/non-baptized, believers/non-believers, etc., so that everyone feels part of the same community.

There is a need for a review of the way in which they are celebrated and for a rediscovery of the meaning of the sacraments, in order to make people experience the encounter with the living Jesus Christ. In this regard, the importance of creativity is underlined, in order to be able to take the Good News of Christ to new spaces and new audiences.

Regarding the physical space, the need to rethink the arrangement of prayer spaces was highlighted, so that the spirit of communion is more intensely lived by the faithful. It is also important to eliminate architectural barriers and other obstacles that hinder access to worship spaces.

The need to meet young people in the different communities was highlighted, accompanying them in their vocational discernment process, giving them greater voice and protagonism in the promotion of activities and projects in ecclesial decision-making bodies. It is essential that young people feel committed to their Church, but that the Church feels available to motivate them, through, for example, reference figures that help them to be welcomed and integrated.

More than thinking about the place of young people in the life of the Church, it is necessary to understand what place the Church can occupy in the lives of young people and, for that, the Church has to listen and give time to young people.

The importance of the need for reflection on priestly celibacy was also expressed, proposing that it be optional; on valuing the role of women on a level of equality with men, incorporating them into the structures of ecclesial power and on harmonizing

common criteria and rules for pastoral care and sacraments, standardizing the responses of each parish, thus transforming it, in everyone's house, a place where love and mercy are our daily bread. In this regard, the desire for greater inter-congregational communion is also highlighted, promoting greater collegiality between diocesan and religious dynamics, presented by the various charisms of religious institutes and congregations.

This witness of communion is seen as an advantage so that the path is no longer made by each individual and starts to be assumed as a necessity for all, summoned by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the importance of consolidating synodal awareness was highlighted, giving continuity to this dynamic of a joint journey, with programmatic pastoral lines raised by the Portuguese Episcopal Conference for the entire Church in Portugal, a program that was designed based on listening to the dioceses that, in turn, listen to their communities, reflecting and implementing the proposals for change presented, in a perspective of a joint creative journey in listening to the Holy Spirit. The world needs a "Church on the way out", that rejects the division between believers and non-believers, that looks at humanity and offers it more than a doctrine or a strategy, an experience of salvation, a "gift blow" that heed the cry of humanity and nature.

Lisbon, 5 August 2022

Portuguese Episcopal Conference