



Continental phase of Synod on Synodality: Communion, participation and mission

Background document

Some 30 theologians, pastoral workers and bishops gathered from 22 September to 2 October at Frascati near Rome to draft the working document for the continental phase of the Synod. The document is referred to as the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS). It brings together the syntheses submitted by Bishops Conferences, religious orders, Catholic organizations, movements, dicasteries and others.

The Synod Office received 112 submissions from the 114 Bishops Conferences in the world which is unprecedented.

The DCS will be released in Rome on 27 October. It will be the subject of reflection and discernment in the continental gatherings. These gatherings will each produce their own document, which will be used by the Synod Office to draft the working document for the October 2023 Synod Assembly.

Some continents are able to have ecclesial assemblies involving bishops, priests and lay people gathering together. In Oceania this was judged to be too expensive and difficult, so a different process has been developed. To ensure that the response to the DCS is ecclesial and includes substantial clergy, religious and lay input, there will be a reflection and discernment process on the DCS in the dioceses of Oceania. The responses will be synthesized into one synthesis from each of the four Bishops Conferences. A Discernment and Writing Group will convene for a week in January to create one document which will be the continental draft for consideration by the Federation of Bishops Conferences of Oceania at its Assembly in February. The final version approved by the Assembly is to be submitted to the Synod Office in Rome by 31 March 2023.

Aotearoa New Zealand reflection and discernment on the Document for the Continental Stage

The reflection and discernment process needed for the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) is more limited than that carried out for the diocesan stage, but it needs to include groups such as religious orders which had their own processes in the previous stage. Only groups are being invited to take part, and there will be no individual responses.

The timeframe is relatively short, end of October to the first week of December.

The process is limited to representative groups, with some attention to be given to involving those groups whose voices were not heard strongly in the diocesan phase. The Oceania participant in the Frascati meeting noted that these groups whose voices were not heard strongly in the first stage include:

- Marginalised groups/those who work with them
- Migrants
- Priests – they were under-represented globally
- LBGTQ+ groups
- Bishops – they are part of the People of God – their voices were not heard clearly at the diocesan stage



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Young people also need to be included in the New Zealand response to the DCS, as in most dioceses the age groups who participated were older.

To cope with the short timeframe, groups are being asked to incorporate their reflection on the DCS, if possible, into their normal meeting schedule, or to convene a group for the purpose in person or by zoom. They are being asked to use the Spiritual Conversation process or another discernment process, rather than simply discussing the document. Many people will be familiar with the Spiritual Conversation process from the earlier stage.

Groups being invited to participate include:

Diocesan bodies eg Diocesan Pastoral Council, Council of Priests, Diocesan Administration Board/Finance Council, Māori advisory body (or other Māori group), diocesan synod team, youth bodies, commissions (especially justice and peace), Catholic Social Services staff, LBGTQ+ group (even if only 2-3 people), any organized diocesan group working with those who are disadvantaged.

National bodies eg Te Rūnanga o te Hāhi Katorika, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, other NZCBC agencies, Te Kupenga, NZCEO, Holy Cross Seminary staff, prison and hospital, national Catholic youth body

Religious congregations: Leadership teams of congregations in active ministry in New Zealand, who are located in New Zealand; CLCANZ

Movements and some national Catholic organisations

Dioceses will involve their own diocesan groups, receive their responses, and discern the key themes for their diocese. The NZCBC office will involve the national bodies, religious congregations and movements, receive their responses and discern the key themes. The diocesan and national responses will then be integrated and form the framework for the drafting of the New Zealand response to the Document for the Continental Stage, which needs to be ready and approved by the NZCBC by 22 December.

The deadline for responses from national bodies, religious congregations, and movements to reach the NZCBC office is Monday 5 December. Responses should be in the form of 3-5 points, with a limit of 500 words in total.