

Listening to the submission made by those responding to the Continental Phase document some concerns regarding the synod process arose |

- The initial local phase of the Synod sought to engage with as wide a group of people as possible listening to their hopes and dreams concerning how the Church could walk together into the future. At the Continental phase this openness was limited as the NZCBC invited responses from particular groups rather than the entire Church, and others that might have something to contribute.
- A certain amount of scepticism was expressed particularly by those that had been involved with the Synod on Youth that there would be little follow up to the process. Having contributed to the Synod on Youth the hopes raised concerning the role of young people in the Church and the support of their participation is perceived as been unrealised locally and globally.
- There was also some confusion on the nature of the Continental phase document with a minority concerned that the Synod was attempting to change Church doctrine. One response to this concern was to use the Pacifica *fale as a metaphor for Church. A traditional building built solidly but that has no doors so is open to all. Enlarging the tent as presented by the Synod process is removing those barriers to the open nature of the fale without changing the solid foundation of the Church* [DPC].

Despite these concerns overall the threads that emerged from the diocesan phase of the Synod were reflected in the materials of the Continental phase. To many respondents this was both encouraging and affirming. *We are hopeful for the future of the Church as we saw that many others around the globe shared similar dreams for our universal family* [South Auckland Young Adult Community]. *There was a sense that this working document was very good, and an uplifting synthesis of the previous documents* [COP].

Responses to the Continental phase documentation can be clustered around four interwoven cross threads.

- a. The call to be a Church of radical inclusion.
- b. The desire that the Church continue to be synodal, listening to all.
- c. The yearning for the acceptance that all the baptised are called and capable of full, active, and equal participation in Church.
- d. The thirst for a Church with a priority for mission.

a. The call to be a Church of radical inclusion.

Responders sought a welcoming and inclusive Church. Of particular concern was the welcoming of non-heterosexual and divorced peoples. It was further considered that *being inclusive is to be aware of all who journey together as one Family of God and this means learning to understand the differences between each person, race, culture, religion, and nation* [Tongan community]. The call is to extend our “tent” to let in anyone seeking to enter. The fluid nature of the tent offers security and comfort to all. Respondents felt that the Church needs to listen deeply to a variety of groups and involve them. Some felt that Māori and Pacifica ways of dialogue could be helpful.

Further the *inclusion of the young* was sought by every listening group. *Enlarging our tent should therefore allow us to involve at all levels our young people* [JPC]. Our “young people are looking for authenticity and truth.” Several participants felt that better catechism explaining Church teaching was needed for the young [Young Adults]. It was felt that youth can feel that they are inside the “Tent”

but kind of ignored, they are the “invisible”. Some young who have left the Church do not feel able to return due to fear of being judged or not fitting in.

Generally, the listeners responded that the documents call that *“the Church should be a refuge for the wounded & broken, not an institution for the perfect.”* (39) and the corresponding need to enlarge our tent resonated deeply with their own experience and what they had heard at various times in the synod process. Overall, the desire was expressed that the Church be welcoming and inclusive while remaining authentic to living the Gospel.

b. The desire that the Church continue to be synodal, listening to all.

Many responding groups mentioned that they experienced the spiritual conversation process as a fruitful and life-affirming process where all felt respected and listened to. Although it was also noted that synodality was a word that some found difficult to interpret, so training and development is needed again and again until it is understood.

Respondents also noted that for all to be included and listened to consideration needed to be made as to who is invited into the conversation. *In order to foster synodality in the Church we need to open spaces for Catholic Community to thrive* [Chaplaincy]. Often it is the same people who already hold the power who are invited to the conversations. Particularly it was felt that *those youth communities not ‘seen’, not paid attention to* [Ethnic community leaders] to be invited to the conversations but also those that feel unwelcome.

The absence of women in conversations affecting the life of the Church was a common concern with it being noted that they are still the minority in decision-making and governance roles. It was considered that the Church needed to find ways to enable women to participate more fully at all levels of Church life. It is pertinent to note that unlike in the local phase of the synod there was no request for the consideration of ordination of women (deacon or priest) but rather a strong emphasis on using the gifts and experience of women in discerning and providing advice, guidance and challenge in decision-making that went beyond managerial roles.

c. The yearning for the acceptance that all the baptised are called and capable of full, active and equal participation in Church.

Respondents considered that in light of the material of the Continental phase and their spiritual conversations that the Church needed *to explore solutions to counter systemic issues regarding leadership which currently prohibits the faithful from living their baptismal call to active participation* [CDA staff]. This would see an enhanced role of the laity where priests and laity understood and appreciated each other’s baptism and vocation. For this there is a need of formation of the laity and of priests. Formation in this area is lacking and the desire for this to change was expressed.

All forms of governance need to be renewed based on leadership that is collaborative and relational. Many responding groups wished for a genuine collaborative synodal process. This includes a desire *that Catholic women are valued first and foremost as baptised and equal members of the People of God.* [JPC]. Women in a plurality of roles and ministries, equal in dignity together with new forms of co-responsible leadership could enhance decision-making. Again, for this to happen it was considered that formation in listening and synodal processes is necessary for all.

d. The thirst for a Church with a priority for mission.

From reflecting on the Continental phase material respondent considered that the Church was being prompted to a radical and public living out of its preferential option for the poor. This would be reflected in the Church being living evidence of the loving Christ in all its decisions so that it *becomes outward focused in caring and loving our poor brothers and sisters, including the disabled, marginalized and homeless.* [Catholic Social Services]. It was felt by respondents that too often a preferential option for the poor is spoken of but not practiced.

There was a clear specific call that as a Church we address issues of climate justice. Mistreatment of planet earth disproportionately affects the poor. We cannot ignore Papatuanuku (Mother Earth) any longer. Our universal Church and our local Church has an obligation to change the mistreatment of Earth, it must be spoken about and acted upon by all.

The call was expressed that all be participants in the mission of Christ, to have a heart for the poor, to be there for the suffering and marginalised. Here too it was felt that there was a lack of formation for clergy and laity.

The need for **formation** of priests and laity was a cross-thread raised throughout the responses *it was felt that the current model of priestly formation was inadequate in many ways, including training to exercise ministry according to the synodal process.* [COP].

The **timeframe** for responding to the materials of the Continental phase of the Synod was relatively short. People generously gathered to prayerfully discern what they were hearing from the universal Church and what that meant for us walking together with a synodal heart. For this to happen there are many challenges to be faced locally and universally it is hoped that the Church is able to *act with speed, don't move too slowly* [DAC].