

Austrian synthesis report

1.

REFLECTION ON THE SYNODAL EXPERIENCE

"A church that is holding synods is not yet a synodal church. We can call ourselves such if the daily life of the Church at all levels [...] is characterized by a synodal style." This statement sums up a central insight of the Synodal Process in the Austrian Church: the imminent task of a cultural change towards a synodal culture that shapes and permeates the life of ecclesial communion at all levels. This cultural change can be based on structures, methods, and experiences of everyday synodality that is already being lived (to some extent), but that in many areas is still a desire.¹

Synodality, however, is not an end in itself. Rather, it is important to "break up rigid structures" in the orientation towards the "indispensable mission of Jesus" and to promote "growth and liveliness of the Church in the service of individuals and of humanity as a whole".

1.1 Milestones

The following aspects are named as "milestones" for the success of synodal consultation:

- *Time*: Allows careful preparation and structured approach – stress is counterproductive.
- *Overview*: Enables the synopsis of the work results of different committees.
- *Reliability*: Transparent and binding communication and decision-making structures guarantee traceability, ensure participation, and convey appreciation.
- *Rights*: Different levels of participation and the degree of commitment are known to the participants before the consultation.
- *Diversity*: Synodality thrives on differences and participation, so that fair participation must be ensured with regard to questions of power relations, age, gender, marginalization, etc.

In addition, numerous syntheses fundamentally point out the importance of trust and commitment to journey together – across all differences.

1.2 Turning points

Numerous syntheses mention a turning point in the Synodal Process, especially where the initial situation was characterized by disappointment, skepticism, frustration or even resignation: the turn from suspicious distance to active participation. The fact that it was possible to get so many people on board is due to the perceived authentic interest of those inviting the contributions of the participants to the process. The professionalism with which meetings were prepared and organized was also experienced as a sign of appreciation. On the other hand, getting involved was made more difficult by scarce time resources and the fatigue that had set in due to previous processes that were experienced as less fruitful.

¹ The present synthesis repeatedly cites the underlying individual syntheses in order to make their "style" and "spirit" audible and comprehensible. However, it deliberately refrains from naming the underlying texts, since it is less about the assignment to a specific synthesis than it is about the content brought to the point in the quotation (and usually addressed in several syntheses). The results of the pre-synodal deliberations are based on minutes of meetings. A direct citation was therefore not possible.

1.3 Spiritual Dimension

The new approach to communication, the effort to practice a culture of active listening interspersed with elements of pause and silence, proves to be a central and forward-looking element of the Synodal Process – far beyond the internal structures of the Church. In the pre-synodal consultation, too, there was a broad consensus that this path should be continued and reflected upon.

One synthesis formulates the underlying basic spiritual attitude based on the actualization of the works of mercy according to Bishop Wanke: "I listen to you. I'll walk a bit with you. You belong. I pray for you. I share with you. I visit you. I speak well of you." This expresses an appreciative, purposeless interest in people that is understandable and attractive also to secular people.

This basic spiritual attitude finds concrete expression in the "spiritual conversation", which is the heart of synodality and encompasses both method and content. It assumes that without exception every human being is a "little word of God" through which God works in this world and that "gratitude, longing, listening, feeling inner movements [...] can open us to the Spirit of God": "We can become co-workers with God by discerning, deciding and acting in this way."

1.3.1 Difficulties

However, a reflection of the partial syntheses also shows that neither were all dioceses successful in working in this attitude nor was it possible to work in this attitude all the time. Some lament the "self-assurance with which the work of the Spirit is denied to others". Others report that those involved were primarily interested pushing their own opinions, but not in entering into a genuine dialogue. In addition, others describe their perception that only "a few [...] have got involved in this difficult undertaking", or that synodality "encounters obstacles when the necessary trust is lacking". It also happened that there were problems with the implementation of the synodal process or that persons or church institutions involved were not satisfied or frustrated with the process and the results of the consultations.

In some places, there was also criticism of the process itself, especially where the organization of the meetings – not least due to the corona pandemic – proved difficult and the interest of those addressed was low. Time and again, reference was made to an existing scepticism about getting involved again in the light of earlier processes that "led nowhere". Difficulties were also encountered in involving special groups (young people, those distant from the church, congregations attended primarily by migrants, ...). Conservative groups were generally perceived as underrepresented. The term "synodality" was also a stumbling block at times because it does not occur in most people's everyday language.

1.3.2 Surprises

Overall, the reflection of the Synodal Experience reveals a variety and wide range of moods that came to light: "of overload, lack of motivation, spirit of optimism, expectation [...] to exhaustion, gratitude, hope and missionary verve."

The consciously practiced "listening" in the form of the spiritual conversation described above with its sequencing of phases of dialogue with phases of silence proves to be a "lasting discovery of the process". Practicing this attitude promises positive developments, especially when mutual listening is followed by the necessary discernment and concrete actions. Whether it is possible to establish such a new, spiritual culture of listening at all levels is therefore of crucial importance for the lasting effectiveness of the Synodal Process.

2.

DISCERNMENT AND THEMATIZATION OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

In the following, various aspects of walking together in the Catholic Church in Austria are highlighted. Priority will be given to those topics that are repeatedly raised in the course of the synodal process in the diocesan consultations and the national pre-synodal assembly.

2.1 Companions

From most of the syntheses it is clear that communion is experienced first and foremost in the parishes, at church services, in gatherings afterwards, in festivals and other activities as well as in various groups. Many experience home, support and meaning there. However, some observe self-contained communities in which, for example, the socially disadvantaged, migrants and families are not given enough attention. Children and young people are increasingly missing from the community. Finally, exclusion was more widely perceived as being personally experienced by those divorced and remarried and members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Some feedback reveals tensions and potential for conflict within the community. This concerns, for example, questions about today's social acceptance of sexual relationships and orientations lived outside the Catholic understanding of marriage, celibacy, or gender equality, but also more fundamental questions regarding ordination, ministry, structure, hierarchy, power, and leadership.

Two groups within the companionship are particularly often emphasized both in the diocesan syntheses and in the national pre-synodal consultation:

On the one hand, there are the *women* who carry the church's voluntary work, but at the same time often do not experience themselves as full members of the community. This perception is based primarily on the exclusion of women from the ordained ministry. In fact, the diocesan syntheses in particular almost universally show: women's ordination (at least in the form of the diaconate) but also an equality of women beyond ordination ministry is urgently desired by many women and men. The unequal treatment of women and men in the Church disappoints and frustrates. Critical voices also note that only a few men can be won over for voluntary work and that too little attention is paid to the role of men beyond Ordination.

The second group concerns *priests*. Consultations in dioceses and at national level have shown that the relationship between priests and the faithful is difficult in many places. On the one hand, there is criticism of a perceived distance between clergy and laity, in some places priests are even experienced as an obstacle to a fruitful community. At the same time, the challenges for priests are named: the shortage of priests and also the increasing loss of volunteers lead to exhaustion; also, priests do not always feel heard, some see their ministry questioned. What makes a good priest? How can parish life be an enriching experience for everyone involved? Why do fewer and fewer men feel a vocation? These questions need to be discussed.

2.2 Listening and speaking up

The newness of the synodal process was particularly evident in the way in which the faithful were increasingly listened to in meetings, assemblies and discussions and given the opportunity to speak freely from their expectations, hopes and disappointments. This is because synodality challenges "to hear different opinions and to allow them to be heard. Even if the Church as a whole is still at the beginning of this mutual listening, the consultation phase together with the pre-synodal assembly offered a first deeper examination of synodality as an attitude."

In some places, the synodal style created the possibility of overcoming various rifts of inner-church discourses. However, a synthesis also warned against "denying the Holy Spirit to those whose opinion or work does not coincide with one's own vision of the Church." Despite all the positive resonance, mention was sometimes made of the discomfort of some of the faithful in speaking freely as lay men and women to priests or bishops. An important observation in numerous contributions was that many groups are not

heard enough. This is especially true of young people, whose issues receive little attention: How can children, adolescents and young adults be reached in their living environments and how can their needs be recognised and be taken seriously?

In addition, the question is often asked how people who are on the margins of the Church and do not get involved could be heard: How can one find ways to those who turned away from the Church? And are women heard in the Church in the same way as men?

Finally, several syntheses and feedbacks from the presynodal consultation express some uncertainty of how to proceed after listening and speaking freely despite the new style: "What can we do? How can we move from listening to action?" Above all, the concern that the synodal process will not produce tangible results becomes palpable here.

2.3 Celebrating

At the heart of the contributions to this topic is the celebration of the Eucharist. On the one hand, it is experienced as a source of empowerment and relationship with God, on the other hand as the foundation of the community of those celebrating. In addition, the desire for long-term offers of online worship services was mentioned in some contributions.

In some feedback, the concern is formulated that synodality should also be reflected liturgically, especially through the increased involvement of lay people in responsibility, design, and performance of the liturgy.

At the same time, criticism is voiced in some places about the (incomprehensible) language and (rigid) design of liturgy and ritual action, while in other contributions there is criticism of the lack of quality of some services. This goes hand in hand with the desire to increase their attractiveness, especially for young people, for example through appealing music, an understandable liturgical language, and informal meetings after the liturgy, such as agape or parish cafés.

The desire for a welcoming culture in an open church is clearly evident in some syntheses. This applies on the one hand to the atmospheric level, on the other hand to the design and use of church premises as a whole.

It is worth mentioning that in some contributions there is a great longing for spiritual exercises and liturgical celebrations, as well as a profound desire for more mysticism and contemplation in order to give more depth to the faith inside and outside liturgical celebrations.

2.4 Shared responsibility for the common mission

In many contributions, mission is associated with credibility, closeness to life and comprehensibility. Above all, Jesus Christ is named as the center of the mission, looking at him and from him to one's fellow human beings. Church guidelines and structures must be examined and further developed in response to the indispensable mission of Jesus. The mission of the Church is "to become an effective sign of God's love for all people" and "she must 'pitch her tent' with the people and be there for the people, offering them closeness, home and relationship and accompanying their lives with the sacraments."

Many contributions speak of such a Church as a Church that reaches out to people, makes God's mercy tangible to all, and takes care of their needs, with a clear option for the poor and disadvantaged. The Church should not only go "for", but "with" the people. And it is about every single person: the Church's mission is connected with a personal closeness to people.

The Church should be a servant, through *diaconia* and *caritas*. Caritas in the form of the Church's social mission takes many forms in its contributions: fighting poverty, commitment for refugees, accompaniment of elderly, sick, needy people, commitment for the homeless, to name just a few fields in which the Church is active on the one hand, and on the other hand, church commitment is expected by the faithful. This commitment must be strengthened, because caritas is to be understood not only as a service, but also as an opportunity to bring the Church to the people. The question "What are the real needs of the people?" is a central building block for church action – and it also builds the bridge to service to people. In addition to

structural adjustments, there is therefore also a need for an upgrading of the diaconate, the service to people – a church for and with the people, with a sense for the realities of life today.

Mission "means awakening, growth and vitality of the Church at the service of individuals and of humanity as a whole." In this context, there is a sense of urgency to take the Christian message out into society again and to position oneself clearly – through missionary action, through better communication of the Holy Scriptures, through the fulfillment of the social mission with a sharpened eye for people in need, through a visible commitment to global solidarity, justice, peace and the integrity of creation, through clear stances on socially and politically controversial topics (migration, bioethics, individualization, digitalization).

As a challenge for the Church's mission, some contributions mention the danger of dealing mainly with full-time and voluntary workers within the church and thereby overlooking those who do not "walk together" with the church.

In numerous syntheses, the increased inclusion of women in the mission is considered indispensable. Even if in some places women are already given an "essential place" in the preaching, one encounters a clear desire for greater appreciation of the already existing commitment and for a further expansion of the possibilities to assume responsibility in the mission of the Church.

An essential point of the mission, which was reaffirmed by participants at the national presynodal consultation, is the return to faith and to Jesus Christ as the center. After all, strengthening one's own faith and spirituality in the Church also leads to more credibility in living one's mission.

2.5 Conducting dialogue

Dialogue is dealt with in the contributions to the Synodal Process in Austria, especially with regard to the interaction between church and (secular) society. This shows a tension between a perceived decreasing relevance of the church and a simultaneous desire for public positioning.

As far as the social relevance of the Church in Austria is concerned, some contributions complain about the growing disinterest not only in the Church, but in the Christian message in general: the "increase of a religiously indifferent secularism, occasionally seconded by a 'new' (...) Atheism (...), which dominates some social media."

In connection with the declining relevance and its possible reasons, several diocesan syntheses point to the crisis of the credibility of the Church. The handling of sexual abuse exemplifies how its own credibility has been undermined. Hoping Scandals would go away, or even covering them up, unwillingness to deal with mistakes extensively and transparently, the perceived discrepancy between "word and deed", for example when it comes to misconduct by clergy, is unacceptable for many believers. In contrast, the framework document "*The Truth will set you free*", which the Austrian Bishops' Conference adopted in 2010 and which contains measures, regulations and guidelines against violence and abuse, is positively highlighted. Courage for honesty, transparency and authenticity are the first steps to restore the damaged credibility.

Another challenge for the Church is the increasing division of society, which has been addressed in several contributions, with the worrying observation that this division continues in the ranks of the Church. Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic is a recent example of a phenomenon that has gained strength in recent years. "The social tendency to deal less and less with opposing opinions also affects the Church and challenges it to promote serious discourse. In this direction also goes the concern that the church should play a mediating role as a bridge builder, especially in the current social situation, where tendencies of division cause many concerns."

Dialogue with society is made more difficult by the fact that church positions are less and less understood. It is feared that the Church will continue to lose its attractiveness and importance if it does not succeed in breaking new ground in the 21st century. This applies in particular to the Church's teaching on questions of sexual morality. However, some voices also warn against the adoption of secular moral concepts and fear

an erosion of the Church's teaching by the Synodal Process, whereby critical reference is made to the Synodal Way in Germany.

In addition to dialogue with society, dialogue within the Church, dealing with different points of view and conflicts, is also experienced as in need of improvement. "An important step in this direction would be for all dialogue partners in the Church to be willing to admit to those who think differently that they, too, are genuinely committed to serving God's cause, truth and love." Unity of the Church does not mean uniformity – the metaphor of a hike whose participants walk at different speeds illustrates this. Many different images of the Church should be allowed to coexist – as long as Jesus Christ is their center and the Gospels are at the center of church action.

2.6 Ecumenism

Although ecumenism is lived in Austria, the interest in the topic was limited in the diocesan contributions. A number of positive experiences with interconfessional and interreligious exchanges are mentioned, as well as friendly cooperation in some areas (commemoration of Corona deaths, joint help for refugees). One contribution expresses the desire to create opportunities for dialogue and encounter in the interconfessional and interreligious spheres, especially for young people.

But there is also criticism of the lived ecumenism as well as reservations in general: One contribution criticizes the lack of convergence in ecclesiology in interdenominational ecumenism. Overall, the question arises as to how ecumenism should and can be deepened and how to deal with set limits. This applies in particular to the question "why a common celebration of the Eucharistic with Christians of other denominations is still not possible."

Also, with regard to interreligious ecumenism and the dialogue with Judaism and Islam, there are not only positive experiences of dialogue and cooperation but also sceptical voices. It is emphasized that the Catholic doctrine should remain visible and be valued in the exchange with other religions.

Two diametrically opposed tendencies seem to confirm ecumenical scepticism: "On the one hand, we can speak of a certain post-confessionality (confessional affiliation hardly plays a role anymore) among many young Christians; on the other hand, sharp denominational divisions can be seen among some other young people."

Contributions from invited representatives of ecumenism in Austria in the context of the presynodal assembly showed that the ideal of synodality unites the denominations and how the Catholic Church can learn from the experiences of the other denominations.

2.7 Authority and participation

Co-design and co-determination and the future of the hierarchical constitution of the Church were central topics in the Synodal Process in Austria.

Involvement – usually called "participation" in the contributions – is considered to be particularly important. Participation should be valued. This applies above all to volunteering, where this is often perceived as inadequate; there is a lack of a "culture of gratitude" or recognition.

The parish is the place where participation is most likely to be realized. This also involves a reassessment of the baptismal vocation: "It is important to broaden the previous understanding of vocation." To this end, charisms and talents are to be promoted to enable people to get involved in the parish: for example, by enabling participation in the parish council, in the organization of church services, in the preparation of festivals and celebrations, in the leadership of groups. Several contributions underline that this small unit of ecclesial coexistence has proven to be successful and is appreciated by the faithful: "The desire for manageable units should be kept in mind in the future development of pastoral concepts."

Critically, it is noted that the parish council allows participation, but includes only limited rights of co-determination. The lack of binding force leads to scenarios where possible decisions or proposals are not implemented due to the authority of the priest: "In this context, the hierarchical distance and the rigid inner-church structures are often critically considered. In some cases, voluntary activities would be rejected or considered interference due to hierarchical circumstances." This leads to frustration and, in some cases, resignation.

Participation is not only a question of structure, but also of culture. For example, it is important to consider how groups that have had participated little so far can be better integrated: e.g., children and young people, migrants and people with disabilities. In many contributions, a better involvement of lay people seems important, even beyond the question of committees: for example, a preaching assignment and permission for for pastoral assistants to baptise or in hospital pastoral care, where due to the shortage of priests often the anointing of the sick cannot be administered.

Several syntheses point to the role of advice given to the bishop by committees. Good advice to the diocesan leadership is generally taken into account in decision-making, but there is a lack of structural obligation to take given advice into account: "Here, the expansion of possibilities and competences could be implemented through canon law (...) so-called rights of appeal, which can be designed as rights of consultation or consent. Establishing these rights is within the competence of the diocesan bishop."

Another aspect is how to deal with authority and hierarchy. In several contributions, the current church structures are assessed as outdated and not compatible with contemporary conceptions of participation. Too little permeability and too little democracy make it difficult for many believers to get involved in the Church. Forms are desired that are more associated with a synodal spirit of the Church. It is therefore important to find a balance between necessary leadership and co-determination: "It should be regularly reviewed whether the goals of the common path and the steps that are being taken in this direction are really still 'common' and are supported by all." This also applies to appointments to offices, in particular the episcopate. Here several contributions emphasize the desire of many believers to create forms of co-determination for the local Churches.

However, there are also voices that understand the hierarchical constitution of the Church as a reflection of the divine order. From this point of view, synodality can only be seen as a supplement, but not as a substitute for the ecclesiastical hierarchical system.

In general, the topic of participation shows that participation is not equal to decisive co-determination. The former usually works well in the parishes; while co-determination depends on the will of the leaders. In higher levels, ordinary believers hardly see any possibility of getting involved: "Basically, the higher the ecclesiastical unity is hierarchically classified, the fewer places of participation are mentioned: diocesan hardly, world church none." Opportunities for co-determination that go beyond non-binding participation are seen as expandable, also with a view to lay people.

This applies above all to the participation of women, which is critically addressed in most of the contributions: "The position of women in the Church was given attention by a large number of participants. The perception of disadvantage to the point of exclusion hurts and affects." It is stated that many women are currently unable to follow the path of the Church, that the voices of women are heard too little or not at all, that the Church does not orient itself to the Holy Scriptures when it comes to the issue of women, and that we can learn from ecumenism.

Even in the existing structures, the representation of women could be improved. The participation of women in (leadership) bodies can be increased, for example, through women's quotas, according to a frequently mentioned proposal. In addition, consideration is given to allowing women to serve in committees, including the Council of Priests and the Bishops' Conference, or to invite them to synods in Rome.

The differentiation between the ordination of women and the participation of women in leadership and management, which has been introduced several times, is remarkable: Whoever advocates the promotion of women in management positions does not automatically support the demand for the ordination of women. At the same time, it becomes clear that many believers in Austria would like to see women ordained, at least in the form of a diaconate – and this position is very well linked to general questions of equality and justice.

2.8 Distinction and decision

Closely related to the topic of participation and authority are the questions of how decisions are made in Austria's church and how the discernment of the spirits can be carried out. Numerous contributions reflect very critically on the way power, leadership and authority are lived out.

Several submissions underline that power is assigned an important role in the current church hierarchy. The general tenor is that power, however, should above all be seen as service to and with others: Then "a model of leadership emerges that balances authority with cooperative-partnership. This is not primarily about the precepts of religious or even ecclesiastical life, but about a way of life and attitude."

The current constitution of the Church allows for leaders to lead both synodally and absolutistically. A concentration of responsibilities on one leader alone is viewed critically: Governance is not an act of an individual alone, but rather a communal task, sometimes across multiple levels of hierarchy. In this sense, decision-making authority is to be shared bindingly. However, there are also voices that emphasize that the sacramentality of ordained ministries, especially that of the bishop, must be taken into account in the question of leadership: leadership is inherent in the episcopate.

Many contributions show that synodal leadership is already practiced in Austria. There is displeasure about the fact that a synodal style of leadership depends on the goodwill of acting persons. "Anxious, insecure or self-centered leaders do not manage to share responsibility or trust the people to whom responsibility has been delegated. They exercise a high degree of control that consumes a lot of energy and resources." Synodal leadership style should be firmly anchored, with clear quality standards regarding participation, openness and trust as well as self-reflection in case of criticism. At the same time, it should be avoided that synodal leadership styles "are misused as a tactic to delay necessary decisions or the discussion of important issues."

Lay people and lay people can also be given leadership responsibility – from the point of view of many believers, an ordained office alone is not enough to implement discernment and decision-making in a high-quality manner. In other words, ordination does not mean that further formation and training are obsolete. It is important that decisions are comprehensible, especially for those who have not (co-)decided: "Transparency is an essential factor for successful synodality – the comprehensibility of decisions, which were made at higher hierarchical levels but affect the local Church, strengthens cohesion."

In the context of decisions, the question of discernment arises. Here, individual contributions certainly show self-criticism: Do we take time to listen to God's Spirit when decisions are made? According to the feedback, this seems to be the case only to a limited extent. At the same time, there is a desire to receive support in this direction: How do we listen to God together? How do we discern the spirits together? How do I know what the Holy Spirit is telling me? How can the discernment of spirits in the local Church be done concretely? Here, the synodal "listening circle", as it was implemented in the course of the Synodal Process in many dioceses and organizations, is praised as a successful method. At the same time, it becomes clear that the spiritual dimension of synodality clearly still needs practice and accompaniment, as well as theological reflection and deepening, until it becomes a lived attitude in parishes, dioceses, and the universal Church.

2.9 Forming oneself in synodality

How is synodality already being lived or how can it be lived? How can synodality be learned? How does synodal action become an inner attitude? The consultations in Austria have shown one thing above all: there is a need for theologically sound formation on synodality, for priests, in the seminaries, for lay people who are committed to full-time and voluntary work, in adult education, in schools. This involves, among other things, the ability to reflect on one's own behavior, the deepening of team and leadership skills, theological reflection as well as in-depth knowledge of how the Church thinks and believes: this underlines the special importance of catechesis, which has also been emphasized in various contributions.

However, synodality does not only mean "the connection with one another, but primarily the connection with the Holy Spirit, which is expressed in the discernment of spirits."

One can learn from religious communities, from other churches, from organizational development.

This is, among other things, a task for personnel development and quality management – whereby the spiritual dimension of synodality is to be understood and preserved as essential and indispensable.

3.

CONCLUSION

There are many questions and topics that need to be discussed further in the sense of the synodal process, for which spaces of dialogue should be opened. This may happen at the respective levels (dioceses, institutions, groups, as well as in ecumenical, interreligious, and social dialogue, etc.).

It is about a quest, about a willingness to change, in which one is open to the Holy Spirit. Appropriate "criteria" would be helpful for this. To formulate these criteria in a way that is comprehensible for the people of today proves to be an essential task of theology.

Synodality is not an end in itself but serves to enable the Church to fulfil her mission of service in the world of today in the best possible way. Structures are there to serve this goal—and ultimately to "lead to Christ."

In the process, an understanding of synodality must be further developed and deepened. There is a willingness to learn from others.

What is needed is a qualified consensus. It should be borne in mind that tensions and even fundamental differences of opinion on church issues will remain. However, in the sense of Pope Francis' leitmotif "unity weighs more than conflict", these should not lead to denying others their belonging to the community of the Church. Imperfect, in need for redemption and diverse, we are nevertheless on the way together.

The synodal process in Austria draws attention to the fact that apart from the companions already involved in it there are others who are to be addressed and invited to participate: those who are distant from the Church, migrants, young people, families (in all their forms), LGBTQIA+, people "on the margins", etc., as well as those who simply did not participate in this synodal process, although they were addressed.

Listening, hearing, appreciation and trust are important. These synodal attitudes point to a spiritual dimension of synodality.

A good way is offered by synodal communication, which is to be further practiced, exercised, learned – also with a view to the development of a synodal culture of dialogue, discussion, and conflict.

Practiced synodality would be a model for society.

A basis for companionship and participation is the baptismal vocation and thus the vocation to responsible participation in the mission. This is an invitation to active participation, with the question of the ordination of women being an open point in a large majority of all statements. In the case of volunteering, on the other hand, in view of the current situation, consideration should be given to making it more attractive for men.

An experienced community – especially in parishes – provides support and home. Here, one can find a good place to discover and unfold one's charisms. Here, participation is best possible if it is not restricted ("only advice is possible") or hindered ("participation must not be dependent on one person"). At the same time,

it remains a challenge for parishes to carry out their mission and, for example, to be a place of welcome also for those who do not "belong".

It should be noted that in turning to those in need, one experiences the Gospel oneself. This is the experience of all those who are involved in *Caritas* in various areas. It should be emphasized that even more attention should be paid to this, as this is central to the mission of the Church. Spiritually based social commitment also shows the relevance of the Church for individuals and for society.

There are some concerns that can be taken up locally and implemented in the sense of the submissions to the synodal process, e.g. gender equality, promotion of women in church leadership positions, expansion of opportunities for participation towards co-determination at all levels, increased participation of lay people in the liturgy, efforts to use a more understandable language in liturgy and proclamation, pastoral practice with people who are excluded from church life in various ways, coming to terms with abuse, promotion of faith formation, etc.

Other concerns are to be addressed at appropriate ecclesial levels: access of women to ordination and related ministries, celibacy as a condition of admission to the ordained ministry, adaptation of doctrines taking into account the progressive revelation of the Holy Spirit (e.g., sexual morality).

The Holy Spirit is to be trusted to create changes that serve the life and vitality of individuals and the Church as a community.

It remains open what can be expected and hoped for overall from this encouraging synodal process at different levels and in its various dimensions.