



ICMICA – MIIC PAX ROMANA

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC MOVEMENT  
FOR INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# BUILDING A SYNODAL CHURCH



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

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# ICMICA – MIIC PAX ROMANA



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# I. INTRODUCTION

In October 2021, Our Holy Father Pope Francis launched the two years synod on synodality and invited the entire Church to reflect on the theme **“For a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission”**. Through this process, he called all the faithful to share feedback with their local churches. This process aims to respond to the call for the renewal of the Church as proposed by Vatican Council II.

Cardinal Michael Czerny reminds us that "on several occasions, Pope Francis has emphasized how synodality founds, shapes and strengthens both the life of the Church and the witness and service she is called to render to the human family. In other words, synodality is lived both within the Church and in its mission in the world".

It has been acknowledged that one of the obstacles to synodality is clericalism. To build a synodal Church, the laity is encouraged to express themselves and prevent them from falling into clericalism. This is done through the process of listening and promoting the formation of the laity to express themselves on an equal footing with priests and bishops. This means strengthening their biblical and theological knowledge and, for the members of our movement, valuing their synodal experience in practice within the movement. Synodality has allowed the entire Church members to renew their engagement and mission within the Church and society, including the lay people.

ICMICA- MIIC, Pax Romana, which gathers intellectual and professional lay faithful, since its foundation in 1947, assumed its experience and spiritual journey in this double and interrelated perspective and grew with the conciliar proposals, particularly Lumen Gentium. There it was recognized that by virtue of baptism; all baptized persons have the same dignity as daughters and sons of God, that together they form the People of God (LG4), and that they are called to active participation in the life of the church and its mission. The doctrine of the priesthood "common priesthood of the faithful" (LG 10) was recovered, with which the importance of the laity in the life of the Church was reinterpreted. "Lay men and women assumed with great audacity their role, according to their gifts and abilities to act both in the search for the common good and respect for the dignity of persons in society and the life of the Church."

This is why the call of Francis resonates so strongly among the membership of Pax Romana, who has always been at the service of the universal church and in the international field, as well as in the societies where it is inserted at the local and ecclesial level. Its attentive experience to see the social reality and listening to the victims as its experience of the consensus fidei strengthened its mission and ecclesial identity. Its spirituality in action and community life cemented its effort of permanent conversion, its discernment that allowed the convergence, consensus fidei, to advance in the evangelizing mission and to be able to assume in a renewed way to be "missionary disciples" as Pope Francis proposes in Evangelium Gaudium (EG 12).

In the face of the global challenges and instabilities facing our society today, the Church seems to lose its relevance and is unable to respond effectively. The laity, who are the face of the Church in society, seem to be unable to address the problems due to their complexity and rapidly changing nature. This inability is explained by the lack of accompaniment and adequate formation of the lay faithful. ICMICA, to fill the gaps, wants to support the formation of lay people in various spaces (society, parishes, dioceses, etc.) to become agents of transformation. Therefore, they wish to respond to the call of the Holy Father through actions aimed at building the synodal church both ad intra and extra as missionary disciples.

Pope Francis thus insists on the inseparable relationship between care for the environment and attention to the poor (LS §49). It is a call to all humanity but in particular to the people of God to address the problem of the existential peripheries [ii] that exist in our world, paying attention to social injustices and the personal sufferings of those who find themselves in desperate situations of poverty, loneliness, and misery.

The lack of a formed and organized laity has fostered non-evangelical practices such as clericalism, which Pope Francis sees as the root of many evils, particularly that of abuse. "I have understood one thing with great clarity. This drama of abuse, especially when it is of great proportions and produces great scandal, has behind it the Church situations marked by elitism and clericalism; sexual abuse is not the first, but that of power and conscience" (Aug. 25, 2018).

The Synodal process is crucial to the life and mission of the Church. Pax Romana ICMICA, being the movement of lay Catholic Professionals has a big role to play in building a synodal Church. Therefore, several sessions on synodality were conducted.

- From June to July 2022, Pax Romana conducted a global survey consultation with its members to seek their feedback on the relationship of the Church with the lay movements, how they situate themselves as Children of God with the Church perspectives, and their recommendation for the synod. The outcomes of this process have been presented to the Dicastery for the laity.
- On 19th June 2022, a webinar entitled 'Participation and building of the lay movements in the building of a Synodal Church' was organized to discuss the importance of the participation of the laity in this process and the kinds of support that are required for the lay movement to strive in a synodal Church.

The outcomes of the synodal process from different regions (Asia, Africa, Europe, and America) have now been released. It would be good to bring the attention of the laity to those recommendations and help them define their roles and contributions to the implementation. The recommendations of the webinars will serve as the baseline for the strategic plan of ICMICA.

Therefore, ahead of the final stage of the synodal process this year, Pax Romana organizes this webinar to achieve the following objectives

- 1.To enhance the understanding, and knowledge of Pax Romana members about the synodal process.
- 2.To share the information and outcomes of the synodal process from different continents (Asia, Latina America, Africa, and Europe).
- 3.To support intellectual discussions, conversations, and debate around the synodal process.
4. To provide guidelines and promote lay participation for the implementation of the synodal recommendations from different continents.
- 5.To define a framework of actions for ICMICA Pax Romana to support strategic plan development

## II. BUILDING A SYNODAL CHURCH

### 1. Synodality: Where are we?

**By Sr. Shizue Filo Hirota**

The website of the Synod Secretariat says the following about synodality.

Synodality is much more than the holding of ecclesial meetings and episcopal assemblies, it is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives content to its being as a communion when all its members walk together, gather in assembly and actively participate in its evangelizing mission.

This Synod is intended to be a Synodal Process. This Synodal Process aims to provide an opportunity for the whole People of God to discern together how to move forward on the way to becoming a more synodal Church in the long term.

On October 9, 2021, Pope Francis opened the Synodal journey and said:

I reiterate that the Synod is not a parliament, that the Synod is not a sounding out of opinions; the Synod is an ecclesial moment, and the protagonist of the Synod is the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is not there, there will be no Synod.



The synodal method is a conversation in the Spirit.

- Active and attentive listening
- Listen to others without judging them
- Pay attention not only to the words but also to the tone and feelings of the speaker. Avoid the temptation to use the time to prepare what you are going to say rather than to listen.

Thus, the Church initiated the synodal process starting with the local, parish, diocesan and national levels. The secretariat received 112 diocesan reports. There are 114 dioceses in the world. Other entities submitted their reports; two international unions of superiors general of religious congregations, the world union of Catholic women's organizations, and the digital Synod with more than 20 million participants, 30% of whom were non-believers.

Then a group of people met in Frascati to prepare the working document for the continental stage.

The document is entitled; Enlarge the space of your tent (Is 5). An important aspect of the synodal journey is its ecclesiality of the People of God. From parish, diocesan, national to continental level, there was the participation of all the people of God, including non-ordained members: men, women, lay people, laywomen, and consecrated women who shared their experiences, we listened to the voices of those who felt marginalized and excluded in the Church.

All continents indicated the need for greater participation of women in the Church at all levels. For the first time in an official Church document, we saw references to LGBTQA people, devoured people, people who have remarried... the issue of women's ordination. It is an honest, sincere, thought-provoking, and free-dialogue document.

We remember that the purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, raise prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind wounds, weave relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright wit that enlightens minds, warms hearts, gives strength to our hands...and gives strength to our hearts.

Until now we thought that a synod is a meeting of bishops with some representatives of the people of God who meet for almost a month to reflect on some proposals on a theme and end up producing a document followed by an apostolic exhortation from the pope.

This synod is not about a theme but a call to live what the Church is. Synodality is not understood if one does not experience it and live it. The challenge is how we are going to involve the whole Church starting with the local level.

## 2. Synodality, religious groups and clergy, and the pastoral mission of the Church

### By Sr. Brigit Weiler

For the religious groups, the in-person meeting saw the participation of 156 delegates, plus the presidents of the 39 episcopates of Europe. The virtual meeting ("online") saw more than 300 delegates.

What was new was that it is for the first time such an assembly was held and agreed on the need to build a European Church. In the beginning, there was a lot of tension due to the great diversity.

The step ahead is to have one Document with "Concluding Remarks".

The Synodal Way in Germany

- was inaugurated on 1 December 2019; the process of discernment and discussion.
- Convened by the German Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK)
- The decisive factor that triggered the initiative was the publication of the MHG study on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.
- Victims of sexual abuse participated in all forums
- It is considered indispensable to "openly confess the guilt and also to work on the structural causes of this guilt". (From: "The texts of the Synodal Way")

- The need for a "de-clericalisation" of church structures,
- Power and participation,
- Recognizing the signs of the times, interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, and acting accordingly.
- The need for an institutional change and a change of attitude.
- Sacramental diaconate for women: "The vote in the Assembly consisted above all in opening up spaces for reflection and discussion on this topic" (Margit Eckholt).

### Synthesis of the Continental Phase in the Latin American and Caribbean Church

Meetings in different geographical zones were organized to facilitate greater participation in the synthesis.

A total of 415 people participated:

- 96 in Central America and Mexico;
- 41 in Caribbean countries;
- 92 in the Bolivarian region;
- 177 in the Southern Cone.
- There were 65 bishops; 70 priests; 61 men and women religious,
- 16 deacons and 194 laymen and women

### Fruits of the process:

- Discovering the joy of living synodality.
- Perceiving the breath of the Spirit (the "Ruach") throughout the process
- Sharing the deep longing for renewal - a shared mission to meet as brothers and sisters; to take on the complex, difficult, but exciting difficult task but exciting task of generating unity in diversity among all of us; to take on the diversity;

Religious Life is an integral and living part of the people of God called "prophethood". God's people, called to "prophetic"; the important role of CLAR

- "The denunciation of clericalism, understood as the expression of clerical authoritarianism, as the deformation of ministerial service into abuse of power".
  - "We see the need to think about a conversion within the Church that overcomes clericalism and the machismo that excludes women from the processes of discernment and decision making, and that is something cultural that we have to face, even if we have to go against the current. Fraternity and sorority are what we have to cultivate (Cono Sur. Ceama-Repam)".(Synthesis of the Continental Phase of the Synod of the Synod of synodality in Latin America and the Caribbean, hereinafter
  - Latin America and the Caribbean, hereafter: SFC\_ALC 87).
  - One challenge is to open up spaces, provide the means and generate ways for the effective participation of women in discernment and decision-making bodies. The October synodal assembly should deepen these themes: women's leadership and their contribution to theological reflection, in pastoral councils, in the accompaniment of communities, and the areas of elaboration and decision-making. "The participation of women is a prophecy, a factor of hope" (Cono Sur) (SFC\_ALC 39).
  - "It has been mentioned that sometimes there is a perceived tension with the clergy who assume responsibility for directing all evangelizing action in the community. "The support, proclamation, and witness of women missionaries must be valued. And this is fundamental in a synodal Church" (Bolivariana/ (Cono Sur) (SFC\_ALC 62).
  - Other contributions express "the feeling that women are 'cheap labor' within the Church" (Cono Sur) and it is "necessary to create and institute new ministries, especially for women" (Ceama-Repam). Many voices consider the institution of the female diaconate to be urgent, recognizing what is being experienced in various communities" (SFC\_ALC 86).
  - The challenge of reforming seminaries and houses of formation, "In the formation of candidates for the priesthood, families, lay people and consecrated men and women must be involved. This was emphasized by all the regional assemblies" (SFC\_ALC 75).
- "A transversal axis in all ecclesial areas is that of formation for a culture of respect for all people and in the prevention of all types of abuse" (SFC\_ALC 75).



### 3. Realizing The fruits of the SYNOD: The Role of Laity in Building a Synodal Church

(Based on the continental document of the Synodality in Asia & Africa)

#### By Paulinus Prasetyo

Asia is a home to 4.6 billion people and the majority of the world's billionaires. The Catholic population in Asia is estimated around 150 million people which is 3.31% of the total population.

#### The decision-making:

it was reported that clericalism is still dominating in Asia. The decision-making on Church affairs is mostly left to the Priests. The laypeople are not consulted. There is a decrease in the priesthood in some parts of Asia. There is a need to increase the number of priests.

Population (Asia)	Catholic Population (Asia)	Percentage (%)	Priests	Consecrated men and women	Lay missionaries & catechists
4.6 billion*	150 million*	3.31%	70,254	187,021	432,035

Source: Catholic Church Statistics 2021 released by Agenzia Fides on World Mission Sunday 2022

The Final Document on Synodality in Asia stated that the Catholic Church “contributes greatly to the fields of education, healthcare, social welfare and reaching out to the poor and marginalized groups in society.” This shows a positive outlook for the Catholic Church in Asia. However, some tensions were raised in the synodal process as stated in the final document.

#### Asian Tensions:

The Church is composed of people from all spheres of life. About living Synodality, it was reported that there is a kind of divide between the laity and the clergy, the church and the political leaders, and even among the religions.

There is a significant participation of women in the day-to-day life of the church in Asia. However, their presence in leadership roles is lacking. It is a problem.

Youth participation in Church activities is minimal. They are absent in the life of the Church. There is a great number of poor and marginalized people.

Even though there is a deficit in religion in Asia, religious conflict is still dominating. For example, In Indonesia, permission to build a new Church is quite difficult.

## Six priorities response in Asia

The bishops' conference in Asia proposed 06 priorities.

1. Formation: there is a need for initial and ongoing formation at all levels, priests and laity.
2. Inclusivity & hospitality: inclusion of women, youth, people with broken families, persons with disabilities, and others. They need support from us.
3. Missionary Discipleship: we need to learn to preach and witness the gospel to one another while recognizing that Christians are the minority in Asia. The incomparable witness Asian martyr gives a challenge to all Asians.
4. Accountability and Transparency
5. Prayer and worship: they must touch the heart of Asian people.
6. Environment: care for the common home. The church must be at the forefront, not only in protecting but also in healing.

## 6 Key questions for reflections from Africa

1. What mechanism do we put in place to cater to and respect diverse cultures?
2. How is the Synodal Church more empathetic and promoting concrete Solidarity?
3. How is an understanding of truth and the principle of mercy?
4. Where is Synodality taking us as we listen to the voices of diverse people?
5. How would the local Church make use of all the points?
6. What are the criteria for discernment and judgment?

## 8 Conclusions from the Synodality in Africa

1. To deepen Catholic Synodality according to the values of the Church as the Family of God.
2. African voices and values should be taken into consideration when elaborating the doctrines and teachings of the church and life.
3. The commitment to conflict resolution, to fight against economic colonialism and illegal exploitation, and the promotion of Good Governance, Justice, and Peace.
4. Also involve inculturation and liturgical renewal to respond to the aspiration, participation, and overall growth of the African faithful.
5. Synodality is the way of being Church and hence the necessity of formation.
6. Synodality should strengthen subsidiarity on all levels of the Church's life (especially women, the youth, and persons living with disability).
7. The family is an important structure in the promotion of the Synodal Church
8. Ecological justice and stewardship should become a way of life in the synodal Church.

## What are our findings?

1. Pope Francis has made “synodality” a hallmark of his papacy, by involving the laity in the synodal process. With this method of increased participation, the results of the synod should be internalized, reflected, and put into action by the laity.
2. Catholics remained about 17.7% of the global population, their numbers grew in Africa by about 2.1% and in Asia by 1.8% while in Europe the increase was just 0.3%. The Future of the Church can also be viewed in the number of the faithful.
3. The results of the synods in Asia and Africa show that most of them are a challenge for the laity to play a more active role
4. Synod for a Synodal Church: dialogue with each other, increase listening, and discern together.

## How does the laity participate

1. We need to understand that the laity is not a guest of the church, they are part of the Church. They are executors of God's mission.

### 2. As laity movement:

- a. Be actively involved in disseminating synodal results through blocking, writing, social media, webinars, conferences, etc.
- b. Take the essence of synodal results in the work program. We can take the results as part of our activities.
- c. Invite various interfaith/ culture networks in realizing synodality. It is not only about the catholic church; it is about humanity.
- d. Strengthen partnership with the hierarchy

### 3. As personal:

Be an inspiration and hope for anyone.

- a. Start from the closest
- b. Restore relationship
- c. Have faith
- d. Do our part

## 4. Synodality and Pax Romana

By Juan Ansion

### Some results of a consultation on Pax Romana's synodal process in lay movements

Pax Romana consulted its members and members of related movements on the synodal process. To the question "Are there people who should be more valued and/or included in the Church? 97.6% answered YES.

The answer to the following question (If yes, who are these people who should be included (and valued) in the Church?) is interesting. From the variety of answers, one can read, among the most significant:

- All people, without distinction of any kind.
  - The church no longer goes out to call and help the poor, the spiritually marginalized, and the disabled (and many others) as it used to do in the past.
  - Whom should be more involved? women, young people, and children. In general, to cater to cultural diversity.
  - Those who do not agree with the opinion of the hierarchy, those who, through the vicissitudes of life, have broken up their marriages, and those who feel a homosexual impulse.
  - Those who should be most valued are people who seek the common good, regardless of their age, their political position, their gender, their sexual choice, or their marital or marital status.
- On the other hand, in the face of people and groups who do not seek the common good, the church must have a voice of proclamation and denunciation in defense of the life of the most vulnerable, even at the risk of losing positions of power, property or even life itself.
  - To the question "In your opinion, does the Church in your country express itself adequately on the socio-economic and political situation of society", 61.9% answered NO.

### a. Synodality as a way of promoting our preferential option for the poor

- The preferential option for the poor is the option of the Gospel, strongly affirmed in the post-conciliar Latin American Bishops' Conferences since Medellin and Puebla. When we speak of the poor, we speak first of all of those who lack the necessities of life, but also of all those who are considered insignificant in society and also in the Church itself.



Consistency with this option presupposes a non-clerical Church where we are all equal in our diversity. This is what we have sought to do in our movement since its beginnings. We are inserted in the social movement as citizens, committed to change in society. We take turns in office in our communities and our positions. We are consistent in the struggle for democracy.

The movement is intergenerational. Women and men are equal. Priest advisors participate as men of faith and theologians without imposing themselves. And we have lay advisors.

### **b. Synodality as a tool for the struggle for social justice.**

From the preferential option for the poor comes a commitment to social justice and a social transformation against the structures that reproduce poverty. Our methodology of seeing, judging, and acting (Reflection-Action-Reflection) makes us see reality in the light of the Gospel, with the requirement to act to make the Kingdom of God present.

This method is in itself synodal because it implies sharing our views on reality in a communitarian climate of the approach based on the Gospel and at the same time respecting the different approaches to the facts.

By being formed in this way and by being present in organizations in society, we also imbue all our relationships with this sense of "walking together". This contributes to the struggle for democracy and justice.

### **c. Synodality as a way of promoting good governance in our Church**

We hope that current decision-makers in our Church will find that many of our lay movements are already working in a quite synodal way, of course always perfectible. Few bishops know and appreciate us. They are focused on their parishes and do not see what we can contribute to them from our community experience, which is less focused on the immediate territory but rather on areas of social and political life according to our different professional backgrounds.

### **d. Synodality as a way of supporting the social mission of the Church**

The social mission of the Church understood in a synodal way goes far beyond the necessary support for those in need of help for economic and other reasons. Indeed, we seek to work consistently for the transformation of this world into one in which injustices and the social, political, and cultural causes of poverty are not reproduced. This also includes - with increasing urgency - linking work to lift the poor out of their situation with saving our common home.



### III. CONCLUSION

This webinar brought a fruitful discussion among the lay professionals on the matter affecting the Church. Participants recognized that the path towards a synodal Church is a journey of thousand miles that has to start today and all the members of the Church (lay, religious or clergy, women and men) have to play their roles. The lay professionals hope that the current decision-makers in our Church acknowledge the contributions of the lay people in this journey, especially in the work to bring social transformation that abolishes any system that reproduces injustices and root causes of poverty. It is also good to note that the conversation around synodality is a continuous process that every member of the Church has to be part of and with the support of the hierarchy.

## PROFILE OF THE PANELISTS

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### **Ramon Ibeas**

He is a Theologian and a Master in Social Doctrine of the Church from the Pontifical University of Salamanca. He is the Secretary General of Caritas Diocesana de Victoria.

He is a Chairman of the Governing Board of Berjantzi and an executive member of Lanagro. He is also a member of the Basque Federation of Pax Romana and former ICMICA Vice-president for Europe

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### **Sr. Filo Hirota**

Sr. Filo Hirota is from Japan. She is Mercedarian Missionaries of the Berriz Catholic Council for Justice and Peace, an Advisor for the Executive Committee for Catholic Nonviolence Initiative Pax Christi International, and a member of the Preparatory Committee of the Synod.

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### **Paulinus Prasetyo**

Paulinus Prasetyo lives in Jakarta Indonesia. He is a professional in the field of Human Resources and a lecturer at the Indonesia Catholic University of Atma Jaya. He is also a leader in his Parish and a volunteer at Indonesia Catholic Intellectual Association (ISKA).

Paulinus has been the Vice President for ICMICA Pax Romana – Asia Pacific Region since December 2021.

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### **Juan Ansion**

He has a Ph.D. in sociology from the Université Catholique de Louvain. He is a retired Professor of Anthropology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú - PUCP (Lima). He is also a Researcher at the Institute for Human Development in Latin America (PUCP). He conducted numerous research and publications on Andean culture, interculturalism, and education. He is a member of the leadership team of the Movement of Catholic Professionals (MPC) of Peru.



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