

## NETHERLANDS

### Utrecht

'Diocesan phase' Synod of Bishops 2023 'For a synodal Church: communio, participatio, missio'

On Tuesday, 7 September 2021, the Dutch bishops received the documents for the preparation of the Synod of Bishops: For a synodal Church: communion, participatio, missio' (2023).

The documents (a Vademecum and a Preparatory Document) were prepared by the secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the "diocesan phase" of prayer and conversation in dioceses worldwide. This phase will begin on October 17, 2021, and will be conducted at the request of the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in April 2022 with a written synthesis from the bishops' confederation of up to ten pages.

rence of up to ten pages. The diocesan reports may also be a maximum of ten pages contain, states the secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

In addition to the central question, the preparation documents contain ten key themes with questions that the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops offers as an invitation for discussion. The bishops can discuss these questions in the diocesan forums that exist and also with specific groups. Not all themes need to be addressed, the Vademecum indicates. The themes can be chosen that are most relevant to the local situation.

In the meeting of September 14, 2021, the Dutch bishops chose three themes.

These three themes are: - Celebrate, - Co-responsibility for mission - Dialogue in Church and Society

The choice for the discussion of these three themes is partly inspired by the concern of the Dutch bishops about the vulnerability of the Church and Christianity in our country and in Western society and by the hope that Christianity and the Church in our regions will have a future and progress.

progress. The bishops recognize in these three themes the key words: communion, participatio and missio.

The three themes are listed below along with guiding questions.

For dioceses that choose to additionally discuss other themes, the list of ten themes is included as an appendix.

The Roman Catholic Bishops of the Netherlands

Utrecht, October 2021

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### Three synodality issues

Many bishops are still silent about Pope Francis' call to consult with their constituencies about desired changes in the Church. The bishop, who has already tried to draw up a schedule for consultation, tends to follow tips that have been handed down from above via the VADEMECUM. Vatican officials have thought they can give direction to the synodal process with three tips and 10 themes that all are based on the continuation of the authoritative structure of which they themselves are a part and which is aimed at the continuation of clerical rights without an essential charitable purpose, without empowering of the people and without rights for all church members. At best, meetings may lead to some soft structural adjustments.

Before getting to alternatives, one has to understand what has caused such strange issues. It is fair to assume that those who hold an official position in the church are forced to follow a pattern of behaviour that suits moral authority and docility, It will take them years to change their orientation, even now that the church is in crisis because of this failing structure. Respecting that personal problem of bishops, the initiative to reorient the church will have to be taken outside the reach of functionaries. This calls for action of independent individuals within the Church and to choose, first of all, one or more of the following three themes

- Equal rights for lgbt people, women, remarried people and others. Henceforth in the church, all forms of discrimination to be excluded, the core message of Jesus Christ.
- Transformation of the church into the Charitable Church, to be a support centre for charitable small communities with care for one another and for the poor. It is the way the first Christians lived the Gospel.
- Votes for ordinary church members. The course of the church to be determined by the *sensus fidelium* is the contemporary means for reorientation and for fully realization of the two previously mentioned changes.

The feasibility of each aim is different.

Equality might be reached with one or two synodality synods of bishops

Charitable communions can be created by church members themselves

Votes for ordinary church members may be possible if the crisis continues to increase.

my proposal is that one or more independent church members ask the bishop whether his parishes may be approached without his censure, inviting them to gather votes in their own circles on one or more of three themes and to present the results at a synod organised by lay people. Every response from the bishop, whether it is to cooperate, to allow, to refuse or not to respond, has its own valuable meaning. If a bishop wants to follow the tips of the Vatican, any organization is free to go a different way.

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