



**We Are Church**  
Pour une Eglise du Peuple de Dieu  
Für eine Kirche des Gottesvolkes  
Para una Iglesia del Pueblo de Dios  
Para uma Igreja do Povo de Deus  
Per una Chiesa del Popolo di Dio  
For a Church of the People of God

www.we-are-church.org  
www.wir-sind-kirche.de/prag2023

## Litmus Test for Synodality and Reform Capacity

### Catholic Reform Groups to the European Synodal Assembly in Prague 5-12 February 2023

Press release Prague / Dublin / Innsbruck / Munich 3 February 2023

Catholic reform groups in Europe welcome the global synodal process launched by Pope Francis, the first and arguably most difficult continental phase of which for Europe will take place in Prague next week, 5-12 February 2023. "It is an extraordinarily ambitious participation and reform process, but one that is indispensable in view of the worldwide church crisis," explains **Colm Holmes** from Ireland, Chair of *We Are Church International*. Sexual and spiritual violence, cover-ups and abuse of power, discrimination against women that contradicts the message of Jesus and human rights, as well as the consequences of a misguided sexual morality are gradually becoming apparent in more and more countries. The worldwide synodal process is a test for a new togetherness in the church.

The given guiding theme "Community, Participation, Mission" and the question of the church's self-understanding – which has preoccupied the church since the Second Vatican Council – are important. However, "In the forthcoming continental synodal assemblies, all topics – including the controversial ones which are addressed in the working document 'Enlarge the Space of Your Tent' – must be able to come up for discussion, so that the principle of synodality does not become a farce," demands **Dr Martha Heizer** of *We Are Church Austria*. This is not an instrumentalisation of the synod. On the contrary, synodality – i.e. the mutual exchange and being on the way together – offers the chance of spiritual renewal, which, however, must also be followed by concrete resolutions to be decided by all participants. According to the long-standing Christian principle: "What concerns all should be decided by all."

### Hopeful working document commits

Unlike the *Synodal Way* in Germany, the worldwide synodal process did not start from the abuse of sexual and spiritual violence. But it is remarkable, says **Christian Weisner** of *We are Church Germany*, that across the most diverse regions of the world exactly the same areas of reform have emerged that are on the agenda in Germany, as the working document "Enlarge the Space of Your Tent" for the continental assembly shows quite clearly. The 45-page working Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) had been compiled on behalf of the Vatican on the basis of feedback from the 112 bishops' conferences and other feedback.

Together with other European reform groups, *We Are Church International* appeals to the delegates of the 39 European Bishops' Conferences, who are participating in the Assembly partly in person and partly online, to become aware of the unique opportunity as well as the great responsibility for the future of the Church and Christianity. The reform groups strongly support the reformers at the Assembly in Prague. But the reform groups also demand that lay people and clergy have equal voting rights at these assemblies and at the World Synod in Rome – otherwise the whole synodal process will have been in vain!

### Expectations of the Church People for the Prague Meeting

In a joint online press conference on Monday, 30 January 2023, representatives of various European reform groups had already formulated the expectations of the Church people for the Prague meeting.

**Ludovica Eugenio**, contact person of #ItalyChurchToo, the coordination of associations against abuse in the Catholic Church in Italy, sees reforms in the Church as essential, in view of the sexual and spiritual abuse that is still being covered up. Abuses in the Catholic Church are not isolated cases: they have systemic and structural causes.

"We need truth that goes beyond personal responsibility, justice for those affected and for the perpetrators, prevention and, finally, long-term reforms and measures: a rethinking of pastoral life, a reform of the distribution of power, the role of women, the theology of ordained ministry, formation in seminaries and psycho-affective education."

**Dr Luca Badini Confalonieri**, Director of Research at the *Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research*, sees the urgent need for a constitution of the universal Catholic Church incorporating the “basic equality” and “fundamental human rights” of all the baptised, as affirmed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). "We must work together to ensure that future recommendations of the Synod lead to concrete changes in Canon Law to prevent the current clerical system from continuing by inertia."

**Sr Philippa Rath OSB**, German Benedictine nun and delegate of the religious orders sees in the *Synodal Way* in Germany the unconditional will to eliminate the systemic causes of violence and abuse - as named in the various abuse studies. But spiritual renewal is also an integral part of the Synodal Way. Its concerns - as the working document for the continental phase "Enlarge the Space of YourTent " impressively demonstrates - are on the agenda in all parts of the universal Church. "We are convinced with Pope Francis that there is no turning back on the path towards a synodal Church.

**Miroslav Matavka** of Rainbow Christians in Slovakia, who is active in various European LGBT Christian networks, advocates for the visible and valued participation of LGBT+ Catholics in the Synod and in the life of the Church. However, especially in Eastern Europe, LGBT+ Catholics still face scientifically disproven prejudices. Both in secular society and in the Church, efforts are being made to create a conflict between the West and the East. The current synodal Process of the Catholic Church is therefore an important instrument for building a Church that will be a true home for all the baptised and confirmed.

**Sophie Rudge** from England, co-chair of *Andante*, said the official working document for the continental phase shows very clearly how great the frustration of committed women on all continents is that women are still considered second-class in the Roman Catholic Church and are treated as such. "The many vocations exercised by women in the Church need to be made visible and appreciated. Allowing women to enter the diaconate, enabling women to enter the preaching ministry and opening up leadership positions to women would bring about a fundamental change in the Church. The Synod Assembly's response to the women's insights will be a crucial test for practised synodality." *Andante*, the European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations, and the global network of Catholic women's organisations *Catholic Women's Council (CWC)* had gathered women's voices worldwide.

### **(Press) contacts in Prague:**

Representatives of *We Are Church International* and other reform groups will be in Prague from 5-12 February 2023 to accompany the Assembly:

**Dr Martha Heizer** (*We are Church Austria*)

(Deutsch, English) E-mail: [martha@heizer.at](mailto:martha@heizer.at), Mobile: +43 650 4168500

**Colm Holmes** (*We are Church International*, Ireland)

(English, Deutsch, François) E-Mail: [colmholmes2020@gmail.com](mailto:colmholmes2020@gmail.com), Mobile: +353 8660 63636

**Miroslav Matavka** (*SIGNUM, EF* and *GNRC*, Slovakia)

(Slovenské, Česky, German, English) E-mail: [miro@duhovi-krestania.sk](mailto:miro@duhovi-krestania.sk), Mobile: +421 903 828240

**Marlies Prinz** (*We are Church Austria*)

(Deutsch, English) E-Mail: [marlies.prinz15@gmail.com](mailto:marlies.prinz15@gmail.com), Mobile: +43 650 5301090

**Dr Martin Schockenhoff** (*We are Church Germany*)

(Deutsch, English) E-mail: [martin.schockenhoff@gleisslutz.com](mailto:martin.schockenhoff@gleisslutz.com), Mobile: +49 173 3248913

**Christian Weisner** (*We are Church Germany*)

(Deutsch, English) E-mail: [prag2023@wir-sind-kirche.de](mailto:prag2023@wir-sind-kirche.de) , Mobile: +49 172 518 4082

Continuously updated information: [www.wir-sind-kirche.de/prag2023](http://www.wir-sind-kirche.de/prag2023) + [www.we-are-church.org](http://www.we-are-church.org)