

**The following was sent to the Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference and to Cardinal Mario Grech / General Secretariat of the World Synod at the end of March 2024:**

Mario Cardinal Grech, General Secretary of the Synod  
Via della Conciliazione 34, 00120 Città del Vaticano  
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March 2024

**Subject: Contributions of *We are Church* Germany to the World Synod 2024**

Dear Cardinal Grech,

the document "To October 2024", published by the General Secretariat of the World Synod, speaks of consultations at the grassroots level and with lay associations. In order to actively participate in the global synodal process and to find answers to the key question: "How can we be a synodal church in mission?", *We are Church* Germany has chosen two approaches:

- a survey to gauge opinions on questions relating to the World Synod 2021 - 2024
- and, together with the reform groups Gemeindeinitiative.org and Maria 2.0 Munich, the online event "On the way to the World Synod 2024 - synodal interested people from the grassroots have their say". This online event in particular also provided numerous examples of best practice.

The results of these events you will receive below for inclusion in the documents for the World Synod 2024.

Further details can also be found on our website.

To the survey: [https://www.wir-sind-kirche.de/?id=125&id\\_entry=10108](https://www.wir-sind-kirche.de/?id=125&id_entry=10108).

To the online event: [https://www.wir-sind-kirche.de/?id=125&id\\_entry=10097](https://www.wir-sind-kirche.de/?id=125&id_entry=10097).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

With kind regards and good wishes for your important task

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## Summary of the results of the survey among committed participants to gauge opinions on questions relating to the World Synod 2021 - 2024 survey organised by We are Church Germany

Reform-minded Christians have developed a questionnaire to identify aspects that are important for the survival of a genuine synodal future for the Catholic Church. Over a period of around four weeks, 130 people from 21 German and two Austrian dioceses took part in the survey. Even if the number is manageable, it is a certain representation of the mood among committed people. Older people and people aged between 30 and 60 are particularly concerned about the future of the church. This also makes it clear that the church is increasingly losing young people.

The situation for the church as a whole is that a large number of people have said goodbye to church life either internally or by leaving, as they have repeatedly experienced sham discourses and no real participation in the past. The unresolved abuse crisis has made the systemic deficits of the Catholic Church abundantly clear worldwide.

### **Answers to the question: How can the differentiated co-responsibility of all members of the people of God be strengthened at the local church level?**

Over 90% of the participants see a special responsibility based on their baptismal dignity, which exists independent of authorities in the church. An even higher percentage see the need to value and utilise the existing charisms in the church people to a greater extent. Over 90% of participants do not want to be patronised. Everyone is responsible for what is thought, lived and believed in the church community. Genuine synodal participation requires that initiatives from the grassroots are taken up, communicated and further developed for the good of all. Over 95% emphasise a synodal culture of respectful cooperation and co-decisional participation. Those responsible for leadership have the ongoing task of promoting synodal processes at all levels. Over 90% also consider the co-decision of lay people to be central to who takes responsibility at all levels.

### **Answers to the question: What forms of relationships, structures, differentiation and decision-making processes in relation to the mission make it possible to recognise, shape and promote it?**

The current structures are viewed critically by a high percentage of participants. Over 90% consider round tables and forums on equal footing to be important for the development of future paths so that the church can fulfil its mission. The existing councils need genuine co-decision-making opportunities in order to be able to further develop the impulses of the faithful. A high level of transparency and dialogue with all those affected by decisions are central to this. Transparency in the actions of all those responsible for leadership and their accountability to participative bodies is seen as extremely important.

### **Answers to the question: Which offices and participatory bodies could be modernised or introduced in order to better express co-responsibility?**

In the opinion of a very high percentage of participants, much would be gained if the synodal character of the existing committees were more strongly emphasised. More than 90% of participants believe that co-determination and, above all, co-decision rights of the committees should be strengthened and expanded. A consolidation of existing committees is not seen as helpful. A crucial element for the future of the Church will be the filling of ministries and offices at all levels, regardless of gender, orientated towards abilities and charisms and also by non-ordained persons.

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## Results of the online event "On the way to the World Synod 2024 - synodal interested people from the grassroots have their say" organised by *We are Church* Germany, *Gemeindeinitiative.org*, *Maria 2.0*, Munich

In accordance with the invitation of the document "Until October 2024", published in December 2023 by the General Secretariat of the World Synod 2021 - 2024, to participate in the synodal process at all levels of the Church, committed people met online on 6 March 2024 to find answers to the key question: HOW can we be a synodal Church in mission?

The document "By October 2024" refers to consultations at grassroots level and with lay associations, and with a view to getting closer to the grassroots and to concretise the key question, three questions were addressed, the results of which are documented here.

### **a) Based on concrete parish experience: what essential steps are needed to make synodality credible?**

- Participation was mentioned the most. Participation means, on the one hand, the full equality of women in all the activities and tasks of the church and, on the other, the responsible involvement of the whole people of God in binding decisions.
- Only advisory bodies, which are then subject to the arbitrariness of clerics, are not synodal and do not have a promising future.
- The self-commitment of clergy to jointly made decisions would be a first step.
- Baptismal dignity is the same for all people.
- In modern societies, the struggle for the best arguments, which then form the basis for synodal decisions, is associated with good, albeit arduous, experiences.
- Participation also means co-deciding who takes responsibility for the community for a certain period of time through an election, especially in the dioceses. Participation leads to accountability of those who bear responsibility. It also requires a basic church law that gives everyone in the church the opportunity to demand rights.
- Participation is expressed in acting on an equal footing, in a welcoming culture for all, in including the disadvantaged and the poor, in transparent action, in open communication, in sufficient space to contribute charisms, which also includes helping to organise worship services.
- This also includes church leadership by non-ordained persons and concrete pastoral care.
- The church will have to change its theological positions and legal regulations. In particular, the understanding of the sacraments with regard to pastoral care for people at the end of their lives, where those accompanying them should also administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, and the different value of church services, which results from the current division of the church into so-called laity and clergy, calls for change. All are called to carry the message of Jesus into the future.

### **b) Which 3 steps should be implemented first locally, diocesanly and worldwide?**

- There are many overlaps here with the concerns already mentioned under a). The full equality of women in all church activities is also central here. Ministries and offices should be open to all genders.
  - Acting synodally at all church levels is an essential prerequisite for the future of the church.
- Unity in diversity is essential, through decentralisation, in order to do better justice to the different living and cultural situations in individual communities, regions, countries and continents. It is equally important to enable and respect different speeds of development.
- In future, celibacy should be voluntary for all.
- The equality of all those working in the Church and encounters at eye level are central.
- All forms of discrimination must be abolished.
- Church law and sexual morals must be adapted in line with the times. Genuine participation must be implemented at all levels.

**c) What examples of best practice already exist locally, in your own diocese, even if they still contradict current canon law?**

- More and more dioceses are discovering new forms of church action as a source of enrichment in the sense of the common mission. For example, more and more non-ordained persons are being commissioned to conduct funerals, preach at Eucharistic celebrations, assist at marriages and lead and preach at services of the word with the distribution of communion.
- In order to counteract the distress caused by the theology of the sacraments, which up to now has focussed purely on priests, quite a few people who intensively accompany the dying are creating rituals similar to the anointing of the sick. For people in the final phase of their lives, the human closeness of pastoral carers is often more important than the presence of a priest for the anointing of the sick.
- More and more people can well imagine parish leadership by non-ordained persons, provided they are suitably qualified.
- Initial attempts have been made with mixed leadership teams of volunteers, full-time staff and priests. There are often still considerable hurdles to overcome due to difficult role perceptions, especially among clergy.
- More and more parishes do not want to deny blessings to anyone, especially queer people and other people. These are often the same people who also allow people to take communion who would be denied it according to church law, such as remarried divorcees or Protestant Christians.
- Initiatives such as "Zeitfenster Aachen", women's sermons in Munich, a co-operative leadership model of the student community in Würzburg, the "Brunnenkirche Erfurt" with intensive community participation, and philosophical sermons at the Jesuits in Berlin are seen as groundbreaking.
- Another possibility is the development of a community mission statement that sets out directions for action together which is evaluated after a certain period of time and then adapted to changing situations depending on the findings.
- Intensive networking of reform-oriented people is now also leading to intensive exchange and mutual encouragement and enrichment at international level through familiarisation with approaches and ideas that are developed and practised elsewhere.
- Around the world, ecumenical prayers with songs from Taizé are often a valuable contemporary form of worship.
- In Munich-Pasing, there has been an interfaith peace walk for many years, which people of different denominations and religions organise and carry out together.
- In view of liturgical texts that are incomprehensible and out of date for many people, those responsible are actively looking for good alternatives, which can be found in Switzerland or among the Old Catholics, for example, and are gratefully accepted by those attending church services.
- Initiatives such as pro concilio from the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, which developed the Rottenburg Declaration, and Maria 2.0 are meeting with lively interest.
- Liturgies of the word should include the distribution of communion.
- One Berlin parish refuses to participate in the formation of a large parish.
- In many cases, an open-minded and creative local ecumenism is described as an important experience.
- Wherever efforts are made to create a welcoming culture for interested parties and newcomers, church is perceived as inviting.
- Attractive offers for families, such as well organised family weekends or regular family circles, interest and inspire children and young people and thus future generations.

Wherever the church community appears credible, close to people and far removed from power interests, it can fulfil its calling and mission better and better. Courageous steps towards further development and genuine synodal and participatory action are key to the future of the Church.

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