

An Open Letter for the Roman Catholic Synod on Synodality

As lay and ordained leaders of the Inclusive Catholic movement, we esteem our spiritual siblings of the Roman Catholic Church for their courage in attempting to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit in advance of the 2023 Synod on Synodality. In a spirit of humility, we share this letter as “a reciprocal exchange of gifts in the light of truth” (Synodality in the Life & Mission of the Church [SLMC] 9), believing that, in the words of Pope Francis, “to walk together is the constitutive way of the Church” (SLMC 120).

If the Roman Church is the largest barque in the Catholic sea, our communities are the smaller, nimbler vessels that rescue many of those who have jumped ship—faithful people who continue to self-identify as Catholic but who no longer in good conscience can call themselves Roman Catholic. Most of the people in our movement welcomed the Spirit-inspired *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Vatican II). We celebrated the “inverted pyramid” ecclesiology that recognized that the Church is the People of God (LG 9-17, SLMC 54) as well as an institution that is structured, ordered and governed by servant leaders, not hierarchs and “princes” (SLMC 57).

Saddened by the retrenchment that produced a “reform of the reform,” the faithful that comprise our movement grieved the silencing of voices, the exclusion of modern-day Phobes (Rom. 16:1), the loss of moral authority by U.S. bishops, the attempts to suppress women religious, and restrictions on the liturgy, including the imposition of a Roman Missal translation that did not include input from the lay faithful. In time, and despite our deep love of the tradition, we could no longer support the institutional abuse, sexism, misogyny, racism and ironic homophobia that plague the Roman Church.

We now exercise “creative fidelity to Tradition” (SLMC 9), reimagining and reinventing Catholicism for contemporary Catholics. Our lived experience inspires us to offer these contributions to your process:

- We have seen firsthand in our communities that honoring the *sensus fidei fidelium* and operationalizing synodality leads to growth and vitality (SLMC 9, 38, 56, 64, 72, 94, 100, 108, 117). We urge you to embrace the esteemed dictum, *Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet* (“What affects everyone should be discussed and approved by all” SLMC 65). We pray that this experience of synodality might energize the faithful for future synodal experiences.
- We urge you to reclaim the inclusive leadership paradigms of the first three centuries of Christianity. We treasure the diversity that characterized the early Church before alignment with empire and subsequent colonizing forces fractured the Body of Christ, disinterpreted the scriptures, misread Church history, and marginalized the gifts of our sisters, of married persons, and of so many other members of the Body of Christ. Like the early Church, our experience has shown no incompatibility between the sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders, nor any need to restrict women from the sacrament of Holy Orders, as grounded in Jesus’ discipleship of equals (Mk. 2:15-17 & 14:3-9; Mt. 9:10-13 & 28:5-8; Lk. 5:29-32, 7:44-50 & 8:1-3; Acts 1:14; Jn. 4:7-15) and Paul’s radical vision of equality in Christ (Gal. 3:28).
- We urge you to demand a systemic reform of the epidemic and sinful clericalism that has characterized centuries of the life of the Roman Church. This task requires the

participation of both laity and ordained. Clerical culture preserves destructive relationships, underpins the unequal treatment of the baptized, and upholds a culture of privilege and secrecy. We understand the challenge of this task, as it is a legacy from which we are recovering as well.

- We encourage an end to the homophobia in the Roman Church's teaching, and the sharing of the sacraments of the Church with all couples, regardless of the gender or gender identification of spouses. Vatican II encouraged "scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (GS 4). There are facts of history, biological science, social science and technology that, if met with continued dismissal by the leadership of the Church, will continue to undermine her credibility.
- We appeal to the Church to examine its demand for Eurocentric uniformity and to believe in the value of allowing local churches the freedom to express their unique cultures and identities. Vatican II recognized the importance of "full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations" by the faithful (SC 14). It is our experience that honoring particularities of language and culture is life-giving in liturgical prayer.
- Finally, a majority of our jurisdictions have embraced synodality from their founding as a response to the Council of Constance and Vatican I and as offshoots of the 19th-century Old Catholic renewal in the Netherlands. We believe that the Roman Church will be profoundly energized by a true willingness to engage in conciliarism and synodality, and to atone for its sin of imposing as *Ecclesia docens* teachings on God's people (SLMC 35) without meaningfully consulting the *sensus fidei fidelium*.

There is no doubt in our minds that many Roman Catholic faithful, genuinely engaged, have shared similar thoughts to those we have articulated during this synodal process. In accord with the vision of St. Ignatius of Antioch, we walk beside you in *synodos*, as "companions on the journey" (SLMC 25, Lk. 21:13-27) and, though you may not recognize us at present (Lk. 24:31), you are always welcome to break bread with and experience the risen Christ with us (Lk. 24:29-33).

We conclude in prayer with and for all our siblings of the Roman Church: "May Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, who 'joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit' ...accompany the synodal pilgrimage of the People of God, pointing the way and teaching us the beautiful, tender and strong style of this new phase of evangelization" (SLMC 121).