



europäische allianz katholischer frauenverbände  
european alliance of catholic women's organisations  
alliance européenne d'organisations féminines catholiques

**Andante Response to the Document**  
**A Synodal Church in Mission**  
**Synthesis Report**

ANDANTE, the European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations, welcomed the invitation of Pope Francis to play a part in making a synodal church a reality.

Initially our member organisations submitted responses to their local Bishops' Conferences. This was followed by online webinars where we read and prayed with the Document for the Continental Stage of the Synod and submitted a report before the Prague meeting.

Following the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2023 we eagerly anticipated the Synthesis Report which represented the contents of the discussions and themes covered and was overwhelmingly passed by the votes of the participants.

Our initial reactions were disappointment, however, we recognised this was not a decision-making event, and trust and good relationships through discerning and listening had been established. We recognised that 71% of the Catholic Church is in Africa and the global south, which will obviously affect how we consider vital issues for the Catholic Church in Europe to be examined.

However we have been struck by the inconsistency of response from different Bishops' Conference within Europe and individual dioceses. For example, in some countries there were no public documents about decision-making structures each diocese had been asked to consider and to allow feedback. Some dioceses were active, for example preparing documents to help explore themes in individual parishes in a synodal way, whilst the majority did not engage with the laity at all.

The women of ANDANTE regretted the previous Synod documents had little to say about climate change, and the impact it has on women, their families and communities. We believe in the importance of conversion to living simply and the role of Catholic thought about justice and peace. The Church has an important role to play in secular economic policy and social policy making by its environmental teaching against violence, exploitation and destruction.

We welcomed the recognition and proposal in the synthesis report.

*“Standing with those who are poor requires engaging with them in caring for our common home: the cry of the earth and the cry of those living in poverty are the same cry. The lack of responses to this cry makes the ecological crisis, and climate change in particular, a threat to the survival of humanity. The Apostolic Exhortation Laudate Deum, published by Pope Francis to coincide with the opening of the work of the Synod Assembly, emphasises this. The Church in countries most exposed to the consequences of climate change are keenly aware of the urgent need to change course, and this represents their contribution to the journey of other local churches in various parts of the planet.”*

*“Church teaching, liturgy, and practice must more explicitly and carefully integrate the biblical and theological foundations of integral ecology.”*

ANDANTE recognises tensions arise between the worldwide Church and local churches. The Church is rich in peoples and cultures and we expect that there will be respect for cultural diversity. We look forward to the proposal in the synthesis document becoming a reality.

*“In a world where the number of migrants and refugees is increasing while the willingness to welcome them is decreasing and where the foreigner is viewed with increasing suspicion, it is appropriate for the Church to engage decisively in education, in the culture of dialogue and encounter, combating racism and xenophobia, especially through pastoral formation. Equally, it is necessary to engage in concrete projects for the integration of migrants.*

*We recommend continued engagement in dialogue and discernment regarding racial justice. Systems within the Church that create or maintain racial injustice need to be identified and addressed. Processes for healing and reconciliation should be created, with the help of those harmed, to eradicate the sin of racism.”*

The women of ANDANTE all shared the expectation there would be full and equal participation of women in the Church. The many vocations fulfilled by women must be visible and acknowledged. Women in leadership must be valued and admitting women to the diaconate, providing formation so women can preach and opening all positions of authority to women would have a transformative impact on the Church. We welcomed the comments from the synthesis report, but feel frustrated that changes at a parish level seem so unlikely to happen and progress is so slow to recognise the equal dignity of baptised women.

*“We have had a very positive experience of the reciprocity between women and men during this Assembly. Together we echo the call made in the previous phases of the synodal process, that the Church adopt a more decisive commitment to understand and accompany women from a pastoral and sacramental point of view. Women desire to share their spiritual experience of journeying towards holiness in the various stages of life: as young women, as mothers, in their friendships and relationships, in family life at all ages, in working life, and in consecrated life. Women cry out for justice in societies still marked by sexual violence, economic inequality and the tendency to treat them as objects. Women are scarred by trafficking, forced migration and war. Pastoral accompaniment and vigorous advocacy for women should go hand in hand.”*

*“Many women expressed deep gratitude for the work of priests and bishops. They also spoke of a Church that wounds. Clericalism, a chauvinist mentality and inappropriate expressions of authority continue to scar the face of the Church and damage its communion. A profound spiritual conversion is needed as the foundation for any effective structural change. Sexual abuse and the abuse of power and authority continue to cry out for justice, healing and reconciliation. We asked how the Church can be a place that safeguards all.*

*Where dignity and justice are undermined in relationships between men and women in the Church, we weaken the credibility of our proclamation to the world. Our synodal path shows the need for relational renewal and structural changes. In this way we can better welcome the participation and contribution of all – with lay and consecrated women and men, deacons, priests, and bishops – as co-responsible disciples in the work of mission.”*

ANDANTE would welcome a reform of the formation of the ordained ministry, with many more women becoming involved in formation. The diaconate could be restored to a ministry of service, which would be less likely to clericalise women deacons. We are aware of many testimonies from women who have vocations to the priesthood and diaconate and we wish there to be further discernment about the ordination of women to the priesthood as well as the diaconate.

*“A thorough review of formation for ordained ministry in view of the missionary and synodal dimensions of the Church is called for. This means also reviewing the Ratio fundamentalis that determines how formation is structured. We also recommend at the same time ensuring the adoption of a synodal style when it comes to the ongoing formation of priests and deacons.”*

Respondents to the ANDANTE consultation commented there needs to be mercy and love for some minority groups such as divorced and remarried and LGBTQ people, as the Church's teaching on moral issues makes it seem remote from Society. However we welcomed the recent document, *Fiducia Supplicans*.

*“In different ways, people who feel marginalized or excluded from the Church because of their marriage status, identity or sexuality also ask to be heard and accompanied. There was a deep sense of love, mercy and compassion felt in the Assembly for those who are or feel hurt or neglected by the Church, who want a place to call "home" where they can feel safe, be heard and respected, without fear of feeling judged. Listening is a prerequisite for walking together in search of God's will. The Assembly reiterates that Christians must always show respect for the dignity of every person.”*

ANDANTE recognises the Church must communicate with the world which is digital and globally networked, and therefore must use modern methods of communication to share that message and raise awareness of gospel values in public life, especially amongst the younger generations. We were happy to note the synthesis document proposes,

*“We need to provide opportunities for recognising, forming, and accompanying those already working as digital missionaries, while also facilitating networking amongst them.*

*It is important to create collaborative networks of influencers that include people of other religions or indeed who may profess no faith, but who wish to collaborate on common causes to promote human dignity, justice, and care for our common home.”*

As the Second Synodal Assembly takes place in October 2024 the women of ANDANTE continue to pray for the success of finding how the Spirit is leading us, and as Father Timothy Radcliff suggested, “The synodal process is organic and ecological rather than competitive.”

We would however welcome the changes it brings.

ANDANTE, spring 2024