



# Introduction

## Description of the synodal process of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic

### *Accepting the call of Pope Francis to the synodal process of the Catholic Church*

The Catholic Church in the Czech Republic accepted the call, expressed by Pope Francis, in October 2021 embarking on the synodal process journey as part of the Synod of Bishops for the Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. In September 2021 the Czech Conference of Bishops delegated to the National Synodal Team the coordination of the synodal process for the whole country. Pursuant to the instructions from the General Secretariat of the Synod Bishops, in September and October 2021 the team started to prepare methodical materials to support the work of synodal groups for the whole country. At the same time, Diocesan Synodal Teams, headed by persons authorised by the Bishop of each diocese to coordinate the synodal process, started to be set up in individual dioceses of the Greek Catholic Apostolic Exarchate.

### *Participation of the People of God in the synodal process*

On 17th June 2021 the diocesan process was launched, with liturgical celebrations held in the cathedrals in individual dioceses in the Czech Republic. A network of parish/vicariate coordinators was created, in certain dioceses was before this event and in others in the weeks following, for local cooperation with diocesan synodal teams in transferring information and methodological support for synodal groups being created in parishes, religious communities and church schools. In this way 2519 groups, an estimated 15,000 believers, were involved in the Czech Republic in the synodal process. About 1,100 parishes were actively involved: approximately 40% of all parishes in the country. The most commonly represented demographic in the groups was employed persons of middle-age.

Although the synodal process was initially met with numerous worries (people did not know what it actually entailed and were sceptical about anticipated results) and insufficient time, in the end the overall experience was positive, and it was also evaluated as such by synodal group contributors. Dioceses and parishes gradually came to identify with the call of the Holy Father to communal discernment in the Catholic Church. The vast majority of these groups thus worked according to the method of "spiritual conversation," suggested by the National Synodal Team and also encouraged by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Discernment was determined by 1 fundamental question and 10 thematic questions formulated in the *Vademecum of the Synod on Synodality*. From the feedback of the People of God across the dioceses, it is possible to conclude that this method - founded on prayer, listening and sharing, with each group member given equal time - helped create a safe space, an atmosphere of sharing and opportunities to speak for sisters and brothers involved.

Diocesan teams also invited religious communities to participate in the synodal process on the diocesan level; however, it is possible to state that the share of these groups was not significant across the dioceses. This is also possibly because religious communities had the opportunity to send the result of their own discernment to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops on the line of actual monastic order/congregations. Priests and consecrated persons were involved in this phase of the synodal process to a very small degree. However, their experience also influenced the synodal process, through the creation of several pastoral groups and the participation of priests in parishes together with other Synod contributors (available data suggest their rate of participation at about 22% of groups). Unfortunately, the creation of individual dioceses of groups in which non-Christians, or non-Catholics, played a significant role did not meet with much success (in almost all groups Catholics were the most prevalent contributors, the number of groups which included members of another denomination/without

denomination is estimated at below 10%). On the other hand, it was possible to engage in the process a group created through the Ecumenical Council of Churches, a group created through the Working Group for Social Issues at the Czech Council of Bishops, a group from the Czech Christian Academy, groups through the LOGOS Society (LGBTQ Christians) and many other charities, as well as employees and students at Church schools.

### *Chronology of the synodal process*

The work of synodal groups in individual dioceses lasted from November 2021 to the beginning of March 2022. To record synodal group contributions, individual diocesan synodal teams prepared (primarily) electronic forms, containing in particular qualitative evaluations of the groups' outputs, and to a lesser degree also a quantitative description, to help create a diocesan synthesis. In preparing the diocesan synthesis, most synodal teams proceeded by qualitative research. Individual diocesan syntheses were submitted to the National Synodal Team by 15th May 2022. This then started to prepare a national synthesis, whose goal was to allow the plurality of voices and opinions resounding in the individual diocesan syntheses to be heard. A draft national synthesis was sent to the Bishops of the CBC, which met over it and added its perspective in its own synodal groups. The National Synodal Team then integrated their contribution to the text of the national synthesis, which was sent to the participants of the National Synodal Meeting in Velehrad (6th July 2022), where this text was subsequently discussed. Participants - representatives of individual dioceses, member of the Bishops' Conference, ecumenical representatives, invited participants - agreed to continue the process in the local church.

## **Reflection of the Synodal Process by the Bishops**

After the **bishops were engaged** in their dioceses, listened to the People of God and **received the diocesan synodal synthesis** together with other fruits of the diocesan synodal process in diocesan synodal meetings **for further processing**, they met to go through **together** and **discern** the result of the synodal process on a national level. While doing this, they stated that the national synodal synthesis has a critical tone and primarily points out suffering, weak points and errors of the life of the church, which must be healed, cleaned or removed. As pastors of the People of God they nonetheless stated, that although the criticism is true and useful, the life of the church has **many positive sides** and **many signs of life** and joyful experience of faith, besides the criticized weaknesses.

During the synodal process, according to the bishops, in particular **three characteristics of life of the local church** were apparent:

### 1. Joy from the Church

Many people express joy from the synodal experience, from the fact, that they live in the Catholic Church, and joy from the growth of life in faith, from what already exists and from what gradually is developing. The number of people who prayed for and made sacrifices for the synod was not insignificant. People long for God and for God's love and want it to show in the real lives of people and of the church.

### 2. Tension between the ideal and reality

People living a virtuous life of faith in the Church feel uncertainty when they have to **go out** in public with the Gospel. Moreover society expects us to stand up for and defend Christianity, its traditions and values. Thus the **tension between reality**, which we share day in day out with the majority society, **and the ideal**, which is defined by the Christian lifestyle, comes to the forefront. This tension requires us to present and ponder the foundations of the Christian lifestyle, over and over again and in each generation, as we react to new challenges while not losing sight of the importance of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

### 3. Openness to the Holy Spirit

For the local church, the synodal process was an experience of openness to the Holy Spirit, communal discernment, in which it was possible to perceive the basic traits of experienced synodality: We do not see the **time of common sharing in synodal groups** as a time of empty criticism, but as a time of new hope. We can find mutual agreement and the common good for everyone **in sincere searching**. We are learning how to **distinguish** what is important from what is unimportant and to maintain what differs in a whole unit.

## **Synthesis of the contributions from synod groups across the dioceses**

### **1. Communion**

#### **1.1 The need for relationship**

##### *1.1.1 A personal relationship with God*

Contributors consider the starting point of synodality to be **a personal relationship with God**. They express a desire for authentic faith, internal prayer and spiritual growth, which they believe is the foundation for bearing personal witness and spreading faith, just as the foundation of trust for life in communion. But they also see that *“people often have a traditional faith, without a personal relationship with Christ, and the Church for the most part offers service of the sacraments.”* In the image of God **goodness and mercy** is fundamental for them. In personal spirituality and in the message of the Church **joy from the resurrected Christ**, and not fear of a punishing God, must prevail, according to the contributions.

##### *1.1.2 Relationships, contact vs. isolation, loneliness*

A large number of groups touched on topics **emphasizing relationship, a longing for an authentic, warm and accepting community, mutual interest, respect and tolerance**. They want to feel like the church is their **home**, they want to experience being brothers and sisters, the family of God. Lack of relationship in the parish, of openness and of a synodal way of thinking are common barriers to the fulfilment of these longings. In the contributions the **sentiment that “we are a closed bubble”** was expressed. Upbringing to an individual faith is also seen negatively, as it involves primarily saving one's own soul. Another negative is the fact that some believers are satisfied merely with meeting their "Sunday obligation". Many contributors also expressed concern about the conservative attitudes of Church leadership, and the Church community as a whole, which leads to isolation, lack of inclusion and even the withdrawal of individuals and groups. With respect to pastoral care of specific groups, the most common themes were children and youth, with the finding that this age group is often **on the margins in parish life**, and also reflecting on what it means **“to spread the faith”**. Many of the synod contributions indicate that youth is one of the few common links in the life of the deanship/vicariate.

#### **1.2 Places of experiencing communion**

Contributors experience communion of faith on a variety of levels. The first is **family**, in which many contributors recognized the need to listen and the need of young people to authentically experience faith. The **parish** received the most attention, however. Many groups mentioned that mere participation in church services is insufficient, and that they do not want to reduce “journeying together” to celebrating the liturgy. There is a strong call for suitable spaces, where parishioners could come together for **informal meetings**, i.e. for dialogue and listening to each other. In many instances, a longing for shared faith in **small communities**, which live in mutual trust and close relationships, was expressed. At the same time, people are aware of the risk that

these groups will be closed to new members, and also of the risk of the absence of communication among small groups in parishes. **Parish evangelization cells** were mentioned as an example of good practice.

Poor awareness of life of one's own **diocese** and lack of contact with its representatives was also an interesting finding. People experience the church on the parish level, which influences their perception of the church worldwide. This is why they say: *“The whole church will take after our parishes.”*<sup>66</sup>

### 1.3 Common celebration

Contributors see celebration of the sacraments as a **source of joy** and community life. There is a longing for the celebration of the Eucharist in particular to reflect the variety of charisms and services in the parish, and also for the celebration to respond to our faith, so that it is a joyful celebration. Many groups stated that liturgy today appears antiquated and incomprehensible to people outside of the Church, and sometimes even to believers themselves. They believe that an explanation of the meaning of individual liturgical prayers, symbols and gestures is needed, as is a re-evaluation of dated liturgical texts. Similarly, they call for **more understandable and more joyous sermons** and also propose the use of **timely prayers for intercession** (e.g. in the form of spontaneous requests).

People still think that quality liturgical **music** is a language through which the Church can address even today's secular environment, but at the same time it is also often seen as old-fashioned and out of touch with the needs of the time. On the other hand, there were also voices on the margins expressing concern about "too much experimentation" and calling for an expansion of pre-conciliar liturgy.

Contributors also mentioned that church services should not be a *“service of experts for an audience”* or *“the mere activity of the priest”* but the celebration of the entire People of God. They would like to experience greater **involvement** in the creation of the liturgy, for instance in the form of lay witnesses during the liturgy. They wish for the **active involvement** of various groups of believers. They particularly emphasized the involvement of **women**, not only during church services, but also e.g. in preparation for the sacraments. It was also proposed the baptisms be performed only during the Sunday mass and the more frequent inclusions of holy masses for specific group of people (e.g. for families, seniors, young people).

### 1.4 People on the margins

Contributors say that although in parishes and other communities there should be **a place for everyone, not everyone is accepted the same way**. All the diocesan synodal syntheses discussed groups who may for various reasons feel that they are on the margins of the Church community. These included various minorities (most often LGBTQ), but also people who were married in the Church and then divorced and remarried, as well as families with young children, women, children and young people, seniors, people with illnesses, singles, new arrivals, homeless people, young people living together without a Church-wedding and others who "disappointed", weak people, people who do not “fit into any categories”, introverts, people who do not identify with the Church's positions and many others. Moreover, priests themselves may be seen as people who are on the margins, in their own way, particularly if parishioners are highly aware of some of their faults. The result is, according to contributors, withdrawing from the Church: *“If a person feels **excluded**, and at the same time feels accepted in the secular society, he or she will prefer to remain **outside**.”*

Contributors emphasized the importance of functioning **pastoral care for people on the edge**. The groups stated that the “Church does not listen to **the stigmatized**” and expressed a longing for greater **openness, acceptance and interest in the excluded, for humaneness, mercy and understanding of human weakness**. The groups were also aware of various sources of **hurt** in the Church. A common theme was **limited access to the sacraments** for certain groups (e.g.

divorced and remarried), where contributors called for an individual approach in this area, arguing that the sacraments are not a reward, but can, in contrast, help such people better handle their complicated situation. Fears that a benevolent approach would bring chaos and division to the church and may legitimize divorce are also present in the synodal contributions, but to a very limited extent.

LGBTQ issues were also mentioned often, with contributors stating that there is no discussion on these issues on an expert level, that arguments from a variety of sources are mixed (and with that the level of truthfulness) and that certain opinions are not taken into account at all. There were also opinions that people with different sexual orientation are not spoken about and are a taboo group. By contrast in the contributions, the longing to engage such people in the life of the Church is expressed, as well as a desire for expressions of solidarity with this group, rather than condemnation of it.

## **1.5 (A) synodal characteristics of life of the Church**

### *1.5.1 Communication*

One of the key characteristics of Church synodality is **communication**, which is inherently connected with the space of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit. The word “communication” sounds as a need on **multiple levels** - among parish groups, among generations, between priests and parishioners, between parishes and dioceses, within a diocese, communication with other Christian churches, interreligious and intercultural dialogue and dialogue with people who do not have a religious faith.

According to contributors, the Church should be a safe place, a space for open communication, free expression of opinion, sharing of living faith, belonging and meeting - without political pressure and without manipulation. They observed that communication is beneficial only if it is truthful. In the specific lives of people, mutual respect, willingness and courage to speak together despite differences of opinion are necessary, as is a safe, accepting environment.

Stagnation of **dialogue** is often caused by a lack of **cooperation** of Church structures, in specific manifestations of the **authoritarian behaviour** on the part of authority figures and the **bureaucratic** system. Contributors perceive that there is difficulty for a dialogue about **controversial themes** which are rather kept secret instead of openly discussed (financing, moral transgressions of priests, the transfer of priests between parishes etc.). Some groups believe that the Church is incapable of entering into a meaningful dialogue with the public. It is not successful in “*speaking the language of today, being legible and understandable*”.

On a parish level, an oft-mentioned weak point in communication is poor transfer of information (whether within the parish or to the outside) a dialogue among people or groups of varying opinions. On a diocesan level, contributors see a lack of greater **interest in what is happening in parishes**, they want to be **seen** and **heard** more. Key for them is **interconnection**, systematic communication and **feedback** across the church hierarchies, while they also mention the possibility of making use of professional help.

On a practical level, contributors emphasized the appropriate use of modern means of communication, although they also expressed awareness that there is no substitute for personal contact.

### *1.5.2 Listening*

According to contributors, listening is not merely a question of politeness. They see the need to turn it into an **internal life attitude**, through which we can learn patience, love and create relationships. Listening is prevented by wholly specific ways of poor communication, such as lack of understanding, unwillingness, prejudices, incompetence, inability to take criticism, lecturing, lack of time and interest, and also a lack of knowledge about something, failure to forgive or fear of rejection. Contributors also state that **listening and openness can be learned** and that we need to do this continuously. The need to listen was apparent on additional levels

as well: within the Church as a whole, on the priest-parishioner level, among small communities, among individuals and groups. Many contributions contained proposals for the creation of a specific space for listening. This need was expressed on a general level (e.g. for communication in the parish) but it was also mentioned with respect to specific groups. According to the witness of Logos (LGBTQ), the present-day Catholic Church does not create a safe climate suitable for open sharing of personal topics, including the possibility of a safe coming-out.

### *1.5.3 Superiority*

Superiority was mentioned by contributors as a barrier to good communication and the creation of an accepting environment. They observe this in the Church on a variety of levels: Communication of some priests and bishops is perceived by some people as arrogant, smug and without the ability to accept one's own mistakes. A priest's opinion is "*incontestable*" and in dealings with people, in their opinion, the priest often "*already knows*" and tends to "question" rather than "listen". As a whole, in their opinion, the Church does not act openly, but rather makes an arrogant impression. "*We are raised in an elitist mentality, that the Church teachings are the only right ones.*" This is connected with the **feeling of superiority with respect to nonbelievers and other churches**: "*We feel like we own the truth*". In the case of rule breaking, there is often an experience of rejection or ostracism. Contributors at the same time connect this superior attitude and sharp criticism of others with "*the Church's fear of the world*". All this makes it impossible to freely and competently debate serious questions.

## **2. Participation**

### **2.1 Conditions for participation**

One of the main fruits of the discernment is reviving the **awareness of personal co-responsibility**, the longing to continue with greater openness and the willingness to participate in the life of the parish, Church, living from Christ's Easter joy.

#### *2.1.1 The need for activation and engaging everyone*

A common theme of the contributions is the issue of **activity or passivity** and disproportion of the level of engagement between active and passive believers. "*Activity can originate from parishioners and it suffices, if they are given **space and trust**.*" A problem in more closed communities may be the development of a "core", which takes care of everything and into which it is difficult to penetrate.

### **2.2 Authority in the Church**

#### *2.2.1 Gifts and services in the Church*

Authority is a quality and also a gift of the person who is a **servant** of the community. That is why it is necessary to exercise authority on the basis of one's own **personal growth**, in which the bearer of authority better and more sensitively **discerns the gifts** of individual community members. Authority also gives space for the personal **charisms** of individuals according to their competencies, allowing for wider activity of lay people. They need support from the Church and they should be guided and formed for their service. In the synodal groups there sounded a desire to **develop services** in the liturgy, in caring for the ill and aged, in catechesis, in preparation for the sacraments and accompaniment.

#### *2.2.2 Priests and lay people*

The priest, as the bearer of authority granted to him through the Bishop Christ, the Good Shepherd, is **one of the constitutive** elements of the community of believers. Naturally this

places great **demands** on him. People do not expect only theological erudition from their priest, but also, and primarily, ordinary closeness, openness, listening, the opportunity for open communication among equals, without arrogance or superiority, trust of lay people, a team spirit, and support of the charisms and activities of believers. The greatest **injuries** then occur where there is a **rift** between priest and lay people. This shows up in the priest's isolation and inaccessibility, arrogant communication, political behaviour, the creation of elites, lack of trust in parishioners and blocking of their activities. *"The priest himself will not save it."*

### *2.2.3 Women in the Church*

The **changing role of women** in society and discovery of their specific charisms call for discovering **an authentic form of service for women in the Church**. Women in the Church should be an asset for developing the ability to listen in the community, for teaching natural empathy, understanding of different problems, related for instance to married life. In the Church today **there is no doubt** about the benefit of women's representation in consulting and decision-making functions, but it is still truly **fulfilled only to a small extent**. Some voices even say that the involvement of women in the life of the Church should take a service-sacramental form. And this is not only related to lay person services, there are even calls for discussing the possibility of deacon and priestly consecration of women.

### *2.2.4 The priest and his place in the parish*

The role of the priest in the parish is to support a **life with the sacraments, the spiritual direction of the parish, and the connecting and bonding** of people. In the contributions, a call to **permanent formation of Pastors** can be heard. **The Bishop** should speak openly with parishioners about his priests. And he should also address priest's transfer with sensitivity, as there are real ties to the local community and governance, as well as a delicate network of personal ties.

### *2.2.5 Clericalism*

In synodal communications there resounded pain from encounters **with abuse of authority**. At times, people feel the lack of a Pastor, who expresses an interest, listens and informs them subsequently after making a judicious decision. This relationship between believers and their Pastors is very important, valuable and fragile. It can be **disrupted** easily. Thus, to the detriment of the whole, authority appropriates, hardens and becomes a mere formality, which can lead to authoritarianism. This then leads to **loss of loyalty** on the part of the People of God, **rebellion** or **loss of a willingness** to cooperate, and passivity may appear. Among **priests a relationship thus damaged** appears in the form of arrogance, insufficient dialogue, insufficient empathy and patience, they become hard to understand, and their style becomes too directive instead of encouraging.

### *2.2.6 Care for a mature priestly personality*

The priest's position in the life of the Church requires a **high degree of engagement**. That is why they need to make use of the **services** of mediation and supervision, helping to process different wounds, work with motivation, develop communication skills like Jesus did. Insufficient care here leads to demotivation, burnout and resignation. It is also necessary for priests, as pastors, to create a **fraternal community**, to encourage each other and avoid the results of harmful loneliness and burnout. It is also necessary to make efforts for **feedback in the parish** and moments of **spiritual pause** lead to the gradual growth of personality and profiling of the mature priestly form. **Communication with superiors** is necessary: the bishop and his authorized persons must have a clear picture of how to help **priests in crisis**, how to receive them, lead a constructive dialogue and look for a solution.

### *2.2.7 Celibacy*

The issue of celibacy arose in several contexts. At synodal meetings, it was said that **celibacy** is accepted in the church, and is an **authentic** experience of the **service** of a priest. Bishops in their reflection also stated that alongside proposals to make celibacy voluntary there are also many believers who take the opposite stance, and accept celibacy of priests with gratitude. Similarly, they state that many priests say they are satisfied with this form of life. In diocesan syntheses the question of the **effectiveness of celibacy** in connection with **immature** behaviour of priests was also raised. There is further a call for opening a **discussion** about **making celibacy voluntary**, as to whether this form of life for priests today is a tool of evangelization or a holdover from the past. People see that making a change can have several positive effects: primarily increasing the number of priests, further a greater maturity and ability to understand the problems of parishioners (contact with day to day reality of life), a firm relational base for priests and the elimination of sexual scandals. Further discussions were led about the consecration of married men.

## 2.3 Discernment and decision-making

Synodal joint decision-making is an important theme for local Church life. On the level of dioceses and parishes discernment and decision-making about a number of matters are necessary. At times, however, matters are resolved without deliberation, in a confused manner and unprofessionally. A change from an authoritative manner of behaving to a **dialogue-based style of decision-making** is seen as necessary.

### 2.3.1 Dioceses and parishes

A lot of believers believe that communication on the **diocesan level** is key. This is a necessary structure of communication based on **subsidiarity**, into which the bishop, the bishop's clerks, priests and other workers on the vicariate and parish level enter. However, here we come up against a low level of **awareness** of what is happening in the dioceses. Although during the Eucharistic prayer believers pray for their bishop every day, **they do not** always **consider the diocese to be their own**. That is why they often ask for **closer** contact with the bishop, as they long for **earnest and real interest** in the life of believers from the diocese. A measuring stick of coexistence in a diocese is **summer transfers in personnel at parishes**; these are carried out, but there is often a lack of communication, people want an explanation. An important circuit of communication on the diocese level is created by **economic matters**. Here we find situations ranging from already highly developed, successful forms of cooperation to poor, often insufficient communication of the bishop's office with economic councillors, to conflicts of interest.

Revival of the Church is expected to happen in **parishes**, because these are by their nature established like living communities of believers which respond to a longing "*for a greater opportunity to share personal experience of faith in an open community.*" It is necessary to continuously check the conditions of the **foundations of parish coexistence**. Responsible people in parishes thus commonly encounter problems such as **lack of people, weak teamwork** and **fear** of communicating with each other.

### 2.3.2 Pastoral and economic councils

The call for pastoral and economic councils as a necessary **parish communication tool** is unanimous. Thus, they should also be established where this has not yet happened. "*Often they do not exist, the Bishop overlooks it.*" It is further necessary to work on their **functionality**. **A comprehensive process of discernment and decision-making** gives space to **all members** of parish councils to sufficiently **express themselves** and make the best use of their **qualifications**. From the witness of synodal groups we have found out, that in reality the decision-making process **does not take place** in its full **scope**. As a result decisions are ad hoc, **forceful** or a mere **formality**. Every good decision requires that it be communicated **well, transparently and understandably** to the whole. Because if it is not sufficiently accepted by

the community, it will not work. On the contrary, the more members of the parish accept that they bear a responsibility for the parish's functioning, the more effective will be decisions made by parish councils.

Similarly, economic and pastoral councils are a tool for making the best decisions on the **diocesan level**, thanks to the involvement of competent people. It is necessary to emphasize that this board must be filled by competent people, meetings must be well-prepared and managed, minutes must be taken and the results of meetings must be thoroughly and clearly communicated to the public.

### *2.3.3 Joint decision-making and teamwork*

Contributors call for the greatest possible involvement in decision-making. *"We want a parish that is like a family with responsibilities."* They proposed increasingly **connecting factual joint decision-making with teamwork**. In teamwork the entirety of those, who contribute to the discernment and decision-making process, comes into play, and shows the **importance of quality management (leadership)**. On a foundation thus laid, it will be possible to think over jointly conceived work for the parish how to *"entrust priests primarily with pastoral care, so they are not overburdened with administration."* Then it will be possible "to delegate, strengthen the joint responsibility of parishioners, to connect the community."

## **2.4 The benefit of synodality in the decision-making process**

### *2.4.1 Discernment*

The synod on synodality teaches us primarily **collective discernment**. In **prayer** the process of searching for **genuine** impulses and calls. Together we ask **where the Spirit is leading us** and what steps we should take. We can **weaken or even destroy** the process, fragile in its nature, if we stop praying or if we lose sight of our goal, our concentration or even ourselves. Stagnation and the inability to make decisions can then develop. Although the moment of collective discernment has a key role in the decision-making process, in the synodal process only a small number of groups focused directly on this theme. Discernment however was carried out in the practical work of the groups.

### *2.4.1 Transparent and competent decision-making*

The process of **decision-making** follows from **prior discernment** and is the culmination of a long, involved, complex and rich process. Although **decision-taking** is, as a rule, determined in advance, and either an individual or a small board is responsible for it, everyone should be involved in the **mentioned decision-making process**.

There is a call for **greater transparency** in the decision-making process in financial matters, in the pastoral direction of parishes and dioceses and in the related matters of filling positions in parishes and Bishop's seats.

Synodal groups dedicated special attention to the necessity for **competent decision-making**. The Church in itself unites many areas and influences from society, bringing many opportunities and new perspectives into its life. For any decision to be competent, it must be well discussed and frequently consulted with experts. People in the groups often stated that there are many moments which **prevent conscientious and competent decision-making**: Fears from a civil society lead to restraint and an **inability to listen to true experts**. In the overwhelming rush of issues and the complexity of problems, the common practice of decision-making in the Church is to reach **for simple solutions or for solutions which have not been prepared by competent persons**. Instead of conscientious discernment, often a certain elite [of the parish] makes the decision. Forceful, elitist and clerical decisions, whose competence is

very low, then are the result. The ability to “*let oneself be advised from the outside*” is here almost non-existent.

### 3. Mission

The Church “accepts the **mission** to proclaim the Kingdom of Christ and God and to make disciples of all the nations.”(LG 5) In contrast with the themes of communion and co-responsibility, the theme of mission resounds less often, but it does so with a great urgency. Many contributors state that the **Church tends to be closed**, that “*we live faith for ourselves*”. They continue that both as individuals, individual communities, but also the parish and the Church as whole: “*We are better at making an impression in our own ranks than talking understandably about salvation and values with people who are searching, although that was the founder’s plan.*” The need for greater openness is vital, good communication and transparency are lacking. Many state that great opportunities can be created for a synodally tuned Church society in this respect. This should not be about activism at all costs, but rather **fulfilling the mission** in everything we do.

#### 3.1 Evangelization: to bear witness to the world

The core of the Church's proclamation at any time and in any form is, according to the group, **authentic joy from God**, the proclamation of **hope and the primacy of God’s love**. Education in faith, formation and personal development, small communities in parishes are all seen as necessary conditions for evangelization and proclamation. Regard for persons who are marginalized in any way is also mentioned. Rather than public evangelization, emphasis is placed on **relationships, on attentive, listening and a loving approach to people, to personal witness**: “*To not be afraid to go out among people, to find out about what they live for, to not be afraid to enter into their suffering and to let them be transformed, to have an impact directly there. To be recognizable as Christians through the “light in our eyes,” to bear witness through life, “there is no need to push anyone, it would actually be great if people themselves asked when they see us”.* “**Harsh judgment, criticism and prejudices** against 'non-believers' harm better relations with the world outside of the Church.” Some contributors mentioned that we are not used to and do not know how to communicate our witness or experience, to share how we experience our faith, or how to engage in a dialogue about spiritual matters. Contributors also identified the following other hurdles in particular: laziness, lack of interest, poor motivation, as well as **fear of confrontation, incompetence and lack of preparation for dialogue with 'non-believers'**. Defensiveness, moralizing and looking down on non-Church goers were all mentioned as paths leading nowhere.

#### 3.2 Transmitting faith within the Christian community

Believers would welcome it if the Church paid special attention in transmitting faith to children and young people. Worries that the young generation may be completely **estranged** from the Church are prevalent across dioceses. “*I see how hard it is for them to take the discrepancies between the proclaimed teachings and real life, our young people are **no longer willing to “get over”** these discrepancies.* The departure of young generations from the Church is seen with great worry across dioceses.

#### 3.3 The image of the Church in society and the need for transparency

According to contributors, the Church has something to offer, but it is not able to communicate this. The Church’s media image is seen as very bad: **lack of transparency**, particularly in the

area of economics and decision-making, obsolescence, lack of media capabilities, the impression that the Church is removed from reality. It would be advisable to get advice from media experts. According to contributors, the church is understandable for the outside world in its activities carried out for the benefit of the **disadvantaged**, in schools and in social work. An intellectual connection with society should be more pronounced. It is necessary to speak out on **current themes**, social, ethical and moral issues. *“Representatives of the Church should always concentrate primarily on proclaiming the Gospel in their media appearances.”* In contributions across the dioceses mention is often made of the **highly positively perceived personage of Pope Francis**, with an emphasis on his openness, authenticity, on his vision of the Church as a "field hospital".

### **3.4 The Church “proceeding” in dialogue with today’s society**

The synodal process showed that on the one hand, there is a great **interest** among believers to enter into dialogue with the secular society, on the other hand **disappointment** due to the lack of success of this effort. People do not know how to proceed. That is why it is necessary to lead a **cultivated dialogue** with them about all sorts of topics, not just about faith, to take an active interest in their lives with awareness of **mutual enrichment**, to respect their story and to not make useless demands of them, or "not to put them" into a box, so that people who long for spirituality do not have to search for alternative sources.

Believers are aware of the estrangement of the Church and the world around it, the source of which is often the already-mentioned media image of the Church, but also the Church’s inability to speak to people today **in a language they understand**. Believers want a Church that does not stand outside of what is happening in society, but which in a competent, understandable and inspirational manner enters into current themes which are important for all of society.

In contributions from the groups it was stated that the Church is **insufficiently engaged in public life**. Meanwhile this engagement has a great potential: it creates a natural situation for dialogue between Christians and their surroundings. It was emphasized that parish activities should become more "**low threshold**", open to everyone. Emphasis was placed on cooperation with in parishes, including cooperation with all the elements of public life in a given area.

### **3.5 The Church in a dialogue with other Christians**

Ecumenism as a way to growing community among Christians is seen to a great degree as an integral part of synodality. However, it turned out that a lot of contributors do not have any experience with Christians of other denominations. There are places where we only quietly tolerate each other or where we **don't know each other** and we **look past each other**. Besides purely ecumenical **joy** there is also a feeling a **disappointment** about the evaporation of ecumenical efforts and the awareness that new impulses are needed. **Ecumenism actually lived** on the level of the Church (relationship, friendship, prayer, Gospel study, charity) are valued. The issue of sharing of the **Eucharist** is a source of pain, particularly with mixed marriages. Potential for growth in the ecumenical community is seen mainly in mutual learning, education and withdrawing from “power-based” positions with respect to each other.

### **3.6 Education and formation for a mature Christian life**

During the synodal process, believers expressed a wish for **growth to Christian maturity** and suitable forms of formation and accompaniment in this growth. The Church should universally help to shape *“free, bold Christians who are open to others”*. In the context of the theme of the growth of Christians, the question of **education and spiritual accompaniment** becomes significant. With respect to upbringing and education, the following areas were mentioned most often: content of Christian faith and life in faith; the Bible; understanding the liturgy. Quality formation and education must be offered not only to priests, but to all believers, particularly to those entrusted with responsibility and service in the community.

### **3.7 Special care for developing the synodal mentality and manner of acting**

The contributions from synod groups give evidence that the synodal process has met with a highly positive reception as an opportunity for the Church **to set out on the path of journeying together**. The synodal process is seen as the beginning of a new stage in Church revitalization. In the local Church, there was a desire to gather courage to make changes, which should focus on ensuring that the contents of Christ's teachings are not drowned in set forms: "*The synodal journey brings with it the necessity of a change in mentality.*" The **method** of working in synodal groups met with a very positive response. The groups contain a great potential for initiatives for growth in dialogue, in a culture of meeting, listening and collective discernment. In parishes and dioceses it is necessary **to progress** towards a synodal way of life. Many participants in the process are convinced that synodality is not possible without the development of **personal experience and relationship with God**. An authentic life in faith and openness to God's workings in us and around us can thus be considered as determining conditions for developing the Church's synodality.

## **Conclusion**

For life of the Church permeated with the spirit of synodality the fundamental question is what Church does Jesus Christ want. In light of the synodal process we see the following points as key for the development of synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church:

### **To be the Church of Jesus's disciples**

- We want to shape the Church as a family, home and space of mutual trust, a community focused primarily on developing relationships with God and with each other, characterized by attention of individuals to others and particularly care for the weakest and marginalized.
- We want to develop a culture of mutual listening, which demands and enables the freedom to express one's opinion and openness to learn lessons from brothers and sisters in faith. For this reason, we think it is fundamental to renounce in the Church the mentality and practice of manipulation, superiority, fear, distrust, abuse of power and pressure on different groups.
- We want to live in an open society, which gets along even with those who are not part of it and does not stand in systematic opposition to the world, but which looks at the world as a work of God and a space in which God's love is manifest. We want to be a Church which bears witness to the world and to each and every person about the fullness of life in Christ and which brings joy and hope to it. At the same time we desire to strengthen and discern the signs of the time, through which God speaks to us in events, needs and wishes of those present in our lives and the lives of our contemporaries.

### **To renew the communion of the Church**

- We want to support living awareness of belonging to the Church. The awareness that we all together form a single community cannot lead to overlooking the specific mission each of us has. Rather on the contrary, it is necessary to ensure that each member of the people of God discovers, accepts and develops authentically precisely that calling which he or she received from God.
- We want to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, who does not cease in every age to bestow on Christ's Church specific gifts of his love meant for the service of the community.

- We want to look for and support forms of cooperation, participation and joint responsibility in the Church and thus to creatively react to the passivity of a large percentage of the members of the people of God, which leads to disgust, resignation and loss of joy from the fact that we are part of a single family of God.
- We want to build a Church as a community, which has its model in the communion of the trinity of God, which means to develop authentic relationships founded on love, transparency and openness.
- We want to support the growth of "small communities" of believers and to lead them so that they do not become closed in on themselves, but are rather interconnected and prepared for service. It is necessary to develop the spirituality of the community, mutual respect and interdependence in relationships between Priests and lay people, Priests and Bishops, Bishops and all the members of the part of the people of God entrusted to them.
- We want to support the principles of communication, transparency, subsidiarity and discernment in the decision-making process. On the level of dioceses and parishes, these elements can find use e.g. in activities of the pastoral and economic councils.
- We want to experience liturgy as a unique source of life of the Church. For that reason it is necessary to devote sufficient attention to it, so that it carefully discerns what belongs to its authenticity, what must be expressed anew in an understandable way, and how to exercise the principle of the active participation of all believers.

### **To grow in a pure Christian calling in the Church**

- We want the Church's proclamations (especially in the form of sermons) following from the Bible to be focused more on building a personal relationship with the Holy Trinity, a joyful life derived from the Resurrection of our Lord and the goodness and mercy of God. The Bible should become the center on which catechism, spiritual accompaniment and education of the people of God are founded.
- We want to develop education in faith and in other areas as well (e.g. interpersonal communications, psychology, economics). The attentive, systematic and long-term formation of the people of God will strengthen our certainty in a dialogue with today's world and our anchoring in that which we can bring to society. This also presumes and requires that we become well aware of the connections of current events in the world.
- We want to fulfil the ideal of Christian marriage and family, although we are aware that this is not always easy. That is why we also want to look for a solution to the often urgent situation of people whose marriage has failed. The local Church should try in these specific instances to accompany, discern and integrate.
- We want the synodal mentality to permeate on all levels of the life of the Church. We want to use the method of collective discernment under the leadership of the Holy Spirit for this, which was proven to work during the diocesan phase of the synodal process in the work of synodal groups.

**Elaborated by: The National Synodal Team  
Velehrad, July 6<sup>th</sup> 2022**

**Coram me**

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Prague, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022**