

# Document of the Continental Stage (DCS)

## Chapter Three Section 1

Before you to continue the ongoing work for the Synod please take time to read the first 2 chapters of the working document.

The accompanying Summary provided by the Cardiff Contact Team is for use in conjunction with the DCS to enable you to form a clearer understanding (should you need it) of the document. Many have criticised the working document for its length, language, and phraseology. The Summary hopefully will be of use to you in this regard.

Below you will find the relevant text of the DCS pertinent to section 1 of chapter 3 which you have chosen and the Summary. The 3 questions posed by the Continental Phase of the process are attached to the email you have received. These too have been kindly been reworded by the Cardiff Team and we use them with their blessing.

### LISTENING THAT BECOMES WELCOMING

32. In this journey, the Churches have realised that the path to greater inclusion – the enlarged tent – is a gradual one. It begins with listening and requires a broader and deeper conversion of attitudes and structures, as well as new approaches to pastoral accompaniment; it begins in a readiness to recognise that the peripheries can be the place where a call to conversion resounds along with the call to put the Gospel more decisively into practice. Listening requires that we recognize others as subjects of their own journey. When we do this, others feel welcomed, not judged, free to share their own spiritual journey. This has been experienced in many contexts, and for some this has been the most transformative aspect of the whole process. The synodal experience can be read as a path of recognition for those who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church. This is especially true for those lay men and women, deacons, consecrated men and women who previously had the feeling that the institutional Church was not interested in their faith experience or their opinions.

33. The reports also reflect on the difficulty of listening deeply and accepting being transformed by it. They highlight the lack of communal processes of listening and discernment and call for more training in this area. Furthermore, they point to the persistence of structural obstacles, including hierarchical structures that foster autocratic tendencies; a clerical and individualistic culture that isolates individuals and fragments relationships between priests and laity; sociocultural and economic disparities that benefit the wealthy and educated; and the absence of “in-between” spaces that foster encounters between members of mutually separated groups. Poland’s report states *“Not listening leads to misunderstanding, exclusion, and marginalization. As a further consequence, it creates closure, simplification, lack of trust and fears that destroys the community. When priests do not want to listen, making excuses, such as in the large number of activities, or when questions go unanswered, a sense of sadness and estrangement arises in the hearts of the lay faithful. Without listening, answers to the faithful’s difficulties are taken out of context and do not address the essence of the problems they are experiencing, becoming empty moralism. The laity feel that the flight from sincere listening stems from the fear of having to*

*engage pastorally. A similar feeling grows when bishops do not have time to speak and listen to the faithful.”*

34. At the same time, the reports are sensitive to the loneliness and isolation of many members of the clergy, who do not feel listened to, supported and appreciated: perhaps one of the least evident voices in the reports is that of priests and bishops, speaking for themselves and of their experience of walking together. A particularly attentive listening must be offered to enable ordained ministers to negotiate the many dimensions of their emotional and sexual life. The need to ensure appropriate forms of welcome and protection for the women and eventual children of priests who have broken the vow of celibacy, who are otherwise at risk of suffering serious injustice and discrimination, is also noted.

*An option for young people, people with disabilities and the defence of life.*

35. There is universal concern regarding the meagre presence of the voice of young people in the synod process, as well as increasingly in the life of the Church. A renewed focus on young people, their formation and accompaniment is an urgent need, also as a way to implement the conclusions of the previous Synod on “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” (2018). On that occasion, it was precisely young people who brought out the need for a more synodal Church in view of the transmission of the faith today. The “Digital Synod” initiative is a significant attempt to listen to young people and offers new insights for the proclamation of the Gospel. Antilles’ report states, *“Since our young people experience a high degree of alienation, we need to make a preferential option for the young.”*

36. Numerous reports point to the lack of appropriate structures and ways of accompanying persons with disabilities and call for new ways of welcoming their contribution and promoting their participation: in spite of its own teachings, the Church is in danger of imitating the way society casts them aside. *“The forms of discrimination listed – the lack of listening, the violation of the right to choose where and with whom to live, the denial of the sacraments, the accusation of witchcraft, abuse – and others, describe the culture of rejection towards persons with disabilities. They do not arise by chance but have in common the same root: the idea that the lives of persons with disabilities are worth less than others”* (Report of the special synodal consultation of persons with disabilities by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life).

37. Equally prominent is the commitment of the People of God to the defence of fragile and threatened life at all its stages. For example, for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, it is part of synodality to *“study the phenomenon of female migration and offer support to women of different age groups; to pay special attention to women who decide to have an abortion due to fear of material poverty and rejection by their families in Ukraine; to carry out educational work among women who are called upon to make a responsible choice when going through a difficult time in their lives, with the aim of preserving and protecting the lives of unborn children and preventing abortion; to care for women with post-abortion syndrome.”*

*Listening to Those who Feel Neglected and Excluded*

38. The reports clearly show that many communities have already understood synodality as an invitation to listen to those who feel exiled from the Church. The groups who feel a sense of exile are diverse, beginning with many women and young people who do not feel their

gifts and abilities are recognised. Within these groups, that among themselves are highly heterogeneous, many feel denigrated, neglected, misunderstood. Longing for a home also characterises those who, following the liturgical developments of the Second Vatican Council, do not feel at ease. For many, the experience of being seriously listened to is transformative and a first step towards feeling included. On the other hand, it was a source of sadness that some felt that their participation in the synod process was unwelcome: this is a feeling that requires understanding and dialogue.

39. Among those who ask for a more meaningful dialogue and a more welcoming space we also find those who, for various reasons, feel a tension between belonging to the Church and their own loving relationships, such as: remarried divorcees, single parents, people living in a polygamous marriage, LGBTQ people, etc. Reports show how this demand for welcome challenges many local Churches: *“People ask that the Church be a refuge for the wounded and broken, not an institution for the perfect. They want the Church to meet people wherever they are, to walk with them rather than judge them, and to build real relationships through caring and authenticity, not a purpose of superiority”* (EC USA). They also reveal uncertainties about how to respond and express the need for discernment on the part of the universal Church: *“There is a new phenomenon in the Church that is absolutely new in Lesotho: same-sex relationships. [...] This novelty is disturbing for Catholics and for those who consider it a sin. Surprisingly, there are Catholics in Lesotho who have started practising this behaviour and expect the Church to accept them and their way of behaving. [...] This is a problematic challenge for the Church because these people feel excluded”* (EC Lesotho). Those who left ordained ministry and married, too, ask for a more welcoming Church, with greater willingness to dialogue.

40. Despite the cultural differences, there are remarkable similarities between the various continents regarding those who are perceived as excluded, in society and also in the Christian community. In many cases their voice has been absent from the synod process, and they appear in reports only because others speak about them, lamenting their exclusion: *“As the Bolivian Church, we are saddened that we have not been able to effectively reach out to the poor on the peripheries and in the most remote places”* (EC Bolivia). Among the most frequently mentioned excluded groups are: the poorest, the lonely elderly, indigenous peoples, migrants without any affiliation and who lead a precarious existence, street children, alcoholics and drug addicts, those who have fallen into the plots of criminality and those for whom prostitution seems their only chance of survival, victims of trafficking, survivors of abuse (in the Church and beyond), prisoners, groups who suffer discrimination and violence because of race, ethnicity, gender, culture and sexuality. In the reports, all of them appear as people with faces and names, calling for solidarity, dialogue, accompaniment and welcome.

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## SUMMARY OF SECTION 1

32. In this journey, the Churches have realised that the path to this enlarged tent is a gradual one. It begins with listening and requires an openness, as well as new ways of walking with others. We are called to recognise the needs of those at the edges. When we do this, others feel welcomed, not judged, free to share their own spiritual journey. The synodal experience can be a means to welcome those who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church.

33. The reports also reflect on the difficulty of listening deeply and call for more training in this area. They point to various obstacles, including:

- Church structures
- Poor relationships between priests and laity
- The gap between rich and poor and the different levels of education.

Much of the Church's work is affected by poor communication between the different parts of the community.

34. The reports also reflect on the loneliness and isolation of many members of the clergy. One of the least evident voices in the reports is that of priests and bishops, speaking for themselves and of their experience of walking together.

*An option for young people, people with disabilities and the defence of life*

35. There is universal concern regarding the meagre presence of the voice of young people in the synod process, as well as increasingly in the life of the Church. A renewed focus on young people, their formation and accompaniment is an urgent need, also as a way to implement the conclusions of the previous Synod on "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment" (2018).. The "Digital Synod" initiative is a significant attempt to listen to young people and offers new insights for the proclamation of the Gospel.

36. Numerous reports point to the lack of appropriate structures and ways of accompanying persons with disabilities and call for new ways of welcoming their contribution and promoting their participation.

37. Equally prominent is the commitment of the People of God to the defence of fragile and threatened life at all its stages. The Church is called to understand better the experience of women forced to consider abortion and the effect it is likely to have.

*Listening to Those who Feel Neglected and Excluded*

38. Many communities have already understood synodality as an invitation to listen to those who feel exiled from the Church. There are many such groups. Some reports reflect on those who feel unwelcome following the changes to the liturgy. For many, the experience of being seriously listened to is a first step towards feeling included. On the other hand, it was a source of sadness that some felt that their participation in the synod process was unwelcome: this is a feeling that requires understanding and dialogue.

39. Some feel a tension between belonging to the Church and their own loving relationships, such as: remarried divorcees, single parents, people living in a polygamous marriage, LGBTQ people, etc. Reports show how this demand for welcome challenges many local Churches. Those who left ordained ministry and married, too, ask for a more welcoming Church, with greater willingness to dialogue.

40. There are many similarities between the various continents regarding those who are perceived as excluded, in society and also in the Christian community. In many cases their voice has been absent from the synod process, and they appear in reports only because others speak about them. Among the most frequently mentioned excluded groups are:

- the poorest,
- the lonely elderly
- indigenous peoples
- migrants
- street children
- alcoholics and drug addicts
- survivors of abuse (in the Church and beyond)
- prisoners
- groups who suffer discrimination and violence because of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and sexuality.

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