



## **Feedback from the Nordic Bishops' Conference on the preparatory document for the continental phase of the synodal world process**

### **General feedback:**

The first phase of the synodal process was very well received in our 5 countries with 7 dioceses/prelatures. The questions were not answered by committees or councils, but really found their way into the local congregations.

However, very few responses were received to the questions in the working document on the second phase. This is partly due to the very inconvenient timing of the survey in November/December.

**"After reading the DCS in an atmosphere of prayer, which insights resonate most intensely with the concrete experiences and realities of the Church on your continent? What experiences seem new or enlightening to you?"**

Due to the above-mentioned low number of responses, the coordinators in Denmark and Sweden decided to revisit some points of the syntheses of the first phase. For both countries, the desire mentioned in No. 30 was emphasized "for a church which boldly proclaims its true doctrine and at the same time accepts and embraces people and accompanies them pastorally, i.e. authentically lives the tension between truth and mercy".

This includes ecumenical cooperation not only as an option but as a necessity, the focus on young people, the inclusion of lay people also in decision-making and its transparency.

One insight that is particularly important for Catholics in Finland and in Northern Norway is the ever-increasing tendency to see the Church mainly as a power structure that needs to be challenged and changed. However, it would be better not to forget that any

real renewal and strengthening of the synodality of and in the Church must start from the basic principles of the Church itself - from the grounds on which the Church was founded, from the side of Jesus Christ our Lord.

**"Having read the DKE and paused in prayer, what major tensions and divergences are important from your continent's perspective? Consequently, what problems and issues should be addressed and considered at the next stages of the process?"**

Given the pastoral and cultural situation in the North of Europe, we would consider the following questions or issues to be the most important or interesting:

(a) The tension between **institution and charism**.

This tension has always been present in the Church, but seems to have taken on a new dynamic in modern times. With regard to the DCS, this becomes clear in the question of the co-responsibility and participation of lay people - especially women - in decision-making processes within the church on the one hand, and the leadership and decision-making powers of ordained ministers on the other. The term "clericalism" is often mentioned in this context. Here it seems important to shape cooperation and the assumption of ministries according to ability. For example, although lay people cannot administer sacraments, they are often more professional and competent than ordained ministers in managing economic and administrative tasks.

Similarly, the often-mentioned call for transparency points to the tension between institution and charism. This transparency helps to provide a real account of decisions, their processes and criteria, and to promote communion and cohesion in parishes.

b) Tension between **faith and reason**, between **church and world**

As a Church in diaspora and, moreover, as a Church in highly secularized countries and societies, this tension is very evident in the North of Europe. How does the Church relate to the phenomena of a modern world, to issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, remarried divorcees, homosexuality and gender diversity? How can we succeed in integrating people who feel excluded from the Church but without abandoning or changing Church teaching?

A wish expressed by Catholics in our countries in this regard concerns the need for spiritual and catechetical deepening. Those who do not (any longer) know the faith and the teaching of the Church will not be able to have a real standpoint in the challenges and tensions, but will give in unreflectively to the demands for adaptation.

c) The increasing **polarization within the Catholic Church**

Another tension we see in the ecclesial landscape in Europe concerns the increasing polarization within the Catholic Church. The gap between "conservative" and "progressive", between "tradition" and "modernity" is becoming increasingly wide and more and more aggressive. This is particularly painful in the area of liturgy. The introduction of the Tridentine Rite under Pope Benedict XVI and its limitation by Pope Francis has led to tensions in some quarters.

Tensions within the Church are also - especially after the bitter experiences of the abuse cases - being made manifest in the sexual morality of the Catholic Church. Does the Church still have the right to express itself in a demanding manner on questions of morality and sexual morality, or has it forfeited this right? And to what extent is a distinction still made in this context between members of the Church and the Church itself?

**Looking at what emerges from the previous two questions, what priorities, recurring themes and calls to action can be shared with other local churches around the world and what can be discussed at the first session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023?**

A priority in the exchange with other local churches around the world must be the question of the nature of the Church. What is the church and what is it not? Is the church just a social institution or the body of the Lord? How can the Church be truly renewed without betraying its divine origin? It is very difficult to rekindle love for the Church after the transgressions of abuse, but in the end we only care about things we love, and without this new love awakened, felt and shown for the Church, the temptation can be great to see the Church only as a structural phenomenon that can be changed at will.

Therefore, the first Synodal Assembly should address this question and critically look at the tensions between the Church and the world and between faith and reason.