

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Synthesis synodal talks
Dutch dioceses

2nd Phase Synod of Bishops 2021-2024
For a synodal Church



Roman Catholic Church
The Netherlands

Synod talks Dutch dioceses 2024

A number of points emerged from the meeting of the XVI Ordinary General Synod of Bishops in October 2023, which require further reflection in the Church. The bishops' conferences worldwide were asked to report to the synod secretariat in May 2024 on the fruits of the synodal process in the local Churches. All reports together will form input for the working document of the bishops' meeting in Rome in October 2024.

The national working group on synodality (Landelijke Werkgroep Synodaliteit) in the Netherlands gave four themes for discussion to parishes, religious, Catholic lay movements and Catholic civil society organisations:

- Deepening our baptism as a basis for being Church
- Formation in a missional Church
- Participation in a welcoming Church
- Women in the life and mission of the Church

This synthesis is based on the synodal discussions in the Dutch dioceses:

Archdiocese of Utrecht
Diocese of Haarlem-Amsterdam
Diocese of Breda
Diocese of Groningen-Leeuwarden
Diocese of Rotterdam
Diocese of Roermond
Diocese of 's-Hertogenbosch

The synod talks in the seven dioceses bore much fruit. Approximately 1,750 believers participated in this second round of synod talks.

The participants in the talks were varied in composition, men and women, young and old, lay and ordained servants, religious, migrants, etc.

In general, discussion participants feel very committed to their church community and its future.

Many participants experienced the connecting effect of the synodal talks. The talks gave them confidence, in the power of God's Spirit, that the way forward can be taken together.



National Synthesis
Diocesan Phase part 2 2024
Dutch dioceses

SRKK Baarn, May 2024

Theme 1

Deepening baptism as the basis for being Church

A missional community is a community of consciously baptised people. In a missional Church, the emphasis is on being baptised. Several discussion participants experience being baptised as belonging to the Church and as a life task. They realise their shared responsibility for the Church, and its mission.

There are also discussion participants who say they see baptism as something that comes with it, as an automaticity. So how 'being baptised' is the basis of 'being Church' is not clear to everyone. Through baptism, we may be included in the Church, but it is not a key to Church involvement. Moreover, those who were baptised as infants did not make a conscious choice for baptism.

For some discussion participants, there is a distance between the theological and ecclesial meaning of baptism and as they actually experience baptism. They mention that they bear witness to their faith in their way of life with charity and service. However, this is by no means always explicitly recognisable in concrete deeds, enthusiasm and joy.

There is shyness to put words to faith, both among themselves and to the outside world. A personal relationship with Christ is lacking among some discussion participants.

Being baptised as the basis for our Church hood is a growth process (1.1). During that process, the joy that faith gives also grows. We want to share this joy (1.2). At several moments, one feels the connection (1.3) between baptism and the community of faith.

1.1 Growing

We see for many conversation participants that baptism is a beginning of a growth process in faith and in church involvement. Through the faith conversation, they often only discover that baptism is a foundation of their existence. You get baptism: a God-given sacrament. Several conversation participants expressed their joy at having found the Church as an anchor in their lives. Below are recommendations from the interview reports.

- Organising and participating in meetings and ongoing faith formation are needed through catechesis, prayer and faith conversations. This need is expressed by several discussion participants. Guidance and nourishment are needed to keep faith and community alive in the ever-changing society.
- Faith education in family, school and Church is very important for deepening faith. In this, the role of educators is seen as crucial by several discussion participants.
- Events such as illness, loss of loved ones or just joyful moments in life add strength and depth to faith.
- 'Doing things together' is important as a faith community, as a team, of which the pastor is part. Several discussion participants want to think about what lay people can do in the liturgy.
- Pastors who know people personally can appeal to their charisms and empower them. Church arises through community and cannot be done without the input of believers/baptised people.
- Believers also have a responsibility to remind each other of the vocation as baptised.
- A number of times it is pointed out that confirmation, as an initiation sacrament, is experienced more personally in relation to the age at which it is administered. Perhaps this is a good opportunity to deepen awareness of baptism, for confirmands and relatives.
- To meet different needs of believers, different forms of celebration and gathering are needed so that each can grow in 'being a disciple' of Jesus.

1.2 Handing out

With baptism, the baptised person becomes a new person, which may also become evident in personal life. Several discussion participants indicate how important their faith is for their whole life. They want to radiate the joy of faith to others, precisely because it means so much to themselves. They think it is important to go out to show that they are proud of their faith and want to show and share the joy and gladness of it.

- More than once, it is emphasised that handing out also means listening to each other. Handing out is not just 'sending', but seeing and hearing and learning from each other.
- Distribution can be done in traditions, customs and rituals, in intelligible language and in deeds, fuelled by prayer.
- The relationship with other churches is important: not isolating ourselves as Catholics, but giving out by working together as Christians.
- As a Church, take more initiative to engage with people from other cultural and religious backgrounds. That too is giving out.

1.3 Connecting

Connection between baptism and the community of faith can be made and felt in multiple moments and ways. The synodal discussions confirm that connection is essential: for believers among themselves who sometimes differ greatly from one another; between clergy and people; between men and women; between people of different cultures and ages.

- Handing out faith and calling to action can also, it is mentioned several times, be done by having the sacrament of Baptism in the Sunday celebration as inclusion in the community of faith. For those present, it is an additional moment of confirmation and renewal of the baptismal vows and of awareness of their mission as baptised persons.
- Those who are baptised join the community of believers of the World Church with many nationalities, which can be found both worldwide and in their own environment. Worldwide, we share the same recognisable liturgy.
- Many conversations call for a connective inclusive, unconditionally open Church.
- Creating connection within, but also outside, the church community.
- Celebrations and communal prayer, such as the rosary, discussion evenings and other activities contribute to mutual connection and the growth of personal relationship with Christ.
- Keeping in mind those who have a much looser connection with the Church for a time, the question is raised whether a form could also be found to reconnect with the Church later in life.

Theme 2

Formation in a missional Church

Several discussion participants feel the challenge of being missionary, of actively welcoming people to the Church, "letting the flame speak" and showing the bond of friendship with God and Jesus. But not everyone feels sufficiently equipped to do so. There is therefore a need for formation to spread the faith and bear witness to its value.

There is a demand for proper formation, both for parents who have their children baptised and for adults, but also for the re-energising of this sacrament by baptised people. In that formation, we want to stay close to ourselves and to Jesus. After all, in a missionary Church, Christ walks with us.

There is a need for formation (2.1) in a missional Church in multiple ways. Many discussion participants want to be co-involved (2.2) in passing on (2.3) the faith in different places (2.4) that speaks more through deeds (2.5) than words.

2.1 Formation

In meetings, believers want to be able to meet and talk about faith and experience togetherness. Here, the basic attitude of listening is important to be open to each other, hear each other's stories and make room for the voice of the Spirit. To deepen the awareness of being baptised and to experience baptism as the beginning of a new life with Christ in the community of the Church, ongoing and motivating catechesis is needed. There is a need for formation through various forms of work. Below are the forms of work mentioned.

- Participation in Bible groups, lectures and pilgrimages.
- The beauty of music is a bridge to the Church.
- Art as a starting point for faith conversation.
- Drawing attention to lived examples of faith.
- Formation through courage, hope and joy of life of refugees and other believers with a migration background.
- Being open to new experiences from new Catholics. They often bring new impetus to the Church, say several discussion participants.
- The connection of faith and tradition can be a source of strength and inspiration. Knowledge of the Bible and tradition adds depth to the life of faith and helps to understand its meaning for our time.

2.2 Co-involvement

There appears to be a strong desire among many discussion participants for co-involvement in passing on the faith. Below are suggestions for more co-involvement.

- To be missionary, ordained and laity must act together. Together, as the Body of Christ, they can advance the mission of the Church. There is a need for more interaction between ordained and laity.
- There is a plea for new structures: parochial, deanal and diocesan for joint consultation between ministers and laity.
- It points out that the Church is a Church of many talents. Space can be given to those talents by working not task-oriented but talent-oriented.
- Utilise the talents of parishioners get ministers along. As ministers, give space to the witness of the laity.

- Invest in parish think tanks and discussion groups of ministers and parishioners who feed each other and contribute ideas.

2.3 *Passing on*

Passing on and witnessing to faith used to be more natural than now. Faith is grace and a gift. You can't just hand that down. Why faith is passed on or not depends on many factors, such as zeitgeist, perception, explanation, personality, environment, etc. When transferring faith, most of the participants in the discussion perceived the community as important, as home. This internal connection between believers can be a valuable attribute when trying to build a bridge to people who are not (yet) connected to the Church. Below are recommendations from the conversations

- Sharing each other's life and faith stories inspires one's own faith and growth.
- From their own community, they want to reach out to people in the neighbourhood around the Church or in the wider community.
- From its own community, it wants to focus on young people and young adults. They want to respond to what is alive among them and to their questions about life and meaning.
- Young discussion participants report that their peers are also searching for meaning and faith for their daily lives. It is important that pastors and other believers learn to welcome and guide them with a listening ear, patience and love.
- Promote working in small groups to facilitate missionary outreach and the sharing of experiences. Small groups can also be more accessible to people from outside. Small groups strengthen the bonds between them, strengthening the community as a whole.
- Lay people ask ministers for support in inviting people to the ward.
- Many discussion participants feel that Catholics should show themselves in society and have a say in what is happening in society from their faith. They want to show the relevance of the Gospel to contemporary issues.

2.4 *Locations*

Formation of a missional Church happens in different places. Here, inviting positive communication, especially also via social media, is important to be findable. Some discussion participants say they miss places where you can easily take people, where people can grow in faith, simply and easily.

- Making faith resonate in families and supporting them in the process.
- Organise youth activities above-parochial, as larger groups are more contagious.
- Actively maintain links with Catholic schools. Take advantage of opportunities there to introduce children to the Catholic faith, customs and values.
- Celebrating the faith in the parish in unity, with multiple generations.
- Alpha meetings are mentioned several times as a good training ground.
- The various movements in the Church (Charismatic Renewal, Sant' Egidio etc.) are mentioned as places where people are formed in certain charisms.

2.5 *Deeds*

In a number of conversations, it emerged that being missionary also means being ready in your deeds for those around you, supporting and affirming them. In a society where contacts are often fleeting, parish and caritas have a connecting task. Shrinkage can be a challenge to become more authentic. Theology and morality are important, but there is more than that. Several discussion participants indicated that proclamation speaks more from loving deeds than from words.

- Diaconal activities: language lessons for refugees, meals for refugees or those in contact with street pastoralism, showing people the way to municipal agencies and organisations, etc.
- Visiting the elderly, sick, bereaved.
- Several times, it is stated that the Church's social teaching is too unfamiliar and could be propagated more.

Theme 3

Participation in a welcoming Church

Many discussion participants experience a sense of home in their faith community, the parish. They plead for a safe, listening and loving Church. When the Church does not put welcoming love first, it obscures the face of Jesus Christ. Several conversations reveal that people feel it is important to let others be free. It is stressed that everyone is different and is allowed to be different. Many see this as a starting point for a welcoming Church.

A welcoming Church requires a certain attitude (3.1) with special attention to special groups (3.2). Recognisability (3.3) is needed to reach and welcome people.

3.1 Attitude

You can recognise a welcoming Church by the attitude of the faithful who attend churches there and the atmosphere. Many discussion participants feel that the Church should be there for everyone, quoting Pope Francis' words 'Para Todos!' People experience a tension between the shared desire to be a welcoming and hospitable community and Church rules and moral positions, especially on sexual diversity. If everyone is welcome by God, that should have implications for church rules, it is argued. The pope calls for an open conversation, including on complicated topics, but this space is not felt by some discussion participants. It is not about discussion, but dialogue.

- Don't deter with rules, but put Christ's love at the centre; love conquers all and accepts all.
- In reflecting on the basis of being Church, several interlocutors yearn for an inclusive understanding of being Church, where attention is paid to the truth in each, where each is invited to participate, where no one should be excluded, including from the sacraments.
- Several interlocutors call for more space to express faith in traditional and new forms. A Church that offers space for diversity and differences in religious experience provides opportunities for deepening and enrichment, they argue. Ask questions, do not judge, but seek understanding. This basic attitude, they say, also provides space for God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit.
- According to many participants, part of a welcoming Church is: welcome on entry, knowing each other outside celebrations and paying attention to each other, being missed when you are not there, being recognised when you come again, being addressed in your own language, meeting moments such as drinking coffee, understandable celebrations with simple language, being taken 'by the hand'.
- Recognisability, predictability and universality of the Eucharist are seen by some discussion participants as welcoming and unifying. Others feel that for new people the Eucharist is too big a step into the unknown. Other types of celebrations could accommodate this.
- There are discussion participants calling for the liturgy to be more in tune with current events and the daily lives of believers. At the same time, they indicate that they are not afraid of the mystery of the liturgy.

- As the Church, be 'table and travel companion'. Such an attitude also involves giving space to everyone's talents. A strong faith community allows many talents to flourish. That enriches the Church.

3.2 Special groups

The interviews mentioned groups that some interview participants felt needed special attention.

- Welcoming migrants and providing space for and learning from their customs and practices. That multiple cultures are present in the faith community is something 'to enjoy' and is 'an enrichment', read several interview reports. Someone described it as follows: 'Live 'building bridges' so that every believer knows that building bridges is part of the faithful life.
- Listening to young people and addressing them. Young people in some discussion groups said they are sensitive to rituals, symbols, worship, traditions, firmness, mysticism. Some young people need further conversation; others, on the contrary, appreciate rituals; still others want the main focus of the Church to be love.
- Several discussion groups are calling for better care for people from the LGBTQA+ community and segregated people. People are calling for embracing these groups. For some, this includes not 'tolerating' them or leaving them on the fringes and not excluding them from sacraments and for church functions. Dealing with LGBTQA+ believers should be given a mature place in the curriculum of priestly training.
- More attention is drawn to the vulnerable in society from caritas and diaconia and through pastoral and social contacts in bereavement, illness and problems.

3.3 Recognisability

The richness of faith is best shown in a way that is recognisable to a wider audience of all ages. Daring to show what touches you and daring to talk about it is part of a welcoming Church. Below are some suggestions from the conversations.

- There is a need for meaning in secular society. Pay attention to the Catholic values present among secularised people. Organise low-threshold activities around the Church and invite people in the neighbourhood to these so that they discover that they are welcome in the faith community.
- In proclamation, you should always try to make connections between exegesis and Church teaching on the one hand and the daily lives of believers on the other.
- Community around the Eucharist is mainly experienced in the social component of meeting and engaging with each other.
- Presenting and letting people experience the church as a safe space that is like a home, where there is room for silence and for God, and where you can meet.
- An active caritas and diaconia can be a strong signboard of the welcoming Church in society.
- Paying attention to the needs and injustice in the world.

Theme 4

Women in the life and mission of the Church

Several interview reports show a great appreciation of women's involvement and commitment to the Church. Many discussion participants feel that the spiritual and substantive contribution of women to all facets of the Church deserves more recognition than has been the case so far.

Most of the interview reports appear to take today's civil society as a reference point in talking about women in the Church.

Among women, there are varying experiences of feeling seen, heard and supported as women in the Church. Many women feel recognised. Others feel disrespected. In addition to the importance for the Church to be missional of using everyone's talents, a number of interviews expressly mentioned that women feel pain and sorrow due to obstacles to using their talents.

An interview report aptly articulates the plea: a common collaboration of men and women can help promote the dignity of every human person, justice and care for the common home. In these times, women and men need each other to pass on the faith. This includes a faithful reflection on the fact that the Church is made up of 'us'.

Several discussion participants call for more space (4.1) for women to contribute to the Church's mission. This requires exchange (4.2) between men and women. Equivalence (4.3) for a number of discussion participants implies that women should be admitted to all ordinations.

4.1 Space

The desire to contribute to the mission of the Church and be given the space and opportunities to do so prevails in conversations about the position of women in the Church. There is a desire for women to be accepted in all positions. One points out that men and women complement each other. Below are suggestions from the conversations.

- Giving theologically trained women permission to preach.
- Creating new ordained ministries, for both men and women, focused on mission.
- Pastoral positions that can be filled by non-ordained persons could be given official recognition.
- A more visible role of women in the Church in liturgy, in funerals and aftercare of bereaved families and in baptismal preparation.
- Different forms of celebration with men and women presiding.
- Give more women administrative positions, for example in parish leadership teams.
- Appoint women to the priesthood and pay more attention in training to the role of women in the Church.

It is important for the learning and living environment of priest students to reflect society, so that they learn to interact with men as well as women.

- During the discussions, all kinds of activities are reviewed in which women play an important role: organising diaconal activities, Bible evenings, study groups, faith formation, prayer circles, adult catechesis, parent-child catechesis, developing new rituals when returning to the Church, looking for differentiation in liturgical forms, visiting groups.

4.2 Exchange

Several conversation participants called for more exchange between men and women, listening to each other more in confidence and listening to each other precisely as men and women. Below are suggestions from the conversations.

- Spiritual formation in small groups, led by qualified men and women.
- Women bring equal and complementary talents that enrich governance. 'Being different' and 'complementarity' are discussed in several discussion groups. Typical qualities of the priest, such as knowing people, connecting with their gifts, looking after others, being caring,

connecting people, can perhaps be categorised as 'feminine' qualities rather than 'masculine' ones, says a discussion report.

- In moving towards equal gender representation, a mandatory women's advisory body could play a role.
- Women have repeatedly played a crucial role in salvation history in the biblical context. You could highlight that more in exchanges. Women like Deborah and Catherine of Siena and other holy women could serve as examples.

4.3 Equivalence

Men and women have equal dignity. They are created in the image of God. More than once, the conversations call for equality. Below are recommendations from the talks.

- Equality between men and women, including when it comes to positions and tasks. Equality is not given sufficient meaning within the Church in appeals to talents/competencies of women and men.
- Some participants call for discussion on the admission of women to all ordinations. They question why a woman could not be a good Catholic priest or bishop. Some discussion participants maintain that priesthood is reserved for unmarried men.
- Distinction between ordained and laity creates inequality. Some participants experience a great emphasis on liturgical priesthood and less on general priesthood.
- Deepening the content of faith and church teaching on women's vocation and position.
- Starting to admit women to deacon ordination is seen as desirable by most discussion participants.
- Several discussion participants ask for different solutions in different countries with different cultures. There is also some understanding that in a world church, women cannot be ordained as priests in one country.