



World Network of Professional Lay Ministers



Second World Meeting of Professional Lay Ministers

28th - 30th September 2024

Letter to the Synod Participants

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We write to you with hearts full of gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this synodal journey. Following our first meeting of lay ministers in Rome last year, we began a world network of lay ministers. While still small, we are a global network of professional ministers empowered by baptism, theologically trained, pastorally formed, and called to serve the mission of Christ in and on behalf of the Church. We come from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ghana, India, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Switzerland, the United States, and Vietnam. We serve as lay ecclesial ministers, pastoral workers, religious educators, chaplains and in many other roles. In a spirit of synodality, we gathered virtually from September 28-30th using the *Instrumentum Laboris* as a guiding text. We spent time praying together, sharing our stories and diverse experiences in ministry, listening to the Spirit in silence, and discerning the topics Communion, Participation, Plurality, Empowerment through a synodal process. In our worldwide meeting we experienced and lived a synodal Church. We therefore ask you, as members of the World Synod that is currently meeting, to take concrete steps to implement synodality in our Church.

Synodal way of discussing

Our three-day meeting used conversation in the Spirit as our model of communication. The lessons learned in this process are not only in the *content* of the conversation, but even more so from doing the *process itself*, with its emphasis on relationship and mutual encounter. We experienced that synodal discussion succeeds when there is listening without judgment. This builds trust. At this moment in our Church and our world— a moment of brokenness and polarization—synodal listening gives us a way to witness to communion that heals and moves beyond divisions. Done well, synodal conversations are joyful, even when the topic is difficult or the perspectives are different. They create lightness, empower and foster communion within the Church, and lead us together into mission. If this succeeds, a synodal Church can be a role model for social processes. Synodal listening opens and converts hearts, creating room for shared decision making and taking.

Prophetic voice in between

Lay ministers are in a unique position as we fully inhabit two social spaces: both the church and the world. Ours is a relational, bridge-building vocation, as we work to connect diverse and even disparate spaces where tension is often felt. A key aspect of being a prophetic voice is to amplify the voices of the marginalized, not just speaking on their behalf, but ensuring that they are

empowered to speak for themselves. This includes actively promoting diversity, mutual listening and understanding, and contributing to a more inclusive Church where all voices are heard and valued.

Our role

As co-responsible members of this shared synodal journey in mission, we balance our desire for unity with an awareness of diversity within our body, the Church. Lay ministers are present in many different roles across the world and are understood differently in different contexts. We are all professional ministers. In some countries we receive just compensation, in others we volunteer, while in still others we work full time and are not justly compensated. The special role of lay ministers makes it important that the structures to support lay ministers are strengthened. Despite all our differences, we have found that our common mission and shared experiences unite us in a feeling of solidarity. We work together with our brothers in the clergy while serving communities with diverse needs and concerns, always desiring reciprocity of relationship. Lay ministers foster synodality through collaboration in co-responsibility, inclusion, and communion across diverse communities and contexts.

Synodal theology and lay formation

Theological formation equips the lay faithful to participate fully in the life of the Church, helping us engage co-responsibly in meaningful conversations, accompanying people in their faith journeys, discernment, and decision-making processes. Integral formation that develops human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral skills should take place for the laity alongside those being formed for the priesthood, the diaconate, and religious life. Of special note is the need for theological education and pastoral skill development in the context of community life, which nourishes us. However, access to such opportunities varies greatly across regions, with some areas having few lay theologians, even fewer of whom are women. There is a need for institutional support for more lay people to study theology.

Walking together

We, lay ministers, are called to actively participate in this dynamic synodal process, guided by the Holy Spirit, to help the Church move forward together on a path of unity and shared mission. The synodal journey must not stop here. We commit to continuing this process, going further by embracing more face-to-face encounters, fostering deeper communion, and including all voices, especially those from the global south. We want to create global solidarity among lay ministers. We are responsible to one another. We recognize that synodality is not just a temporary process of discussion; it's the way of being Church in the modern world. We are excited to continue walking this path together, confident that the Holy Spirit will guide us into a future full of hope and promise.

We commit to living synodality in our contexts around the world, looking to foster synodality where it does not yet exist. We hope the presence of our network and our aspirations expressed in this letter will encourage, inspire, and help you to find concrete steps to do the same.

With hope and joy in Christ,

08 of October 2024

The participants of the 2nd World Meeting of Professional Lay Ministers

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