



SHAPING SYNODALITY IN EUROPE · WELS 2026

SYNODALITY IN EUROPE

*Experiences from Wels, ecclesial blockages and perspectives
of shared responsibility*

REPORT ON THE ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE OF THE TASK FORCE
AND ON THE TABLE CONVERSATIONS AT THE SYMPOSIUM IN WELS

OCTOBER 2026

Synodality in Europe

The first part is the summary, as it is also available in print. The second part contains the full text of the report; the key sentences are highlighted in colour.

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From Noordwijkerhout 1967 to Wels 2026

190

People on site

31

Countries

21

Tables

4

Languages

Between 1967 and 1996 the bishops of Europe met for nine symposia; from these encounters the Council of European Bishops' Conferences emerged in 1971. They were study meetings of the bishops, also attended by theologians and representatives of the councils of priests, the lay forum and religious. In the 1980s and 1990s the bishops read their times together. In Prague in 1993, after the fall of the Wall, bishops deliberated with lay people, priests and religious in an enlarged symposium; the groups contributed their views in their own reports. From 14 to 17 September 2026 the symposium "Shaping Synodality in Europe – From Vision to Roadmap" at Schloss Puchberg Education Centre near Wels stood in this line. In Wels, bishops, priests, religious, theologians, pastoral workers and committed baptised faithful sat in mixed groups at the same tables. A European Church Forum, as proposed at the close, could take up the tradition of the symposia.

The symposium was organised by the Catholic Private University Linz and the European Synodal Task Force of the CCEE, under the patronage of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences. Work took place at 21 tables in German, English, French and Italian, following the method of the Conversation in the Spirit that had already shaped the Synod. Each person speaks while the others listen; after a time of silence all take up what touched them in what was said, and together they name what emerges.

The symposium took no decisions. It stands between the Synod and the Ecclesial Assembly 2028 and has carried the experiences of the Synod into a wide circle of local Churches. Its results go to the Presidency of the CCEE and to all participants.

THIS REPORT

It draws on two sources that are evaluated separately, the online questionnaire of the European Synodal Task Force to the participants of the symposium and the reports from the table conversations at the symposium in Wels. The following pages bring together the essentials; the full text of the report is in the second part.

The tradition of the symposia of the European bishops

The first symposia were devoted to renewal within the Church. In the 1980s and 1990s they became places where the bishops of Europe read their times together.

RENEWAL AFTER THE COUNCIL

1967 NOORDWIJKERHOUT Post-conciliar diocesan structures

1969 CHUR Ministry and life of priests

1975 ROME The mission of the bishop in the service of faith

1979 ROME Youth and faith

READING THE TIMES

1982 ROME The collegial responsibility of bishops and bishops' conferences of Europe in the evangelisation of the continent

1985 ROME "Secularisation" and evangelisation in Europe today

1989 ROME Human attitudes to birth and death today: a challenge for evangelisation

1993 PRAGUE Living the Gospel in freedom and solidarity

1996 ROME Religion as a private matter and as a public concern

IN THIS LINE

2026 WELS **Shaping Synodality in Europe. Bishops, priests, religious, theologians and committed baptised faithful at the same tables**

Proposal CHURCH FORUM **A European Church Forum for Reading the Signs of the Times, every two years**

The symposia moved away early on from the secularisation paradigm. In its place came people's experiences of life. "Evangelisation means that the Church learns and teaches," as Carlo Maria Martini put it in 1989.

Based on Ivo Fürer, Die Entwicklung Europas fordert die Kirchen heraus. Die Tätigkeit des Rates der Europäischen Bischofskonferenzen (CCEE) von seiner Gründung 1971 bis 1996, ed. Margreth Küng, introd. Paul M. Zulehner, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag 2018. The titles are the themes of the symposia; the division into two phases follows the introduction by Paul M. Zulehner.

Who sat at the table in Wels

190 PEOPLE ON SITE, INCLUDING 165 PARTICIPANTS

139

of 165 participants were not members, experts or guests of the Synod assemblies in Rome.

■ not in Rome ■ in Rome (2023 and/or 2024)

Bishops

21

8

13

Research group

18

15

3

Other participants

126

116

10

Total

165

139

26

ORIGIN OF PARTICIPANTS, 31 COUNTRIES, 28 MEMBERS OF THE CCEE

Austria	42 ●●●	Germany	18 ●●●	Hungary	10
Belgium	8 ●	Switzerland	8 ●	England and Wales	7 ●
Czech Republic	7 ●	Ireland	6 ●	Lithuania	5 ●
Ukraine	5 ●●	France	4 ●	Saints Cyril and Methodius	4 ●
Netherlands	4 ●	Nordic countries	4	Portugal	4
Slovenia	4	Italy	3 ●	Luxembourg	3 ●
Romania	3	Scotland	3	Slovakia	3
Latvia	2	Poland	2	Albania	1 ●
Bulgaria	1 ●	Holy See	1	Croatia	1
Moldova	1	Cyprus	1		

The 190 people on site also include staff for organisation, press, interpreting, music, transport, photography and social media. Checked against the participant lists in the Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office of 7 July and 21 September 2023 and of 16 September 2024. A dot ● stands for a bishop; Saints Cyril and Methodius comprises Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo; Nordic countries comprises Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden; Ukraine comprises the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic Church. The table names the country or Church from which the participants came; it does not indicate whether a Bishops' Conference sent delegates. Represented by delegates were 28 members of the CCEE, the Bishops' Conferences of Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, England and Wales, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Nordic Countries, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Ukraine, the International Bishops' Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius and, as further members of the CCEE, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Diocese of Chişinău and the Maronite Archeparchy of Cyprus; in addition, the Greek Catholic Church in Hungary was represented. Among the participants were 21 bishops; in all, 22 bishops were present, two of them cardinals.

Two sources, evaluated separately

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE OF THE TASK FORCE

56

Responses from participants, four language versions

40 with a leadership role

16 without

TABLE CONVERSATIONS AT THE SYMPOSIUM IN WELS

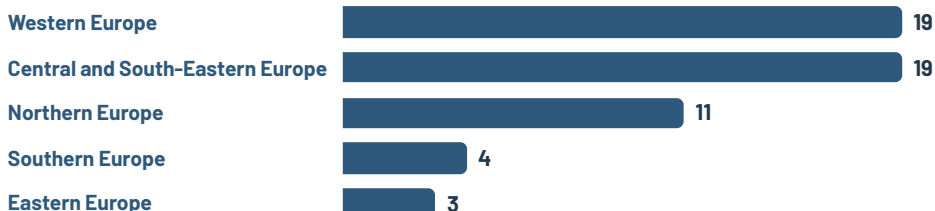
104

Table reports

21

Tables - 5 conversation sessions

WHERE THE RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE COME FROM



The questionnaire is not a representative survey. It opens up perspectives of experience that are to be read as personal perceptions and do not constitute an assessment of any local Church. Throughout the report, the origin of statements from the questionnaire is given according to these five regions, even for countries with several responses; this keeps the presentation consistent, and individual respondents cannot be identified. Western Europe comprises Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland; Central and South-Eastern Europe Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; Northern Europe Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania and the United Kingdom; Southern Europe Cyprus, Italy and Portugal; Eastern Europe Moldova and Ukraine. Austria, Germany and Switzerland are strongly represented, with 68 of 165 participants and 17 of 56 responses; two participants came from Poland and none from Spain. Among the 56 responses received are two pairs of almost identically worded responses, one each from Central and South-Eastern Europe and from Southern Europe; each pair is counted as one contribution, giving 54 independent contributions. The four responses from Southern Europe thus correspond in content to three voices. Countries are named as the origin of a statement only for the table conversations, where a table report itself cites a local experience.

Where the way is blocked

The questionnaire asked about changes since 2021, about blockages, about local conditions and about hopes. The responses range from clear encouragement to the perception that hardly anything has changed. The order has been chosen thematically; beneath each box are the regions from which the observations come.

1 Leadership and distribution of power

Explicit resistance and fear of losing authority; to be distinguished from this, a leadership that gives the process no discernible priority.

Western Europe Central and South-Eastern Europe
Northern Europe Southern Europe

2 Between consultation and decision

Responses describe it as unclear when and how consultation takes place, who is consulted and what follows from what has been heard.

Western Europe Central and South-Eastern Europe
Northern Europe

3 Relationships and communication

Breakdown in communication between bishops, priests and the People of God; clerical mentalities among lay people too.

Western Europe Central and South-Eastern Europe
Northern Europe

4 Understanding and self-perception

Lack of formation, merely external appropriation and an identity that sees anything new first as a threat.

Western Europe Central and South-Eastern Europe
Northern Europe

5 Exclusion and credibility

The position of women as a limit to credibility; consequences of sexual violence and of repeatedly disappointed expectations.

Western Europe Central and South-Eastern Europe
Northern Europe

6 Aggravating conditions

Overload, shortage of personnel, scarce resources; war, poverty and emigration shift what is feasible.

Western Europe Central and South-Eastern Europe
Northern Europe Eastern Europe

It is not simply a matter of reform-minded laity facing a clergy unwilling to reform. Mistrust can be a justified reaction to wounds and broken promises and must not simply be labelled as resistance to synodality.

"Is the church really interested in our opinion? ... But eventually nothing changed."

Response to the questionnaire from Eastern Europe

06

QUESTIONNAIRE AND TABLE CONVERSATIONS

Lines of conflict and dissent

The responses to the questionnaire describe differing expectations of where the path should lead. Some tensions run between people, some within the same expectation.

FIVE LINES OF CONFLICT FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

CO-DECISION

binding sharing of power, joint decisions



democratisation as a misunderstanding of synodality

SPIRIT AND STRUCTURE

concern about a spiritual narrowing without consequences



complaint about merely external participation without inner appropriation

PACE

swift action in view of ecological and social crises



warning against premature expectations of clear-cut results

RENEWING AND PRESERVING (ONE RESPONSE)

co-determination, gender and generational justice, relaxation of celibacy



comprehensive provision at the accustomed quality

CO-RESPONSIBILITY AND DOCTRINE (ONE RESPONSE)

changed way of working, greater lay participation



no change in doctrine, "dynamic orthodoxy"

Patience needs comprehensible intermediate steps; urgency needs feasible decisions.

THE FOUR STRONGEST POINTS OF DISSENT FROM THE TABLE CONVERSATIONS

A The grounding of synodality: baptism or God's universal saving outreach

B Women and ministries, including the question of ordination

C The connection between consultation and decision

D The significance of institutional reform

What can be built upon

The focus on blockages must not render existing experiences invisible. From many regions the responses report new beginnings on which other local Churches can build.

Binding structures

Structures of shared responsibility have become binding and have changed behaviour.

New bodies

A new diocesan body and stronger links to the parish councils.

Synodal planning

Pastoral planning is designed synodally, with an accompanying programme for local participatory bodies.

Cross-cutting theme

Synodality is understood as a task for all areas, one that requires the transition from routine functioning to acting together.

Accessible materials

Synodal materials and approaches that start from the needs of communities.

Formation and teams

Formation programmes, synodal teams and a new culture of conversation.

Diocesan processes

Concrete diocesan processes and strengthened pastoral councils.

Young adults

New teams and participation of young adults at parish level, revitalised youth ministry.

That something has succeeded in one place does not refute the experience of a blockage in another.

"The solidarity of the people in these years has shown that they are able to live 'faith in action'."

Response to the questionnaire from Eastern Europe

08

TABLE CONVERSATIONS AT THE SYMPOSIUM IN WELS

Twelve thematic fields: disputed and proposed

The table reports can be assigned to twelve thematic fields. For each, what remained disputed and what was proposed is recorded.

01 Baptism as foundation	DISPUTED	at one table baptismal ecclesiology not accepted by all; does grounding in baptism start too late if God's saving action precedes everyone?
	PROPOSED	remembrance of baptism, mystagogical formation, accompaniment of parents and godparents
02 Equal dignity and women	DISPUTED	ordination of women as the sharpest documented dissent; at one table, particularly intensely, the diaconate for women, to be distinguished from the question of ordination, as well as the ordination of married men and the obligation of celibacy; at individual tables the visibility of queer people, gender diversity and sexual ethics
	PROPOSED	ministries according to charisms and aptitude; distinguish leadership and ordination; amend the statutes of Bishops' Conferences so that a woman can become General Secretary
03 From listening to decision	DISPUTED	effectiveness of consultation; priority of canonical renewal or of the life of faith and mission; the metaphor "Reset"
	PROPOSED	a second round of consultation and a justification when leadership does not follow a council's vote
04 Accountability and resources	DISPUTED	accountability of volunteers; trust and control. Financial inequality and the loneliness of bishops and priests are regarded as a burden without being disputed.
	PROPOSED	accompaniment and coaching of those in leadership, clear role profiles, further training
05 Listening and parrhesia	DISPUTED	Is listening enough, or does dialogue become a distraction? Protected space or closed world?
	PROPOSED	Conversation in the Spirit in small units; attention to the poor and excluded
06 Identity and openness	DISPUTED	Who belongs to the Church? When does opening up become self-abandonment? Catholicity and right-wing extremism
	PROPOSED	places of encounter beyond Sunday Mass; relationships with the newly baptised

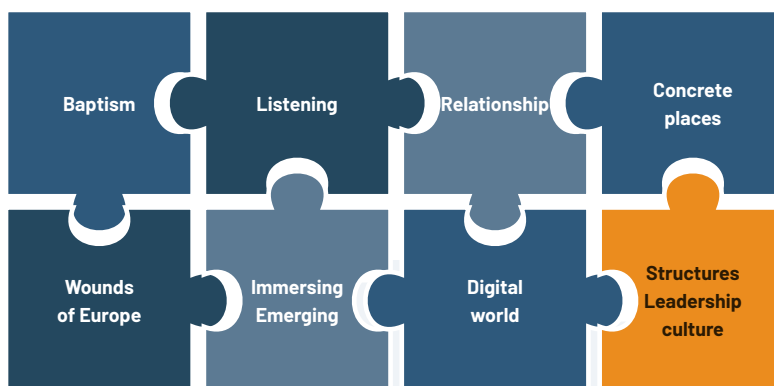
Twelve thematic fields: disputed and proposed

07 Secularisation and power	DISPUTED	secularisation as an opportunity remains difficult for some with Eastern European experiences; power as a problem of credibility or a condition for action
	PROPOSED	reconciliation with one's own past; small communities; social teaching and the common good
08 Europe's wounds	DISPUTED	giving hope and one's own powerlessness; which experiences awaken hope
	PROPOSED	cooperation with other religious communities for people in war and poverty
09 Liturgy and spiritual deepening	DISPUTED	significance of liturgy, Eucharist and preaching; unity and creativity; incomplete reception of the Council, nostalgia for the past also among younger people, a dissenting voice against mere reference to the Council
	PROPOSED	places of contemplation for which the bishops also bear responsibility; mystagogy
10 Initiation and young people	DISPUTED	age and requirements for confirmation; movements; the absence of young people from the conversation
	PROPOSED	catechumenal places of faith; accompaniment after the celebration of the sacrament
11 Digital living spaces	DISPUTED	short-term attention or credible witness
	PROPOSED	learning from existing initiatives, such as a Belgian network of "Godfluencers"
12 Ecumenism, East and West	DISPUTED	mutual incomprehension; fidelity to one's own rite and openness. The war is regarded as a burden, without being disputed.
	PROPOSED	knowledge of the local Churches, shared forms of prayer, ministry of reconciliation; one table proposes a European ecumenical synodal assembly

Proposed steps are suggestions from the conversations; they are not decisions.

What belongs together

At the end of the symposium, first pieces of a Roadmap for Europe were identified from the table reports; they do not yet form a complete picture. Finally, the closing address put forward the proposal of a European Church Forum for Reading the Signs of the Times; it does not derive from the table reports. On the following pages, the pieces form the framework in which the findings from the Task Force questionnaire and from the table conversations at the symposium in Wels are brought together with the proposals of this report. On each page, colour indicates what was said and proposed at the tables, what the questionnaire shows and what emerges from the evaluation of both sources.



PROPOSAL AT THE CLOSE: A EUROPEAN CHURCH FORUM FOR READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

A roadmap emerges when we take the pieces seriously, relate them to one another, recognise what is missing, try out concrete next steps and are ready to let ourselves be corrected along the way.

Vocational coaching, the accompaniment of leadership and vocations academies were proposed at the tables and are also important at European level. Limited European programmes in vocational coaching and accompaniment of leadership would be possible after further clarification, a vocations academy only once need and reliable partners have been clarified. They belong to the piece "Structures and leadership culture". The Church Forum serves to read the signs of the times.

Baptism and listening

■ At the tables ■ In the questionnaire □ Proposed at the tables ■ From the evaluation



Baptism

Baptism is the beginning of our being Church together.

AT THE TABLES

For many tables, baptism is the common point of reference for dignity and responsibility; at the same time the reports describe a distance between sacrament and lived awareness. One table report records that baptismal ecclesiology was not accepted by all; a counter-question asks whether grounding in baptism starts too late if God's saving action precedes everyone.

IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

One response cites inadequate formation of lay people regarding their baptismal dignity.

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- remembrance of baptism, also without a priest; mystagogical formation; accompaniment of parents and godparents
- **EUROPEAN** a task force on baptismal awareness in connection with the CCEE; a baptism congress

FROM THE EVALUATION

A theological strand of work could take up the objections instead of answering them with formation programmes alone.



Listening

As a Church we too often give answers to questions no one has asked.

AT THE TABLES

For some, listening is enough; others expect action to follow from it. It was asked whether dialogue really takes place; one comment asked for fewer questions and more silence before the conversation.

IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Increased listening and new forms of participation are described as changes since 2021; where participation remains without effect, disillusionment arises.

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- practise Conversation in the Spirit in small units
- listen to the poor, the homeless, the excluded and people without religious affiliation

FROM THE EVALUATION

Before any consultation it would need to be clarified for what purpose people are heard and what follows from it.

Relationship and concrete places



Relationship

How do we go to people? How do we become present where they live?

AT THE TABLES

Hospitality, reliable relationships and the readiness to let oneself be changed form a common focus. It remained disputed who belongs to the Church and when opening up becomes self-abandonment.

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- places of encounter beyond Sunday Mass; going where people are not waiting for Church offerings
- relationships with the newly baptised; noticing loneliness
- recounting lived experiences of faith and mission

FROM THE EVALUATION

Learning partnerships between places with related questions could connect these experiences.



Concrete places

After the liturgy a priest stays at the door and says goodbye to people personally.

AT THE TABLES

The conversations repeatedly ask about life after the celebration of the sacrament; preparation alone does not yet create reliable belonging. That young people were themselves missing from the conversations was explicitly raised. Movements and communities with a clear identity were experienced partly as a help, partly as too closed.

IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Established groups give support and can at the same time limit their view of people outside.

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- catechumenal places of faith; accompaniment of families and young people after the celebration of the sacrament
- **EUROPEAN** exchange of good experiences of initiation at a future European meeting

FROM THE EVALUATION

It remains open how the young people missing so far might contribute to developing such places.

Wounds of Europe and spiritual source



Wounds of Europe

Where do we encounter the Risen One in the wounds of the people of Europe?

AT THE TABLES

War, displacement, loneliness, fear and polarisation mark the reports; from Ukraine the question takes on existential gravity. The reports also speak of a wounded Church.

IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The consequences of abuse weaken the willingness to take on responsibility.

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- cooperation with other religious communities for people in war and poverty
- connect solidarity with spirituality and mercy beyond one's own group

FROM THE EVALUATION

Wounds suffered would need to be distinguished from injustice caused by the Church. In war-affected contexts, war, poverty and emigration change what is locally feasible; additional reporting obligations should not arise there.



Immersing in God, emerging among people

AT THE TABLES

Prayer, silence, Scripture and the personal relationship with Christ are repeatedly named as sources of synodal practice. Opinions differed on the significance of liturgy, Eucharist and preaching.

IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A synodality that remains external is feared as much as a spiritual narrowing without consequences.

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- places of contemplation for which the bishops also bear responsibility
- liturgical formation and mystagogy; connecting preaching with everyday life; retreats and pilgrimages

FROM THE EVALUATION

Spiritual deepening and institutional commitment would need to be considered together.



Digital world

Digital spaces can open doors. Through these doors people must be able truly to encounter one another.

AT THE TABLES

The digital world is regarded above all as a living space of young people. It remained disputed whether attention on social media produces more than a short-term effect and where witness turns into self-promotion. Others named concrete initiatives as examples of accompanying young people.

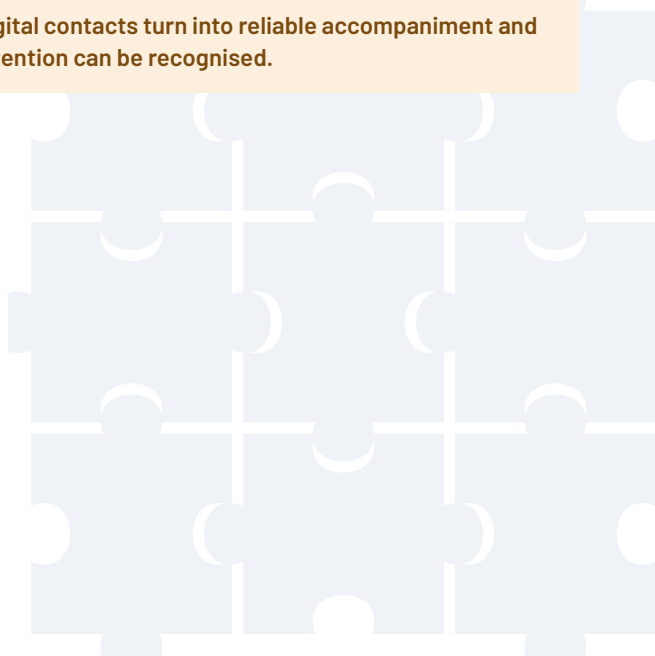
PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- accompany young people in their actual spaces of communication; find an understandable language
- connect digital and personal encounter
- learn from existing initiatives, such as a Belgian network of “Godfluencers”

FROM THE EVALUATION

What would need examining, besides reach, is above all the path from contact to conversation and local community.

It remains open how initial digital contacts turn into reliable accompaniment and how something more than attention can be recognised.



Structures and leadership culture



Who is heard? Who advises? Who decides?

AT THE TABLES

The effectiveness of consultation was experienced differently. Sometimes it works; sometimes the decision remains unchanged with the parish priest or bishop. Disputed were the accountability of volunteers, the relationship between trust and control and, as the sharpest dissent, the ordination of women. At one table the diaconate for women, which is to be distinguished from the question of ordination, was discussed particularly intensely; the ordination of married men and the obligation of celibacy were also mentioned. Individual tables raised the visibility of queer people, the handling of gender diversity and questions of sexual ethics. Large financial differences between dioceses and the loneliness of bishops and priests were mentioned.

IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Persistent concentration of power, unclear decision-making processes, the fear of losing authority and a leadership that gives the process no priority. Several responses describe women bearing responsibility that is not correspondingly recognised institutionally. Several responses from Western as well as from Central and South-Eastern Europe name celibacy, two Western European ones also the handling of gender diversity and sexual ethics.

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- functioning pastoral councils; comprehensible criteria for reviewing implementation
- a second round of consultation and a justification when leadership does not follow a council's vote
- entrust ministries according to charisms and aptitude; distinguish leadership and ordination
- amend the statutes of Bishops' Conferences so that a woman can become General Secretary
- **EUROPEAN** mutual access to the dioceses' letters from the first half of 2027; no longer leave the role of women, including the question of ordination, unspoken

FROM THE EVALUATION

Collaboration, co-deliberation and co-decision would need to be distinguished; tested models of participation, decision-making and accountability could be made accessible in several languages. The question of a woman as General Secretary may arise for all Bishops' Conferences; each can clarify on its own responsibility whether its statutes allow this. In some conferences this is already the case, in the Bishops' Conference of the Nordic Countries since 2009, in the Dutch since 2014, in the German since 2021, in the Slovenian since 2023 and in the Scottish since 2026.

Leadership culture: vocation, accompaniment, formation



Leadership needs accompaniment, vocation needs space

AT THE TABLES

Objection was raised to attributing all obstacles to reform one-sidedly to priests; lay people can also be resistant, and women in leadership roles can face fierce criticism precisely after responsibility has been entrusted to them. A new appointment does not by itself change the culture in which leadership is exercised.

IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Resistance also among younger priests; a lack of skills in shared discernment and cooperative leadership.

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES

- formation and accompaniment of those in leadership; ongoing formation of bishops and priests
- clearer role profiles; greater volunteer responsibility; greater participation of lay people in councils

PROPOSED AT THE TABLES, EXPLAINED IN THE CLOSING ADDRESS

Vocational coaching

People discover and shape their vocation, in family, work, volunteering, pastoral ministry and ecclesial office.

Accompaniment of leadership

Coaching, peer consultation and spiritual accompaniment for bishops and those in leadership.

Vocations academies

Shared learning among different vocations, linked to the question of what kind of people Europe needs today.

FROM THE EVALUATION

Qualified accompaniment could also be open to local Churches that cannot finance it alone; limited programmes from existing institutions would initially make sense. Accompaniment replaces neither accountability nor independent procedures in cases of abuse of power.

A European Church Forum for Reading the Signs of the Times



Reading the signs of the times together

The closing address proposed a European Church Forum for Reading the Signs of the Times, a spiritual and theological space in which the Churches of Europe perceive together what is happening to people. Where are fear, polarisation, loneliness and violence growing? Where do hope, solidarity and new forms of faith, vocation and responsibility appear? Such a forum could build on the tradition of the symposia of European bishops from 1967 to 1996, in whose line Wels also stands. The symposia of the 1980s and 1990s in particular understood Europe as a spiritual space of encounter between East and West, North and South. Bishops, theologians, pastoral workers, young people, religious, committed baptised faithful and people from various spheres of society would come together there.

FROM THE EVALUATION

Such a forum could meet every two years, deliberate on and work through a socially relevant theme, and take a position on it.

TO BE CLARIFIED BEFORE A DECISION

- purpose
- relationship to existing bodies
- ecumenical partnership
- expected benefit for the local Churches

AT THE TABLES

One table proposed a European ecumenical synodal assembly that would bring Christian communities together and make it possible to speak together out of their diversity.

2027

Evaluation assemblies of dioceses and eparchies in the first half of the year, assemblies of the Bishops' Conferences in the second, as foreseen by the General Secretariat of the Synod

2028

Continental Assemblies in the first four months, foreseen by the General Secretariat of the Synod for all continents; in October the Ecclesial Assembly in the Vatican

open

Possibly a first Church Forum, once purpose, form and rhythm have been decided

What could follow from this

The evaluation of the questionnaire and the table conversations suggests several steps. The guiding idea is to act at European level so that the local Churches can act themselves.

1 A learning and support network

OCCASION Responses in the questionnaire ask for networking, examples and small feasible steps; one response proposes a "Synodality Network".

PROPOSAL Local Churches with related questions could come into contact with one another; existing resources could be made accessible.

2 Tested models of participation, decision-making and accountability

OCCASION Questionnaire and tables reveal a lack of clarity between listening, deliberating and deciding; the tables suggest models for dioceses and parishes.

PROPOSAL Case studies, including unsuccessful ones, could be made accessible in several languages.

3 Theological clarification

OCCASION The tables document dissent on baptism and God's saving outreach, on dignity and office, on leadership and ordination.

PROPOSAL Short clarification dossiers could take up the objections instead of passing over them.

4 Solidarity

OCCASION Responses in the questionnaire and table reports name war, poverty, emigration and lack of resources, which determine what is possible.

PROPOSAL Unequal access to translation, participation and education could be recognised and, where possible, balanced out.

5 Passing on open questions

OCCASION At the tables there are calls no longer to leave the role of women, including the question of ordination, unspoken.

PROPOSAL Disputed concerns could be passed on, together with the positions held on them, to the competent levels.

CCEE AND SYNODALITY

The CCEE Commissions for Evangelisation and Culture, for Youth, for Family and Life, and for Social Pastoral Care could take the proposals of this report as a whole into account in their work, without creating parallel structures. How this can happen and whether, beyond this, further commissions could be considered would need to be clarified with those responsible.

What is emerging in Wels

Which themes Europe contributes in 2028 will emerge from the reports of the dioceses and Bishops' Conferences; Wels cannot anticipate this. Questionnaire and table conversations do, however, reveal directions by which further discernment could be guided.

1

Baptism as the basis of shared responsibility

For many tables the common point of reference; at the same time a gap between sacrament and awareness, and the objection that God's saving action precedes everyone.

Question What follows from baptism for participation and mission?

2

From listening to decision

Disillusionment where participation remains without visible effect; unclear when, how and whom to consult.

Question How does shared deliberation lead to visible effect?

3

Women in responsibility and leadership

A limit to the Church's credibility; the ordination of women as the sharpest documented dissent.

Question How can leadership and ordination be distinguished without concealing the dissent?

4

Synodality under strain

War, poverty, emigration, shortage of personnel; minority and diaspora situations.

Question In what way is solidarity part of synodal practice?

5

East and West

Mutual incomprehension, fidelity to one's own rite and openness, ecumenical relations under the burden of war.

Question What do the diversity of rites and ecumenism contribute to the European conversation?

6

Mission in a secular, polarised Europe

Secularisation, polarisation, absence of young people, digital living spaces.

Question How can initiation, hospitality and witness be connected anew?

Europe contributes to the universal Church with several voices, with agreements it has named and differences it has openly named.

At which level the proposals would need to be discussed

The proposals can provisionally be ordered by the level at which they would need to be deliberated. The order is provisional; what enters the Ecclesial Assembly will emerge from the reports of the Bishops' Conferences. The numbers refer to the proposals on page 20.

HELPFUL SO THAT PARTICIPATION HAS CONSEQUENCES

- 1 reliable connections between local Churches with related questions
- 2 reviewed case studies on participation, decision-making and accountability, including unsuccessful ones
- 4 recognising unequal access to translation, participation and education

POSSIBLE, AFTER FURTHER CLARIFICATION

- limited programmes for the accompaniment of leadership and for vocational coaching
- a European Church Forum for Reading the Signs of the Times, as proposed in the closing address

RAISED IN WELS, WITHIN THE COMPETENCE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH 3 5

- questions concerning ordained ministries and universal Church norms
- the binding relationship between office and co-decision
- the role of women, including the question of ordination, with the differing positions
- the diaconate for women, on which positions diverge
- the question of celibacy, on which positions diverge

WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

At one table it was proposed to amend the statutes of Bishops' Conferences so that a woman can become General Secretary. Each Bishops' Conference can clarify for itself whether its statutes permit this. In the Bishops' Conference of the Nordic Countries this has been the case since 2009, in the Dutch since 2014, in the German since 2021, in the Slovenian since 2023 and in the Scottish since 2026.

Whether and how these concerns enter the Ecclesial Assembly will become clear along the way. It would be helpful if they were then named together with the positions held in Europe, including opposing ones.

The proposals are neither resolutions of the symposium nor commitments by existing institutions.

OUTLOOK

"That we talked about it is good, but it is not enough."

Response to the questionnaire from Western Europe

"I have hope, but not optimism."

At one table in Wels

Wels has opened a space for this path. Its continuation will be seen primarily in whether relationships become more resilient, whether listening has consequences and whether people can exercise their ecclesial responsibility with greater freedom and greater trust; whether further events take place is not the first criterion here.

THE FULL TEXT OF THE REPORT



The complete report to the Presidents of the European Bishops' Conferences and the Participants of the Symposium, with all evaluations in full.

Introduction

KEY SENTENCES

Between the aspiration to shared responsibility and the actual possibilities of participation there is a tension that cannot be resolved by further agreement on concepts alone.

A synodal process loses trust when people are heard but cannot recognise what significance their contribution acquires for common action.



The Symposium “Shaping Synodality in Europe” in Wels made clear that the synodal renewal of the Church is not to be measured solely by a lack of ideas or of willingness. In many local Churches, new relationships, forms of joint consultation and experiences of spiritual discernment have emerged. At the same time, the transition from such experiences to a reliable ecclesial practice remains difficult. Between the aspiration to shared responsibility and the actual possibilities of participation there is a tension that cannot be resolved by further agreement on concepts alone.

The contributions reveal a Church that is searching along different paths for a credible form of its mission. Some voices expect above all binding changes in leadership, decision-making and accountability. Others ask about a deeper spiritual appropriation, about the relationship between synodal practice and Church teaching, or about a renewal of proclamation. Still others are under such heavy staffing, economic or war-related strain that even sustaining a viable community demands great effort. Besides the pace, these differences in part also concern the understanding of the path, which is thereby itself partly disputed.

Further work therefore requires a twofold attentiveness. The blockages must be named clearly, without treating every reservation about a particular reform as a rejection of synodality. At the same time, spiritual language, references to cultural differences or the necessary patience must not lead to concrete questions of responsibility and change being postponed again and again. A synodal process loses trust when people are heard but cannot recognise what significance their contribution acquires for common action.

The report distinguishes the online questionnaire of the Task Force addressed to the participants of the Symposium from the table conversations at the Symposium in Wels. The questionnaire was available in four language versions and asked about changes since 2021, blockages, local conditions and hopes. It yielded 56 responses; 40 respondents state that they hold a leadership role, 16 state that they do not. The table conversations at the Symposium in Wels are documented in 104 regular reports from 21 groups and five conversation sessions. The responses open up concrete perspectives of experience that are to be taken seriously in their own right, without being representative of the Churches of Europe. Where differences and dissent become visible, they remain part of the account.

The findings point to a European task that can consist neither in making the local Churches uniform nor in an additional level of leadership. European cooperation must make possible what individual local Churches find difficult on their own, and at the same time strengthen their own responsibility. Subsidiarity thus describes the appropriate ordering of shared responsibility between the levels. What is decisive is whether dioceses and parishes are, through cooperation, better able to carry out their mission under their concrete conditions.

PART ONE

Wels as a European space of ecclesial dialogue

KEY SENTENCES

Unity must prove itself in the willingness to accept the experiences of others as a possible corrective to one's own perspective.

Reliability arises when common concerns are translated into tasks, responsibilities, time and support.



An encounter of different ecclesial experiences

Wels brought together experiences from Bishops' Conferences, dioceses, parishes, universities, training institutions and contexts of synodal formation. Episcopal and other ecclesial leadership responsibility encountered theological research, pastoral practice and the experiences of committed baptised people. The value of this meeting lay not only in presenting positions already developed. In conversation together it became possible to see how differently the same concepts are understood and which concrete experiences lie behind agreement, reticence or criticism.

First-hand experiences from the Synod assemblies in Rome were shared with a wider circle of those with ecclesial responsibility who had not themselves taken part in these assemblies. In this way the synodal process was carried forward into other working contexts. Beyond the transmission of finished results, this handing on requires reception into the reality of the local Churches, into their relationships, their conflicts and their possibilities. Only there is it decided whether the common orientation becomes a changed way of being Church.

The connection with academic work and ecclesial formation was essential for this. Theological reflection can help to discern experiences, clarify concepts and overcome premature oppositions. Conversely, it must allow itself to be questioned by concrete ecclesial reality. Where people experience participation as ineffective, or encounter a boundary between theological recognition and actual possibilities for action, a correct definition of synodality is not enough.

Formation contexts such as the "School of Synodality", learning spaces in pastoral theology and the participation of younger priests also belong to this horizon. They indicate that the continuation of the process does not depend solely on leadership functions already being exercised. It is equally a matter of winning people over to shared responsibility, enabling them to gain experience and developing the skills required for this. Such learning paths need places where questions can be asked without every uncertainty being immediately judged as a lack of loyalty or a lack of willingness to reform.

The geographical and ecclesial breadth of Europe

The European frame of reference encompasses different national and regional experiences. These include Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as Ireland, England and Wales, Scotland and Iceland. Portugal, Italy and Cyprus open up further Southern European perspectives. From Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe come experiences from Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova and Ukraine.

This geographical breadth must not be translated into a contrast between a uniform West and a uniform East. Within the same countries there are considerable differences between dioceses and parishes, between urban and rural areas, between multilingual communities and between different

ecclesial milieus. One local Church may have well-developed structures of participation and at the same time struggle to reach new people. Another may have few institutional means and yet have developed a viable culture of personal responsibility.

The Bishops' Conference of the Nordic Countries and the International Bishops' Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius bring supranational forms of ecclesial cooperation into this context. Such experiences are particularly important for further work at European level, because they show that ecclesial dialogue cannot always be organised along the borders of individual states. Common language, regional history and differing social conditions must also be brought together within such a conference area.

The Eastern Church perspectives likewise retain their own character. The Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic experiences of Ukraine are not interchangeable. The Greek Catholic Metropolitan Church in Hungary and the Maronite context of Cyprus broaden the view of liturgy, initiation, ecclesial belonging and leadership. Ecclesially, Europe is not shaped exclusively by the Latin tradition. A common synodal learning process must take up this diversity in its significance for the questions and the way of working.

Unity that does not pass over differences

European dialogue becomes demanding where different experiences lead to different expectations. Secularisation can be experienced as a loss of ecclesial presence and as a threat to familiar ways of life. At the same time, it can open up possibilities of living faith out of free assent and of distinguishing social power from the truth of the Gospel. Both experiences occur in the conversation. They cannot be replaced by a single assessment.

Something similar applies to social and political proximity. In some contexts the Church is experienced as an important bearer of education, solidarity and public responsibility. In others, the dangers of a close bond between ecclesial identity, national self-assertion and political power come to the fore. Besides the extent of ecclesial influence, it therefore needs to be clarified what the Church uses that influence for, what dependencies arise from it and whether its practice helps people towards freedom, dignity and shared responsibility.

Experiences of the Church as a minority are not uniform either. A shrinking Church in a country formerly strongly shaped by Catholicism is in a different situation from a diaspora community that has long been small. Nevertheless, both can learn from each other. Where the expectation of continuing everything everywhere in its previous form has to be abandoned, the quality of relationships, the capacity to speak about faith and the cooperation of different ministries gain in importance.

The common task therefore requires that the differences remain recognisable in common declarations as well. Unity must prove itself in the willingness to accept the experiences of others as a possible corrective to one's own perspective. This demands more than courtesy. It demands that uncomfortable questions also be heard and that one's own history not be declared the universal standard of ecclesial fidelity.

From shared experience to reliable practice

The table conversations show that the very act of people with different tasks and vocations speaking together can be an ecclesial experience. This experience, however, does not last of its own accord. It must be connected with the places where those involved live and bear responsibility. **Without such connections, a successful symposium risks remaining an exceptional experience alongside a largely unchanged everyday practice.**

Continuation therefore needs people and structures that sustain relationships and make learning possible. In this, responsibility must not be shifted onto a few particularly committed individuals. If synodal renewal is carried mainly by personal enthusiasm, it remains vulnerable to overload, changes of personnel and disappointed expectations. Reliability arises when common concerns are translated into tasks, responsibilities, time and support.

This also concerns the connection between the various ecclesial levels. European conversations must be conducted in such a way that their questions can be taken up in Bishops' Conferences, dioceses and parishes. Conversely, local experience must help to shape the European agenda. Transmission only from the top down would fall short of the synodal claim. It would be equally inadequate to collect local voices without recognisably responding to them.

The European space can take on a particular task here. It makes possible encounters that are not shaped by immediate local dependencies. It can make experiences comparable without equating them, and provide support that is not available locally alone. Its value lies in strengthening the Churches' own responsibility and making common tasks workable.

Criteria for further work

Several criteria follow from this starting point. Synodal renewal must remain oriented towards the mission of the Church and must not exhaust itself in preoccupation with its own organisation. At the same time, this mission must be recognisable in the relationships and procedures of the Church. **A proclamation of common dignity loses credibility if people remain permanently without a voice in ecclesial practice.**

Spiritual discernment and institutional responsibility belong together here. Prayer, Scripture and silence open a space in which habits and one's own interests can be questioned. Clear procedures, accountability and transparent decisions prevent this space from being appropriated by individual persons. Neither does the spiritual attitude replace an accountable order, nor can a good order make spiritual appropriation superfluous.

A further criterion is the handling of conflicts. The synodal path does not require every difference to be resolved immediately. It does require, however, that differences can be named and worked through without excluding people from the community of conversation. Where a decision is needed, responsibility must be taken for it. Where a question remains open, its openness should not be presented as a settled consensus.

Finally, further work will have to be measured by whether it enables people and communities to act for themselves. Alongside cooperation in predetermined tasks, the Church needs the co-responsibility of people who can contribute their gifts, ask questions and help prepare decisions. In this, baptismal dignity, spiritual maturing and an ecclesial leadership that does not exercise its responsibility alone are brought together.

PART TWO

The Task Force questionnaire: blockages and expectations for the future

KEY SENTENCES

Where participation remains without recognisable effect, disillusionment, withdrawal and loss of trust arise.

But every consultation that is meant seriously needs a recognisable connection to the responsibility of those who issued the invitation.



Personal experiences from the local Churches

The online questionnaire of the Task Force addressed to the participants of the Symposium gathers experiences with the synodal process since 2021. It asks about actual changes, blockages, local conditions and hopes for further work. The responses range from clear encouragement to the perception that hardly anything has changed. They are read as personal experiences; no conclusive assessments of entire countries are derived from them. Throughout this report, information on origin from the questionnaire refers to five regions, Western Europe, Central and South-Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe and Eastern Europe. Western Europe comprises Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland; Central and South-Eastern Europe Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; Northern Europe Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania and the United Kingdom; Southern Europe Cyprus, Italy and Portugal; Eastern Europe Moldova and Ukraine. Countries are not named as the origin of an individual statement, even where several responses come from one country. In this way the account remains consistent, and individual respondents cannot be identified.

It is precisely the differences within the same context of origin that are revealing. They show that national orientation, diocesan implementation and parish experience can diverge. The following account therefore distinguishes the kind of difficulties and the level at which they are perceived.

Core finding of the individual responses

The individual responses show a considerable tension between the aspiration of synodal renewal and the ecclesial reality experienced. Increased listening and new forms of participation stand alongside a persisting concentration of power, unclear decision-making paths and resistance to shared responsibility. Repeatedly described are a lack of initiative from leadership, fear of a loss of authority, clerical mentalities among priests and laity alike, and consultations that have no consequences. Overload, lack of formation and limited resources reinforce these difficulties. Where participation remains without recognisable effect, disillusionment, withdrawal and loss of trust arise.

This is not simply a matter of reform-minded laity facing a clergy unwilling to reform. The responses describe committed bishops and priests as well as passive or resistant laity, productive bodies as well as self-absorbed groups, and parishes ready for renewal but lacking sufficient support. Differences also exist between the national, diocesan and parish levels. It is precisely these constellations that matter for any monitoring that is not meant to stop at general country labels.

In assessing the difficulties, three levels are to be distinguished. **Blockages** are ways of acting and institutional constellations that prevent or undermine participation or implementation. **Lines of conflict** denote differing conceptions of synodality and its consequences. **Framework conditions**

include, for example, shortage of personnel, poverty, demographic change or war. These levels can reinforce one another, but require different responses. A theological difference of opinion is not in itself a blockage; lack of funding cannot be removed by an appeal to openness.

Blockages in leadership and the distribution of power

Active resistance and fear of a loss of authority

Beyond slow learning processes, some of the individual responses describe explicit obstruction or rejection. From Western Europe it is reported that clerically minded parish priests block synodality locally and that an episcopal understanding of the process stops at listening without opening up new participation in decision-making. Voices from Central and South-Eastern Europe name the leadership's fear of too many people having a say, and the insistence on legal competence. From Western Europe, public episcopal rejection is also described. These perceptions apply to the respective spheres of experience; they imply no statement about all those responsible in a region or country.

From Northern Europe, the deliberate refusal of synodal participation by individual priests and laypeople is reported. A response from Central and South-Eastern Europe describes how those engaged in synodality are ridiculed or silenced. In such cases it is not enough to provide further information. The reported blockage lies in the fact that the willingness of others to cooperate finds no protected and recognised form.

The responses suggest different mechanisms. Where authority is identified with sole decision-making power, any extension of participation can appear as a loss. Where synodality is understood as a threat to the faith, obstruction can even be experienced as a duty. These interpretations must be distinguished, so that not every reservation is construed wholesale as an interest in power, while concrete questions of power do not disappear behind spiritual language either.

Two responses from Western and Southern Europe sharpen the finding. Both explicitly locate resistance among younger priests too. One of these voices links this with insufficient formation of the laity regarding their baptismal dignity and with strongly hierarchical rural contexts. The other reports the notion that the synodal path already ended with the Final Document of 2024, and at the same time calls for authentic attitudes and a convincing theological rationale. From these perspectives, a change of generations alone does not appear to be a sufficient answer.

Lack of initiative and of priority

To be distinguished from active resistance is a leadership that does not explicitly oppose the process, but gives it no recognisable importance. One Western European response names a lack of initiative on the part of the bishop and low visibility in the diocese. From Northern Europe comes the account that the bishop is occupied with immediately pressing tasks and does not take up synodality as an inwardly necessary means of ecclesial renewal. A response from Central and South-Eastern Europe stresses that synodality is not among the actual priorities in all regions.

A finding of a different kind also comes from Northern Europe. There, diocesan leadership is described as open and mediating, while reception by priests and parishes remains weak. This shows that agreement at one level of leadership does not automatically produce a viable chain of implementation. From Central and South-Eastern Europe, too, local new beginnings are named, together with the wish for clearer common support from the bishops.

Monitoring would therefore need to ask, alongside official declarations, about further preconditions. What is decisive are responsibilities, available time, formation opportunities, support in conflicts and a recognisable link back to the parishes. **A declared priority without such preconditions remains organisationally weak.**

Blockages between consultation and decision

Participation without a clarified path to responsibility

One Western European response formulates the problem with particular precision. It is unclear, it says, when consultation should take place, who should be involved on which question, and how this is to be done. Besides too small a number of conversations, the difficulty thus concerns their function. **If it is not clear why people are heard and what follows from what is heard, participation remains non-binding.**

From Northern Europe, the transition from participation to co-responsibility is explicitly named as a problem. A response from Central and South-Eastern Europe describes a distance between consultation and concrete ecclesial life, as well as difficulties in sharing decisions and responsibility. Voices from Western Europe underline that consulting together without deciding together is not enough. A further Western European response calls for rights of participation that do not depend solely on the voluntary concession of the hierarchy.

Several questions that need to be distinguished from one another arise from this. Can people raise topics? Are they involved in preparing a decision? Is their participation merely consultative, or does it also take effect in decisions? Are reasons given when the outcome of a consultation is not adopted? The individual responses suggest that these levels are often not sufficiently clarified or connected with one another.

Existing structures without renewed practice

In the responses, councils and bodies are not consistently the solution, nor are they consistently the problem. From Western Europe, on the one hand, a well-established culture of joint consultation is described. On the other hand, many regulations and bodies can leave little room for the unforeseen. Another response notes that, despite numerous organisations, suitable forums are lacking in which the *sensus fidei* of the People of God can be voiced and jointly clarified.

Further Western European responses show a related tension. An existing right to a say, secured under Church-State law, can enable participation, yet at the same time raise the question of why any further change should be necessary at all. A voice from Central and South-Eastern Europe criticises the fact that it is above all the discourse that has changed, while legal competences

have remained the same. A further Western European voice places a different emphasis and sees immediate obstacles primarily in the failure to use existing possibilities and only secondarily in regulations.

These differences matter. A blanket demand for more bodies would miss some experiences; the claim that all necessary possibilities already exist would equally miss others. In each case it would need to be examined whether a problem lies in missing rights, unclear procedures, insufficient use, or in a relational culture that devalues formal participation.

Further responses show that existing participatory structures must themselves become the object of critical examination. One voice from Central and South-Eastern Europe describes, side by side, complacency, overload, lack of interest and disillusionment at the absence of change. A Western European response points out that already existing participatory bodies can diminish the readiness for self-criticism and reform.

A further response from this area describes a concrete institutional dilemma. Additional structures are said to be unwelcome, yet no one wishes to give up existing ones, because power and opportunities for participation are tied to them. The equation of organisation under Church-State law with democracy and synodality is also explicitly problematised. According to this perception, there are in addition difficulties of joint action between bodies under canon law and under Church-State law, differing financing conditions and differences in church culture. This is a more precise finding than a general reform fatigue. It points to the coordination of different bodies and to the question of how existing participation actually leads to shared responsibility.

Blockages in relationships, communication and personal responsibility

Loss of trust and closed channels of information

Several individual responses describe a damaged relationship between ecclesial levels. One response from Central and South-Eastern Europe speaks of a breakdown of communication between bishops, priests and the People of God in both directions. From Northern Europe comes the complaint of a lack of connection and hospitality between priests, parish staff and people who wish to take part. The blockage thus already concerns access to the community, even before formal co-decision becomes possible.

An individual response from Central and South-Eastern Europe recounts a concrete parish conflict in connection with new diocesan structures. According to its account, information was withheld or distorted, other positions were not accepted and committed people were driven to withdraw. This account is to be read as the experience of the respondent; it does not permit a final judgement on the persons involved. It shows that non-ordained key figures can also exercise informal power.

To be distinguished from this is the problem that existing work goes unnoticed. A Western European response describes how, with limited staff resources, a good deal does happen, but the results do not reach the community. Here a lack of initiative should not be assumed too hastily.

What would be needed are reliable channels of communication and feedback that also reach people outside the inner circle.

Passivity, clericalism among the laity and closed groups

The expectation that leadership will settle everything is itself a recurring difficulty. A Western European response describes how the faithful, despite talk of their responsibility, continue to look to superiors and expect solutions from them. Clerical mentalities among the laity are also reported from several countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. **Shared responsibility then fails because it is not granted, and in part also because it is not practised, entrusted or accepted.**

A further individual response from this region shows a particular form of self-sufficiency. Existing prayer, singing and senior citizens' groups can be understood as a sign of a complete and successful parish life. What provides stability and community for those who belong can limit awareness of people outside these circles. Similarly, an excessive attachment to parish traditions is described in Western Europe.

Irrespective of the value of tradition and stable groups, what therefore needs to be examined is whether their stability enables or prevents encounter with, and participation of, further people. A synodal opening must respect existing bonds and at the same time ask about those who find no place within them.

Blockages of understanding and of ecclesial self-perception

Lack of formation and a merely external appropriation

Ignorance is named sometimes briefly, sometimes in a highly differentiated way. A Western European response names it as the primary blockage. Further Western European voices describe a complex concept that even those in leadership find difficult to fill with concrete content. A response from Northern Europe asks more fundamentally about the understanding of who the Church is and what it exists for.

A further Western European response warns that synodality might remain external and be appropriated neither as a way of life nor as a spiritual attitude. A response from Central and South-Eastern Europe describes people who take part in the process as if from outside, without opening themselves to inner change. Responses from Central and South-Eastern Europe and from Northern Europe also point out that formation is not everywhere sufficiently promoted or prioritised by those responsible.

Formation in this context means more than explanations of documents. The responses name a lack of skills for common discernment, for cooperative leadership and for responsible action by lay people. Where formation is lacking, uncertainty can reinforce existing dependencies. Where it is offered but no real opportunities for participation follow, its effect likewise remains limited.

Defensive identity, political entanglement and fear of the present

Some responses describe an ecclesial self-perception in which what is new first appears as a danger. A response from Central and South-Eastern Europe names party politics in parishes, nationalism, anti-modernist understandings of faith and the tendency towards authoritarian leadership. Old models are said to be retained because they convey security, even if they no longer correspond to social reality.

A further response from this region links a lack of openness with national identity, nostalgia for the past and a frequently moralising, defensive reaction to secularisation. It explicitly observes such tendencies among younger people as well. A third voice from the region describes fear of suspicion from Rome and the perception of synodality as a task to be carried out in obedience rather than as its own path of renewal. Western European responses also address the relationship with Rome. They describe Roman centralism, waiting for Roman decisions, the outstanding recognition for a national synodal structure and international interventions as a burden. A fourth voice from Central and South-Eastern Europe points to political polarisation and lingering post-communist patterns of thought.

No uniform diagnosis for this region can be derived from this. The voices name different local and historical constellations. What they have in common is the indication that synodal processes can remain weak where ecclesial identity is determined predominantly by demarcation, security and defence. A response from Central and South-Eastern Europe adds that concern for religious practice could push back commitment to justice, peace and responsibility for creation.

Exclusion, loss of credibility and disappointed expectations

Women and the limits of real equal dignity

Several responses see in the position of women a limit to the Church's credibility. From Western Europe, the tension is described between the indispensable actual responsibility of women and their exclusion from the priesthood. A further response from this area links the question of women with a critique of insufficient sharing of power and of the failure to take up theological insights.

Voices from Central and South-Eastern Europe name inequality between women and men and prejudices against the participation of groups hitherto less represented. A Western European response highlights the wish for greater liturgical visibility. The concerns are thus not identical. They range from recognition and representation through leadership to access to ordained ministries, and must not be reduced to a single demand.

According to these voices, the blockage lies where existing gifts and responsibility already assumed are not correspondingly recognised by the institution. These experiences are to be taken seriously, without deriving from them an agreement of all respondents on every question of reform.

Consequences of abuse, withdrawal and loss of confidence in the future

The consequences of sexual abuse are explicitly named in responses from Western and Northern Europe. Besides public reputation, they affect the readiness of committed people to continue taking on responsibility. A Western European voice reports that even people formerly closely bound to the Church were asking what sense further commitment makes. A response from Northern Europe describes demoralisation and fear of rejection or failure.

Alongside this, the experience of change failing to materialise has its effect. From Western Europe, the transition from a new beginning to weariness and a marked decline in the initial enthusiasm are recounted. Further Western European voices speak of fatigue and a lack of transparency. Where hope is repeatedly raised without recognisable consequences following, a further call to participation can lose credibility.

An important distinction follows from this. **Mistrust can be a well-founded reaction to injuries and broken promises and must not simply be labelled as resistance to synodality.** Credibility here includes, in addition to a new invitation, the assumption of responsibility, protection, comprehensible consequences and reliable feedback.

Aggravating conditions

Overload, shortage of personnel and insufficient funding

Individual responses from Northern Europe, Western Europe and Central and South-Eastern Europe link the shortage of priests with ever larger areas of responsibility, too little time and a lack of opportunities for the formation of lay people. A response from Northern Europe makes especially clear that formation alone is not enough if there are no appropriate opportunities for employment and integration afterwards. A further response from Northern Europe describes limited economic means and the lingering effects of the interrupted culture of patronage.

The effect of these difficulties extends beyond an external limitation. When a few people have to accomplish ever more, preserving what is immediately necessary becomes plausible, while renewal is postponed. At the same time, shared responsibility and new collaboration could relieve the burden, but they first require precisely the accompaniment for which there is hardly any time. A self-reinforcing cycle of overload, low participation and further increasing strain can thus be discerned.

Responses from Western Europe add that existing resources and long-established structures do not automatically make change easier either. A well-developed status quo can favour inertia; fragmented organisation can hinder joint projects. Monitoring should therefore ask about the distribution and use of resources as well as about their quantity.

A response from Northern Europe sets a particularly important accent. It describes changed, synodal pastoral planning, the strengthening of local participatory bodies and a group on the ministry of women. At the same time, the changed composition of the clergy and of the Catholic population, exhausted finances and property questions are in the foreground. According to this

voice, synodality remains at the margins as long as it is not understood as the way of addressing precisely such pressing problems together. The criticism is thus directed against treating it as an additional special programme.

Demography, rural areas and cultural diversity

Ageing and weakening ties are mentioned in several contexts. At the same time, the responses show that young people do not automatically stand for openness, nor older people automatically against it. From Central and South-Eastern Europe come accounts that it is precisely younger people who may seek security in traditional forms. In Western Europe the observations range from lack of interest to reticence towards the process, which can change through one's own experience.

A Western European response names difficulties of communication and team-building in rural areas. Another points to differing dynamics within a single country. A response from Northern Europe places community-building in multilingual and multicultural parishes at the centre. These conditions call for different approaches; a uniform European format for formation or participation would do them only limited justice.

War, poverty and emigration

A response from Eastern Europe sets an existential accent. War and the dehumanisation of life constitute the greatest constraint; hope is directed towards survival, Christian maturing and responsibility under these conditions. A further response from this region names war, poverty and emigration. These voices must not be subsumed under a general category of unwillingness to implement.

Nor is the brief mention "mission" in the relevant response fields to be read unambiguously as a claim that mission itself is a blockage. It is more plausible to recognise in it a field of tasks that is pressing under difficult conditions. For monitoring, this entails the need for a clarifying follow-up question and concrete support instead of a hasty attribution of resistance.

A third response from this area recounts a process interrupted by the war. At first, people in the parishes had reacted with relief to the invitation to contribute their opinion; afterwards, no change had become tangible. Mentioned are the lack of a diocesan forum for proposals from lay people, strong dependence on a few priests and the lack of any mandate for co-responsibility. The statement thus links wartime conditions and institutional obstacles without equating the two.

Lines of conflict over the goal of synodal renewal

The individual responses name obstacles and at the same time show differing expectations of where the path should lead; the path itself is thus also disputed. These differences must remain visible alongside the blockages.

Co-decision and democratisation are weighted in opposite ways. Voices from Western Europe call for binding sharing of power and joint decisions. A response from Central and South-Eastern Europe, by contrast, sees a misunderstanding and misuse of synodality as democratisation. It remains to be clarified which concrete procedures those involved have in mind and what understanding of office and of common discernment lies behind them.

Spiritual renewal and structural reform are connected in different ways. Some responses fear a narrowing to a spiritual dimension without consequences; others lament precisely a lack of inner appropriation and a merely external participation in the process. These statements do not necessarily contradict each other, but can lead to different priorities. For further work, spiritual deepening and institutional commitment are to be examined together, without making either one an excuse for neglecting the other.

Pressure for change and long-term cultural change stand in tension. A voice from Central and South-Eastern Europe calls for swift action in view of ecological and social crises. A Western European voice warns against premature expectations of clear results. The difference concerns both the time horizon and the question of how progress is to be recognised. Patience needs comprehensible intermediate steps; urgency needs feasible decisions.

Renewal and preservation are expected at the same time. A Western European response describes the wish for co-determination, gender and intergenerational justice and a relaxation of celibacy, together with the expectation of comprehensive provision of the usual quality. A response from Southern Europe names differing diagnoses of the ecclesial situation and the struggle for unity without uniformity or fragmentation. Conflicts therefore arise between clearly delimited camps and equally within the same expectations.

Critical dissenting voices are also documented. A response from Western Europe considers some topics in Europe overemphasised, so that what is essential recedes into the background. Another, likewise from Western Europe, describes how synodality has become for many a weapon with which to accuse others. A response from Northern Europe asks for European efforts against disinformation about synodality and about the renewal brought by the Council. A further one from this region describes the deliberate resistance of priests and lay people with fundamentalist attitudes.

Greater co-responsibility is not consistently linked with changes in doctrine. A response from Eastern Europe explicitly affirms a changed ecclesial way of working and stronger lay participation, but rejects the use of synodality for political or ideological purposes and for changes in doctrine. The response describes the desired path as “dynamic orthodoxy”. This position stands within the will for renewal and makes visible a line of conflict there.

Changes and resources on which to build

The focus on blockages must not render existing experiences invisible. Described are greater openness between bishops and lay people, synodal materials and parish-based approaches in Western Europe, and formation programmes, synodal teams and concrete diocesan processes in Central and South-Eastern Europe. The same region also reports local initiatives despite weakly perceived development at higher levels. A response from Northern Europe links ecclesial communication with positive experiences in youth ministry and consecrated life.

Contradictory responses from the same context of origin are also revealing. The report of a congress, the description of cautiously growing co-responsibility and the statement that nothing has changed must not be levelled into an average picture. They show that the question of place and of the perspective of experience is decisive for every further follow-up question.

For European work, this results in a twofold task. It must provide support where participation is prevented or hindered, and at the same time understand what makes concrete experiences succeed. The overview by region at the end of this part opens up these differences; it does not replace clarification with those involved in each case.

Further responses also broaden the positive findings. A response from Southern Europe describes structures of shared responsibility that have become binding and the changes in behaviour that have resulted from them. A Western European response names a new diocesan body and stronger communication with parish councils. A response from Northern Europe reports synodal pastoral planning and a new resource and accompaniment programme for local participatory bodies. A further Western European response describes synodality as a cross-cutting theme that requires the transition from an institutionally ingrained functioning to communal action. These experiences are developments reported locally in each case; their basis is not sufficient for comprehensive national diagnoses.

Expectations for the future and explicitly European concerns

Synodality as the ordinary way of being Church

The hopes extend beyond the continuation of a time-limited process. Responses from Central and South-Eastern Europe wish for a lasting culture of encounter, discernment and shared responsibility. A voice from Northern Europe describes the hoped-for path as an exodus from inherited habits to a new identity as the People of God. Other responses emphasise an opening of the Church, the missionary power of the Gospel and the connection between personal credibility and institutional change.

From Western Europe there is the explicit expectation that words and documents will lead to legally binding reforms, sharing of power and oversight. Voices from Central and South-Eastern Europe highlight gender justice and the transformative significance of the Gospel. A Southern

European response links spiritual renewal with accountable consequences of tasks assumed. The hopes can thus be reduced neither to structure nor to spirituality.

A Western European response gives concrete shape to the hope for binding commitment through demands for legally anchored rights of consent for lay representative bodies, co-determination by parish councils and the evaluation of bishops by the faithful. Added to this are decentralisation, regional solutions, a stronger decoupling of ordination and power, and spaces for trying out preaching by lay people. These are reform concerns of the respondent, which neither exist as powers so far nor have been jointly resolved by the respondents.

Learning between local Churches instead of transferring a uniform model

Several responses explicitly link Europe with the exchange of concrete experiences. A Western European voice stresses that good practice must be explored as a stimulus for one's own situation and adapted to its conditions in the process. Further responses from Western Europe and from Central and South-Eastern Europe wish for relationships, helpful examples and small, feasible steps. A further response from Central and South-Eastern Europe expects clear orientation and pastoral tools in order to be able to overcome inertia and low participation.

A voice from Central and South-Eastern Europe already refers to international formation programmes and shared resources experienced as helpful. A response from Northern Europe expects a common reading of the signs of the times and support in taking up new impulses without further polarisation into camps. These responses ground a European mandate that empowers the local Churches rather than taking their decisions away from them.

Further responses name the European mandate of support particularly directly. A Western European response calls for interdiocesan support and European networking in a "Synodality Network". A response from Northern Europe relies on connections between people, the sharing of good experiences and new forms of synodal community. A further Western European voice wishes for patient work of translation between ecclesial levels and a readiness to broaden one's own positions. These concerns link local responsibility with a concrete need for cross-border support.

Methodological diversity and appropriate decision-making paths

A Western European response contains a concrete, distinct wish. Alongside the Ignatian-inspired Conversation in the Spirit, further synodal methods should be developed, because the same form does not suit everyone and some questions would need to be decided promptly. Mentioned are the Dominican disputation and forms modelled on the Benedictine chapter.

This voice broadens the mandate for formation. Alongside the introduction of one method as widely as possible comes the task of examining the suitability of different forms for different questions and contexts.

European responsibility for peace, democracy and the common good

Individual responses formulate an explicitly societal horizon. A Western European voice links European ecclesial cooperation with peace, freedom and democracy and with the Church's capacity to cross politically hardened boundaries. A further Western European response highlights social justice, democracy, equality, respect and the common good. Voices from Central and South-Eastern Europe name ecological urgency, the fight against poverty and overcoming the Church's self-referentiality.

In these responses, Europe is therefore more than a platform for intra-ecclesial accounts of experience. It is also a shared space of responsibility in which the Church is to carry out its mission in the face of social crises. This perspective stands as a distinct accent alongside the institutional and spiritual expectations.

Consequences for a synodal practice of leadership

Participation needs a recognisable effect

The individual responses suggest that the quality of synodal processes should not be measured first by the number of invitations or conversations. What is decisive is whether people understand why they are being involved and what significance their contribution acquires for common action. A listening process can be well prepared and spiritually deepened and still disappoint if what happens next remains unclear. The question of effect may appear to express a merely instrumental understanding of synodality; it belongs, however, to the responsibility for the expectations that have been raised.

For leadership, this entails the task of defining the path of a consultation as clearly as possible before it begins. Which question is put forward for common discernment? Which experiences are needed? Who prepares a decision, who bears responsibility and how is the outcome communicated? Not every consultation can or should decide everything. **But every genuine consultation needs a recognisable connection to the responsibility of those who issued the invitation.**

This connection becomes particularly important where the outcome of a consultation is not adopted. A justification is then not merely a communicative supplement to a decision already taken. It recognises those involved as responsible subjects of ecclesial life. Where such a justification is lacking, the impression easily arises that participation is only welcome as long as it confirms an intention already in place.

Sharing responsibility and clarifying responsibility

The questionnaire shows both a desire for greater personal responsibility and uncertainty about who is responsible for what. Shared responsibility does not arise from distributing tasks as vaguely as possible. It needs recognisable roles, the possibility of consulting expertise and a reliable form of accountability. Otherwise, new forms of participation can lead to additional burdens without actually changing the distribution of power.

This applies equally to the responsibility of priests and of lay people. Priests must not remain responsible for every decision while others are at the same time called upon to act independently. Lay people should not have to take on tasks without receiving the information, authority and support this requires. A synodal practice of leadership must shape each person's responsibility in such a way that it can actually be exercised.

Equally important is the distinction between collaboration, participation in consultation and participation in decision-making. All three can be meaningful, but they are not the same. If simple collaboration is called co-responsibility although neither the task nor its execution can be shaped by those involved, a conceptual ambiguity with practical consequences arises. Conversely, shared responsibility in its various forms must not be regarded as valuable only when it is combined with identical decision-making competence.

Taking the intermediate levels seriously

Between episcopal orientation and parish practice lie numerous spaces of mediation. These include diocesan areas of responsibility, deaneries, pastoral services, places of formation and everyday communication between these levels. The questionnaire shows that impulses can be taken up, altered, delayed or not passed on there. A clear episcopal commitment to synodality is therefore important, but on its own it is no guarantee of its implementation.

The quality of this mediation should itself become a subject of common reflection. Where is knowledge lacking, where competences, where time? Which people already bear responsibility without receiving sufficient support for it? Which information does not reach communities, although it would be available? Such questions help to distinguish between a lack of will and inadequate conditions.

A particular task consists in bringing feedback from local practice back into diocesan leadership.

Mediation is not a one-way street. If difficulties on the ground are read only as a lack of understanding of a good concept, the opportunity to improve the concept through experience remains unused. Synodal leadership must therefore also allow itself to be questioned about the effects of its own decisions.

Linking formation with real possibilities for action

Besides knowledge about synodality, the frequently mentioned need for formation also includes skills that have to be learned in acting together. These include listening to different experiences, spiritual discernment, dealing with conflicts and the willingness to assume oneself the responsibility one demands. Such skills do not arise from a one-off briefing on new concepts.

Formation becomes more effective when it is linked to concrete tasks. A leadership team can learn, from a decision that is actually pending, how information is shared, how those affected are heard and how different points of view are weighed. A council can examine whether its way of working leaves room for questions or mainly confirms proposals already prepared. A community can gain experience in trusting new people, once invited, also to help shape things.

Theological formation remains indispensable. Practical cooperation alone does not yet answer the question of why shared responsibility belongs to being Church. Conversely, a theological justification remains abstract if it is conveyed without corresponding experience. The connection between both paths of learning is particularly significant for priestly formation, further training and the accompaniment of volunteers in positions of responsibility.

Not overburdening wounded trust with new expectations

Where people have been wounded by abuse, exclusion or participation without consequences, a new invitation can have an ambivalent effect. It can open up hope, but also give rise to the expectation of renewed disappointment. A responsible synodal practice must therefore acknowledge that trust cannot be presupposed and that withdrawal does not always mean a lack of willingness.

Building trust requires reliability in manageable steps. Commitments must be kept or corrected with reasons given. Criticism must be possible without calling into question the belonging of the person who voices it. Different experiences should not be invalidated by pointing to progress already made. **That something has succeeded in one place does not refute the experience of a blockage in another.**

Experiences of abuse are, moreover, subject to their own requirements. Spiritual conversations and communal reflection cannot replace the designated procedures for safeguarding, complaints and the reappraisal of abuse. The willingness to listen to victims and survivors must remain linked to professional responsibility and the protection of their self-determination. A common language of ecclesial vulnerability must not blur the different responsibilities of those affected and those in positions of responsibility.

Combining patience with verifiable steps

The responses call for both patience and recognisable change. These expectations need not be opposed to one another. Patience becomes credible where a next step is named, responsibility is assumed and a later joint review is agreed. Without such commitment, it can appear as a call to keep waiting while the decisive questions remain untouched.

Conversely, a spiritually responsible patience guards against celebrating every new structure as renewal. Relationships change more slowly than the allocation of competences. New responsibility can give rise to uncertainty, feelings of loss and conflicts. These experiences need accompaniment, without becoming a reason to reverse every path that has been begun.

For further work, a combination of limited projects and longer-term orientation is therefore advisable. Not everything has to be changed at once. But what is begun should be seriously accompanied and considered in terms of its effects. Precisely in this way, a culture of leadership can emerge that is committed both to people and to the common mission.

Experiences from the questionnaire by region

The overview brings together the reported priorities by region. Countries are not listed individually even where several responses come from one country; each region states in brackets which countries it comprises. The number of responses is given in each case, so that it remains visible on what basis an experience is described. A single voice opens an important occasion for conversation, but does not permit a general assessment of a national Church. Among the 56 responses received are two pairs of almost identical responses, one from Central and South-Eastern Europe and one from Southern Europe. Each pair is treated as one contribution in the thematic weighting; there are thus 54 independent contributions.

Region	Responses	Reported priorities
Western Europe (Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland)	19	New cooperation between bishops and lay people, diocesan and national structural development, synodal teams and further training, more consultation and interdiocesan networking, accessible materials, Conversation in the Spirit, starting more strongly from local needs, synodality as a cross-cutting theme and more listening in individual communities. At the same time, fears on the part of leadership, local resistance, little local impact, unclear paths of consultation, ignorance and need for formation, disillusionment and reform fatigue, low visibility in the diocese and lack of initiative, overload, ageing and resistance also among younger priests and committed lay people. Named are a lack of binding commitment, non-transparent power and the self-assertion of existing bodies; problematised are the equation of structures under Church-State law with democracy and synodality, and the coordination of different sponsoring bodies and funding systems. Also described as a burden are Roman centralism, waiting for Roman decisions, the outstanding recognition for a national synodal structure and international interventions. Concerns are rights of participation and evaluation, connection with young people, communication in rural areas, team-building, stronger lay participation, theological grounding, a leadership capable of acting together, methodological diversity, interdiocesan support and European networking.

Region	Responses	Reported priorities
Central and South-Eastern Europe (Austria, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary)	19	First experiences of participation, synodal teams, pastoral care teams, formation programmes and a new culture of conversation, strengthened pastoral councils and bodies, local processes, new teams and the participation of young adults at parish level, and a shift towards pastoral ministry with the people. At the same time, little reception and hardly any perceived national or diocesan development, a change visible above all in discourse while legal competences remain unchanged, lack of interest, rejection, complacency, lack of formation, inertia and little reach beyond the core milieu, limited resources, overload, distance between clergy and laity, problems of communication and trust, local conflicts, fear of losing authority, clerical and authoritarian patterns, unequal participation, political influences and in some cases negative public portrayals; synodality is not everywhere a real priority, and one voice warns against misunderstanding it as democratisation. Concerns are baptismal awareness, gender justice, transparency, missionary openness and formation for shared responsibility.
Northern Europe (Ireland, United Kingdom, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania)	11	National networking, diocesan events and parish work, strengthened and renewed pastoral councils, Conversation in the Spirit in individual contexts, synodal pastoral planning with support for local participatory bodies, a group on the ministry of women, listening processes in parishes, mediating leadership, revitalised youth ministry and cooperation in individual communities, alongside the statement that there has been no change. At the same time, lack of resources and financial limits, loss of trust, consequences of abuse, exhausted leadership and insufficient initiative from leadership, low participation of priests and little reception in the parishes, little implementation, lack of unity, insufficient involvement of young people, and fatigue and scepticism towards listening processes. Concerns are the synodal handling of questions of finance, personnel and property, community-building in multilingual parishes, co-responsibility and coping with ecclesial scandals.
Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal, Cyprus)	4	Binding structures of shared responsibility, changed decision-making procedures, more co-responsibility and greater common awareness. At the same time, scepticism among the clergy, parishes not involved, resistance particularly from younger priests, deficits in formation, prejudices, declining engagement and the difficulty of involving new generations. Concerns are priestly formation, overcoming strongly hierarchical practice and joint pastoral projects. In content, the four responses correspond to three voices.
Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Moldova)	3	Solidarity as faith lived in war, more dialogue and sharing, initial encouragement. War, poverty, emigration and atheism determine what is possible; survival, the protection of life and responsible Christian living are in the foreground. A process interrupted by the war, the absence of a diocesan forum, the overload of priests and the lack of commissioning of lay people are mentioned. Stronger co-responsibility is desired, doctrinal change is rejected; hope is directed towards new evangelisation.

PART THREE

Table conversations at the Symposium in Wels: divergences and steps forward

KEY SENTENCES

Not every difference is already a conflict, and not every absence of objection signifies consensus.

The table reports do not yield a catalogue of measures free of contradiction.



Spiritual conversation, differing positions and concrete proposals

The table conversations at the Symposium in Wels deepen the questions of synodal renewal in a common European space. Their particular contribution lies in connecting personal experiences, theological reflections and proposals from different ecclesial contexts. They are presented here in their own right and are not merged with the responses to the questionnaire into a single finding. Each of the five conversation sessions followed input from the programme, namely on Monday the introductory lectures by Predrag Bukovec, Xénia Sereghy and Robert Svatoň, on Tuesday morning the short statements on key questions for Europe (digital world, ecumenism, war, polarisation, nationalism and migration, catechumenate and catechesis), on Tuesday afternoon the keynotes by Tomáš Halík and Gabriele Eder-Cakl, on Wednesday morning the keynote by Christoph Theobald and on Wednesday afternoon the keynote by Myriam Wijlens. For each thematic field, the input to which the conversations mainly refer is given in brackets.

Explicit disagreement, differing experiences and unresolved tensions must be kept apart. Not every difference is already a conflict, and not every absence of objection signifies consensus. Likewise, a distinction must be made between a spiritual orientation, a concrete local proposal and a European working mandate.

The presentation brings out these differences in the individual thematic fields. Proposed steps are reported as suggestions arising from the conversations; they are not decisions. Taking them further requires clarification of competences, prerequisites and possible support.

Baptism, the universal offer of salvation and the foundation of synodality

(Introductory lecture Bukovec; keynotes Theobald and Wijlens)

For numerous tables, baptism forms a common point of reference for ecclesial dignity and responsibility. At the same time, a considerable distance between sacramental celebration and lived awareness is described. People can understand themselves as members of the Church without connecting their belonging with baptism. Likewise, baptism can appear as a private family event, while its communal significance is scarcely experienced. Beyond knowledge of baptism, the reports therefore ask about a way of life rooted in baptism.

Divergences and open theological questions

Explicit dissent is documented in one table report. There, the approach of a baptismal ecclesiology was not accepted by all and gave rise to an intense debate. The report, however, does not give detailed counter-arguments. This gap must not be filled with conjectures about the theological positions of those involved.

A precise theological counter-question concerns the starting point of synodality. Does grounding it in baptism not begin too late, if God's saving action already precedes all human beings? This position is grounded in dialogue with the Council and a theology of universal grace. The conflict concerns whether baptismal belonging adequately expresses the comprehensive horizon of walking together. A conclusive common answer is not given.

Further questions concern the relationship between baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. The differing practices of initiation are linked to the tension between a Eucharist-centred ecclesiology and a baptismal ecclesiology. In addition, the relationship between the universal call to salvation and the specific baptismal vocation remains open. The conversations thus do not lead to a common commitment to a single theological starting point.

Proposed steps forward

At parish level, remembrance of baptism, accessible mystagogical formation, accompaniment of parents and godparents, and a celebration that can be experienced more communally are proposed. These include regular conversations about how people live the Word of God, and low-threshold forms of remembrance of baptism that are not tied to the presence of a priest. A further proposal links formation on baptism with a deepening of the *sensus fidei*. Common to these suggestions is the transition from a sacrament received once to a lifelong vocation.

At European level, a task force in connection with the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) is proposed to promote baptismal awareness and a baptismal ecclesiology. Alongside this are the idea of a baptismal congress and the suggestion of exchanging experiences of Christian initiation at a forthcoming European meeting. These proposals differ in form and scope. They name concrete possibilities for further work without already representing a common decision.

It remains open how such a strand of work would take up the theological objections instead of circumventing them through practical formation programmes. It is equally unclear how the baptismal vocation connects social action, lived community and participation in ecclesial decision-making.

Equal dignity, different ministries and the position of women

(Keynotes Theobald and Wijlens)

The equal dignity of the baptised is widely affirmed. The reports show, however, that the same ideas of responsibility, ministry and office do not automatically follow from this statement. The experiences of women in particular make visible the distance between theological statement and ecclesial practice. In one conversation, women say that they do not feel sufficiently heard and recognised in their gifts, emotions, mission and baptismal vocation.

Divergences on equality, responsibility and office

The conversations reveal difficulties in distinguishing conceptually between dignity and responsibility. Disputed, among other things, is whether all the baptised should participate in ecclesial ministry and whether lay people are sufficiently prepared for it. A further difference concerns the expression of the baptismal vocation. While liturgical participation is recognised as a genuine expression of this vocation, it is also asked whether this is sufficient for people with responsibility in pastoral care teams. Baptismal vocation, collaboration in the parish and institutional office must therefore not be tacitly equated.

The sharpest explicitly documented dissent concerns the ordination of women. The position that it is overdue stands opposed to a position that excludes it, invoking the binding nature of papal teaching, and fears a schism. The different practical expectations of those involved are thus also based on different understandings of the binding force of magisterial teaching. **This dissent must not be concealed by general agreement on equal baptismal dignity.**

There are also differences in the perception of current practice. The assessment that women are already very present and bear great responsibility stands opposed to the demand for further development. The stronger integration of women and the family as the place where faith is passed on are also weighted differently. These differing priorities cannot simply be equated with a rejection of women's concerns.

Proposed steps forward

Several contributions call for ministries to be entrusted according to charisms and suitability rather than gender, and for women's experiences of vocation to be taken seriously. It is further proposed to distinguish between leadership and ordination, to link authority more closely to tasks and offices, and to think further about the preaching mandate of the baptised, also with regard to the homily. These concerns require differentiated treatment. They do not justify the assumption that every change mentioned is already legally possible locally.

One table report records that the diaconate for women was discussed particularly intensively; it is to be distinguished from the question of the ordination of women. The same report names questions about the ordination of married men and about the obligation of celibacy. Several responses to the questionnaire from Western as well as from Central and South-Eastern Europe

also mention celibacy. Individual tables address the visibility of queer people, the handling of gender diversity and questions of sexual ethics. Two Western European responses mention the handling of gender diversity and questions of sexual ethics.

A particularly concrete proposal concerns the statutes of Bishops' Conferences. At one table it was proposed to amend them so that a woman can hold the office of General Secretary. From the evaluation it follows that this question arises for all Bishops' Conferences and that each can clarify on its own responsibility whether its statutes permit this. In some conferences this has already been realised – in the Bishops' Conference of the Nordic Countries since 2009 with Sr Anna Mirijam Kaschner, in the Bishops' Conference of the Netherlands since 2014, currently with Anneke van der Kamp-van Saase, in the German Bishops' Conference since 2021 with Beate Gilles, in the Slovenian Bishops' Conference since 2023 with Sr Marija Šimenc and in the Bishops' Conference of Scotland since 2026 with Luisa Campbell. For further work at European level, there is at the same time a call for the role of women, including the question of ordination, no longer to be left unspoken. Locally possible changes and the need for further ecclesial clarification must be kept apart.

It remains open how actual recognition and responsibility can be extended where there is no agreement on questions of ordination. It also needs to be clarified which steps are possible locally and which questions require a further ecclesial decision.

From listening to decision and to accountable leadership

(Keynotes Wijlens and Eder-Cakl)

Several tables ask how consultation actually leads to accountable action. The reports describe both positive experiences with pastoral councils and shared leadership and situations in which many collaborate but only a few can prepare or influence decisions. Besides the number of people involved, the problem thus concerns the quality of their participation.

Divergences on competence, law and institutional change

The effectiveness of consultation is assessed differently. In some contexts it is experienced as functioning; in others, after listening and discernment, the decision remains unchanged with the parish priest or bishop alone. Priorities also differ. Some attribute great urgency to institutional and canonical renewal, while others call for a stronger focus on the life of faith and mission.

Clear scepticism is directed against a reconfiguration of roles if this seems to place functions rather than persons at the centre. The question is asked how such considerations serve the mission of the Church. The objections thus concern the connection between organisation, theological justification and concrete people. They are not to be treated as a mere technical misunderstanding.

Existing legal scope is also assessed differently. The differing experiences of neighbouring local Churches make visible the significance of canonical interpretation. The encouragement to use existing possibilities is countered by questions about their scope. There are also reservations

about the metaphor of an ecclesial “Reset”. For some it sounds like a necessary new beginning, for others like a problematic erasure of history or like an unresolved claim to the authority to initiate such a restart at all.

Proposed steps forward

At parish and diocesan level, functioning pastoral councils, better links between councils and the active participation of lay people are proposed. Concrete proposals instead of mere expressions of opinion are expected, as well as comprehensible criteria for reviewing implementation. One suggestion names a parish listening process followed by a parish assembly by 2028. It opens up a local project with a concrete timeframe, but not a general timetable for all dioceses.

A concrete procedural proposal concerns the case in which those in leadership do not wish to follow a council's vote. An institutionalised second round of consultation and a clear justification of the divergent decision are suggested. This makes visible an alternative both to consultation without consequences and to an unclarified shift of all decision-making competence. **Its concrete legal form remains to be examined.**

An explicitly European proposal concerns making mutually accessible the letters that, in line with the guidelines of the General Secretariat of the Synod, the dioceses address to the other local Churches in the first half of 2027. Through the CCEE or the circle of those responsible for the symposium, it could be examined how such an exchange might be made possible. Beyond this, proposals on accountability, transparency and co-responsibility as well as concrete models for dioceses and parishes are put forward. The European contribution would lie in identifying and passing on workable models; local decisions would remain with the local Churches.

It remains open how consultative participation, decision-making competence and ultimate responsibility are to be related to one another in each case. It must likewise be distinguished which problems require a new regulation and which a changed application of existing rules.

Accountability, volunteering, resources and support for leadership

(Keynote Wijlens)

In the redistribution of responsibility, the conversations address its preconditions as well as good intentions. The reports speak of qualification, financial preconditions, the burden on those in responsibility and the relationship between trust and accountability. This makes clear that participation must be made possible institutionally and in terms of personnel.

Divergences over responsibility and its safeguarding

A particularly concrete debate concerns the accountability of volunteers. A priestly voice asks how it can be demanded if mistakes are ultimately attributed to the priest and a pastoral relationship is at the same time to be preserved. Others stress the necessary trust in volunteers, their agency and the importance of appropriate formation. A need for control and a lack of courage explain the conflict here only in part; underlying it is an unresolved order of responsibility.

In this context, objection is raised to a one-sided attribution of all obstacles to reform to priests. Lay people, too, can be resistant; women in leadership roles may be exposed to fierce criticism precisely after responsibility has been transferred to them. A new appointment to a position therefore does not automatically change the culture in which it is exercised.

Large financial differences between dioceses limit the possibilities of shared responsibility without themselves constituting a theological dissent. Suitable and motivated people are in some cases unable to obtain employment that secures their livelihood. Such conditions must not be misread as a lack of synodal disposition. In addition, there is the loneliness of bishops and priests as a burden to be taken seriously.

Proposed steps forward

Proposals include formation and accompaniment of those in leadership, a strengthening of volunteer responsibility and clearer role profiles. Vocational and leadership coaching are mentioned, as are peer consultation and spiritual accompaniment for bishops and those in leadership, vocations academies and the ongoing formation of bishops and priests. Alongside this stands the demand for greater participation of lay people in councils. The language for ministries arising from the baptismal vocation also needs clarification, so that responsibility is not reduced to occasional support.

On the ground, agreements on responsibility, support and feedback would need to be developed from this, whose concrete shape requires further work. Of immediate European relevance is the question of how qualified accompaniment and accessible materials can also be open to those local Churches that cannot finance them alone. A sustainable European funding model would first have to be developed for this.

In particular, the accountability of volunteers, the balance between trust and control, and the funding of sustainable collaboration remain open.

Listening, parrhesia and the limits of a mere conversation method

(Keynotes Halik and Eder-Caki)

Listening is understood as a fundamental spiritual and interpersonal attitude. It is meant to enable people to be present with their own experiences and questions, rather than merely reacting to ecclesial answers already formulated. The experience that the Church gives answers to questions nobody has asked is explicitly named.

Divergences over effect, scope and protected spaces

A clear tension concerns what is expected of listening. For some it already seems sufficient; others expect action to follow from it, especially on the question of ministries and of women. Put pointedly, it is asked whether dialogue really takes place or becomes a distraction. **The criticism here concerns the possible lack of consequences of relationship and mutual understanding.**

A further tension concerns the protected space for conversation. Such a circle may be necessary so that people can speak freely. But it can become a closed world if the experiences do not reach the rest of ecclesial life. Agreement to a protected space for conversation is therefore not identical with agreement to permanent self-limitation.

The method, too, is criticised in concrete terms. One response calls for fewer questions and ten to twenty minutes of silence before the conversation; other contributions name a lack of time for deepening. The criticism is directed at the conditions of the Conversation in the Spirit and shows that spiritual aspiration and actual conditions of conversation must fit together.

Proposed steps forward

Proposals include spaces in which people can develop their ability to speak and be heard. Parrhesia and the courage to speak prophetically belong to this, as do protected spaces for discourse and a convincing invitation to all the baptised. Explicit attention to the poor, the homeless and the excluded is meant to prevent synodal discourse from being confined to a circle of experts.

At the local level it is recommended to practise the Conversation in the Spirit in small units and to shape it as a changed way of being together, without making it an additional burden. This is linked to the transition from a mere “Sunday Church” to everyday Christian practice. Further proposals aim at lasting opportunities for listening, also to people of other religions or without religious affiliation.

It remains open how what has been heard passes into decision-making and accountability, and how participation actually becomes possible beyond the ecclesial core circles. Methodological quality and institutional effect must therefore be considered together.

Christian identity, hospitality and missionary openness

(Keynote Halik; short statement Catechumenate and Catechesis)

Several tables describe a Church that addresses people primarily as counterparts with their own questions of life; the question of potential membership recedes behind this. Hospitality, reliable relationships and the willingness to be changed oneself form a common focus. The reports leave open, however, how this attitude is in every case to be connected with explicit proclamation and ecclesial belonging.

Divergences over belonging and the limits of openness

The question of belonging leads to a series of fundamental counter-questions. Are all people potentially Church, or is that already appropriation? Should people be led to Jesus or to the Church? Which rules are indispensable, which changeable? At the same time, the alternative between withdrawal into a closed milieu and abandonment of one's own identity is problematised.

It is asked whether synodality and evangelisation are treated as alternatives and where different local Churches see indispensable limits. One pointed concern is at what point openness becomes self-abandonment. Another approach asks whether the person who occasionally lights a candle already belongs to the Church, and what purpose the greatest possible reach serves at all. The various questions show that the same understanding of belonging is not presupposed everywhere.

A further limit is touched on in one table report. If catholicity means excluding no one, how does this relate to positions such as right-wing extremism? The question makes visible that acceptance of persons, communal belonging and the assessment of particular attitudes do not simply coincide. No conclusive common answer is documented.

Proposed steps forward

New places of encounter beyond a parish narrowed to Sunday Mass are suggested. The Church is to go where people are not waiting for ecclesial offerings, to perceive loneliness and to awaken curiosity through credible living. The image of open doors therefore denotes both the welcoming of those who come and the Church's going out.

Sustainable personal relationships with the newly baptised and the sharing of culture and everyday life are named as concrete steps. Proclamation through deeds, listening and community is thereby linked with the experience of concrete love. These proposals are located above all at the level of the community and the individual. Alongside increasing reach, the quality of relationship above all is regarded as their common touchstone.

It remains open how hospitality can be lived without appropriation and witness without vagueness. European diversity here raises organisational questions and at the same time touches on differing notions of what constitutes Christian identity today.

Secularisation, social power and the interpretation of Europe

(Keynote Halik; short statement Polarisation, Nationalism and Migration)

In the table conversations Europe does not appear as a uniform space of experience. History, ecclesial presence, relations with the state and social recognition are experienced differently. What is shared is the question of how the Church can be credible and effective under these conditions.

Divergences over loss of power and social support

Interpreting secularisation as an opportunity remains difficult for some participants with Eastern European experience. It also remains open whether a history of strong Christian influence is to be regretted as a loss or overcome as a problematic history of power. State support for Catholic schools is not universally regarded as a matter of course. In these questions, differing historical experiences continue to shape present-day pastoral orientation.

Opposing emphases become particularly clear in the assessment of social power. On the one hand, it is argued that the Church could be more credible without this power and has already been so historically. On the other hand, it is asked how education, help for the poor and social engagement would be possible without agency. The dissent thus concerns the extent of power as well as its concept and its purpose.

The sweeping claim that religion no longer receives social or political support is explicitly questioned. In the conversation a distinction is drawn between support for the faith, cultural interest and institutional motives. Added to this are the tension between national identity and the universality of the Church, and that between religious freedom and the need for a strong identity of one's own.

Proposed steps forward

Proposals include educational programmes that start from people's actual questions of life and bring these into conversation with biblical witness and the tradition of faith. Further suggestions concern reconciliation with one's own historical past, small credible communities and listening to needs before planning new activities. The connection between synodality, Catholic social teaching and the contribution to the common good is explicitly called for.

At the European level the points of connection lie in the exchange of differing experiences and in a common interpretation that does not make any region the standard for all others. Recounting lived experiences of faith and mission could help to build such connections. At the same time it is proposed to respond jointly rather than in isolation to the differing life situations of young people, migrants and catechumens.

It remains open how common orientation can become possible without historical uniformity. East and West must not be treated as closed opposing camps. The conversations show differing, in part cross-cutting experiences, whose common potential can only be unlocked through genuine encounter.

Europe's wounds, ecclesial injuries and concrete solidarity

(Short statements War and Polarisation, Nationalism and Migration)

Europe's wounds become present above all through war, flight, loneliness, fear and polarisation. One shared question condenses this horizon, asking where the risen Christ is encountered in the wounds of the people of Europe. The reports on Ukraine give this question an existential character. Behind the image stand people and communities under concrete threat.

Tensions between hope, powerlessness and responsibility

A fundamental tension exists between the wish to give Europe hope and a sense of one's own powerlessness. There are also differing perceptions of which experiences actually awaken hope. The elementary experience of faith in war is particularly highlighted, while other voices name God's working in secular contexts and the diversity of European experiences. The variety of these approaches does not yield a simple common success story.

It is critically noted that family crises were given too little attention, while much was said about ecclesial reorganisation. The distance between European conversations and the Church as experienced in the neighbourhood is likewise stressed. These queries correct a possible self-referentiality of the European work and point to its service to concrete life.

At the same time the reports speak of a wounded Church. Here a distinction must be made between injuries suffered and injustice caused by the Church. **Sexual violence and abuse of power must not be depoliticised by a general language of shared vulnerability or removed from the question of responsibility.** Such a distinction is indispensable for responsible ecclesial practice.

Proposed steps forward

Cooperation with other religious communities for the benefit of people affected by war and poverty is named as a concrete step. Solidarity is explicitly linked with spirituality and with a mercy that reaches beyond one's own group. Injuries are not to be concealed. Rather, from acknowledging one's own vulnerability a more attentive presence with other people can grow.

The European dimension lies here in relationships across borders; responsibility for the help itself remains local. Where reports still remain at the level of spiritual orientation, this must remain visible. They do not consistently name those responsible, funding or binding next dates. Part Four therefore explicitly translates these suggestions, as working proposals, into possible forms of European support.

It remains open how being moved becomes lasting solidarity and how people with experiences of injury themselves share in deciding on their participation.

Spiritual deepening, liturgy and the danger of a merely organisational renewal

(Introductory lectures Bukovec and Sereghy)

Prayer, silence, Scripture and a personal relationship with Christ are repeatedly named as sources of synodal practice. The movement of immersing oneself in God and emerging among people connects contemplation and presence in society. At the same time the reports warn against a process that loses its spiritual dimension in organising.

Divergences over the role of the liturgy and the relationship between Spirit and structure

Differing positions on the liturgy become clear. For one voice authentic liturgical celebration stands at the centre; another considers the reference to liturgy and Eucharist overemphasised in view of the experiences of many people. The question is also posed in practical terms. Should people distant from the Church be invited directly to the liturgy because it is precious, or is preparation needed first, so that the invitation does not lead nowhere?

The importance of the homily is also weighted differently. One voice stresses that it is not the most important element of the Mass; others insist on its importance for people's questions and on the freedom to seek well-prepared celebrations. Elsewhere, liturgical unity is described both as a helpful orientation and as a possible limitation of creativity.

In table reports as well as in responses to the questionnaire, the incomplete reception of the Second Vatican Council is repeatedly named. A return to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and to the importance of the Word of God is desired. A nostalgia for the past is described that also appears among younger people, and it is hoped that priests also live the Council they know. One dissenting voice calls for an independent theological justification, without always merely referring to the Council.

A supplementary personal reflection warns against confusing Christian hope with organisational optimism and ever new projects. As a personal voice it is to be distinguished from the shared table conversations. Its objection nevertheless sharpens a question also discernible there about the limits of human planning. Hope is not exhausted in the expectation that one's own measures will produce the desired success.

Proposed steps forward

Places of contemplation are called for, and the bishops are explicitly seen as bearing a responsibility for making them possible. Liturgical formation, mystagogy and a stronger connection of the homily with everyday life are named as further steps. Prayer and silence need space; the organisation of celebrations should not impair their dignity through logistical requirements.

Ongoing formation is linked with retreats, pilgrimages and the cultivation of inner attentiveness. People are to be enabled to live an authentic Christian life and to speak about it. The steps remain predominantly located in parishes, dioceses and educational institutions. A European exchange could open up their experiences, but would be no substitute for locally lived spirituality.

It remains open how spiritual deepening and institutional consequences can come together without being played off against each other.

Initiation, young people and concrete places of lived faith

(Short statement Catechumenate and Catechesis; introductory lecture Bukovec)

The conversations repeatedly ask about life after the celebration of the sacraments. Preparation alone does not yet create reliable belonging. The newly baptised, families, children and young people need communities in which they receive and at the same time are themselves present with their gifts and questions.

Divergences over prerequisites, accompaniment and commitment

Views on the age of confirmation, preparation and motivation diverge. One local experience relies on later confirmation in the hope of greater maturity; at the same time there is a warning against making access to the Eucharist more difficult through ever more requirements. Linked to this is the question of whether pastoral adaptation really helps or merely makes things less binding. No common model of initiation can be derived from this.

Tensions exist between appreciation of communities that offer a clear identity and sustaining religious practice, and the concern that these may become too closed. Movements are perceived partly as a help in rediscovering baptism, partly as possibly not very open to the synodal path. Young people's search for spiritual depth should therefore be assessed neither wholesale as a step backwards nor uncritically as a solution.

The absence of young people from the conversations is explicitly addressed. It is set against the call for spaces in which initiation, experience of faith and synodal togetherness are connected from the outset. The central tension lies between speaking about young people and a practice in which they themselves speak and shape.

Proposed steps forward

Proposals include catechumenal places of faith where different vocations are on a common path with the bishop. New parishioners are to be actively received and be able to contribute their experiences to shared learning spaces. This includes continuous accompaniment of young people and families after the administration of the sacraments. The community should act for them and at the same time be able to change together with them.

Adolescents and young adults are to be formed so that they themselves can reach others. Educational programmes are therefore linked with new spaces of listening and with cooperation between parishes, movements, religious, priests and lay people. An exchange of good experiences

of initiation is explicitly suggested for the next European meeting.

Open questions remain regarding the concrete forms of longer-term accompaniment and the involvement in their development of the young people hitherto absent.

Digital living spaces and personal relationship

(Short statement Digital World)

The digital world is perceived as a real living space of young people and as a possible place for communicating faith. At the same time there are reservations about simply adopting media standards of success. Personal encounter remains a recurring point of reference.

Divergences over reach and sustainability

Whether religious attention on social media produces more than a short-term effect is a matter of controversy. The visibility of prominent figures is seen on the one hand as a possible opening, on the other as part of self-staging and an instrumental media logic. It is asked whether religion is credibly witnessed here or used to address particular target groups.

Other contributions stress the opportunities of existing offerings and name concrete digital initiatives as examples of accompanying young people. Their digital life-world is important precisely because young people are absent from some ecclesial conversations. There is thus no uniformly positive or negative assessment of digital mission.

Proposed steps forward

Proposals include comprehensible language, learning from existing offerings and accompanying young people in their actual spaces of communication. A Belgian network of “Godfluencers” is named as a concrete suggestion. At the same time, the importance of personal relationships in a digitalised world remains a central consideration. Digital and personal encounter should therefore not be treated as alternatives.

It remains open how initial digital contacts pass into reliable accompaniment and by what signs something more than attention can be recognised. For European cooperation, therefore, it would be necessary, alongside comparing reach, to examine the connection between contact, conversation and local community. Such an exchange could help to develop suitable forms further and to perceive their limits more precisely.

Ecumenism, East and West, and European community

(Introductory lectures Svatoň and Sereghy; short statement Ecumenism)

The various ecclesial traditions become visible as an opportunity for learning and at the same time as a source of misunderstanding. A common baptism does not mean that liturgy, understanding of the Church, belonging and synodal practice are understood alike everywhere. Particularly important is the distinction between Eastern Catholic Churches, other Christian Churches and differing national characteristics.

Divergences and obstacles to understanding

Clear differences and mutual incomprehension between Eastern and Western experiences are openly named. Fidelity to one's own rite can come into tension with openness to others. At the same time a broader understanding of ecumenism is called for that includes prayer and common mission. The task is to preserve one's own tradition and to bring it into a relationship with others that is ready to learn.

The connection between national and ecclesial identity and the strain placed on ecumenical relations by the war make understanding more difficult. Such experiences cannot be dissolved by general appeals to unity. At the same time, equating the attitude of individual actors with an entire tradition must be avoided.

Where nuances rather than actual divergences are spoken of, terms such as integration nevertheless require clarification. Problems of understanding are also named between Eastern and Southern European experiences. Even in the absence of open conflict, it therefore cannot be presupposed that participants mean the same thing by the same terms.

Proposed steps forward

A better knowledge of the Christian Churches in each local area and concrete encounters between them are suggested. Common forms of prayer, knowledge of other rites and cooperation in the service of reconciliation could open up paths for this. Equally important is to explain more precisely to other Churches what is meant by synodality, dialogue and ecumenism, and to take up their own experiences and questions.

The clearest European structural proposal is found in one table report. A European ecumenical synodal assembly should bring Christian communities together and enable them to speak together out of their diversity. This is to be taken seriously as an explicit table proposal. It is neither identical with an existing body nor already a mandate to found a new institution.

Its purpose, participation, relationship to existing ecumenical structures and the question of how a European meeting strengthens local cooperation remain open. Here in particular, subsidiarity would be the criterion for any further development.

Distinct contribution of the table conversations at the symposium in Wels

The table reports do not yield a consistent catalogue of measures. Their particular contribution lies in linking fundamental theological questions with experiences from different ecclesial contexts and with concrete proposals. The strongest explicitly named disagreements concern the grounding of synodality, women and ministries, the connection between consultation and decision, and the significance of institutional reform. Further tensions concern social power, identity and openness, liturgy, initiation and the relationship between European understanding and local reality.

As regards the steps forward, the range is just as important. Alongside fundamental attitudes there are concrete local projects, national suggestions for reform and explicitly European proposals. For further European work, particular mention is made of a task force on baptismal awareness, a possible baptismal congress, the sharing of diocesan letters, models of transparency and accountability, exchange on initiation and an ecumenical synodal assembly.

Not every proposal is yet sufficiently defined. Where responsibilities, resources or implementation steps are lacking, further clarification remains necessary. The roadmap should therefore neither turn every suggestion into a European project nor confine itself to a collection of local good practice. It must distinguish what is a matter of local responsibility and what additional European support makes this responsibility more effective.

Divergences as a shared theological task

Differences in grounding are not merely problems of understanding

The table conversations show that not every tension can be overcome by a better explanation of the same approach. Where the relationship between baptism and God's universal offer of salvation, between equal dignity and different ministries, or between consultation and decision is in question, different theological groundings are in part at stake. These differences are to be treated as part of the shared work on a viable form of synodality; on these questions there is no settled consensus that they could disrupt.

Such work must, however, go beyond the juxtaposition of positions. Different concepts should be clarified and their practical consequences made visible. What does a particular understanding of ministry mean for the participation of others? What consequences does an understanding of baptismal dignity have for the recognition of charisms? What form of unity is sought when local paths diverge? Only when the consequences of a position become apparent is responsible understanding possible.

The kind of objection also matters. A statement may be disputed theologically, experienced pastorally as inadequate or considered legally impracticable. These levels require different ways of being addressed. If they are conflated, a legal limit may appear as a definitive theological

answer, or a theological demand as an immediately available course of action.

Common paths despite differing scope of reform ideas

The conversations contain wishes for reform on which there is no agreement. These include, in particular, questions of ordination and the future relationship between leadership, ministry and decision. At the same time, in many places there is a shared desire for more reliable listening, better formation, greater transparency and genuine recognition of the gifts of women and men. Further work should make use of these shared possibilities without passing over the disputed questions in silence.

Such a path must not, however, become a permanent evasion. Where an open question constitutes a concrete limit to people's vocation and responsibility, it is not enough to point to other possibilities of participation. The question must be taken forward in an appropriate way. At the same time, improvements that are already possible cannot be made dependent on all questions of principle being decided first.

The European level could help to exercise this twofold responsibility. It can bring different experiences into conversation, make misunderstandings visible and prepare questions in such a way that they can be taken further by the competent body in each case. Its task is thus a mediating one; it carries no authority to derive a new decision for the universal Church from a European conversation.

The relationship between spiritual experience and institutional form

A recurring tension concerns whether renewal must begin first with attitudes or first with structures. The experiences from Wels suggest overcoming this alternative. A spiritual attitude needs opportunities in which it can be lived. An institutional form needs people who exercise their responsibility in this spirit. Each can foster the other, and each can block the other.

Thus a newly created body can fail if it merely reproduces existing power relations in a different composition. Conversely, a culture of trustful conversation can reach its limit if its results are given no institutional significance. The synodal claim therefore concerns the interplay of relationships, procedures and responsibilities.

This has consequences for the assessment of progress. A changed tone is not insignificant merely because no change in law has yet been made. A change in law is not meaningless merely because it does not automatically change the attitudes of those involved. What matters is whether the various steps are related to one another and whether a more reliable shared responsibility develops from them.

Mission as touchstone of synodal renewal

The concern that synodal processes might lose themselves in ecclesial self-preoccupation must be taken seriously. It is not answered, however, by separating questions of participation, power and recognition from mission. How the Church decides, deals with criticism and entrusts people with responsibility shapes the credibility of its witness.

Nor may mission be used merely as a retrospective justification of institutional reform. Encounter with people, attention to their lives and readiness to serve have a priority of their own. They can lead the Church to ask questions other than those with which it first entered a process.

The table conversations combine these two perspectives. They call for a Church that renews its relationships and at the same time opens itself beyond its familiar circles. A European roadmap should therefore ask of every project which people will thereby be better heard, accompanied and enabled for co-responsibility, and how the mission of the Church becomes more concrete in it.

Country-related experiences from the table conversations at the symposium in Wels

Besides overarching questions, the table conversations also name concrete local experiences. The following overview brings these together and distinguishes them from the individual responses presented above. Unlike in the questionnaire, countries are named here, because the table reports reflect experiences from conversations and do not identify individual respondents. A country is included only where a table report itself cites a local experience; the order is alphabetical. Where a contribution refers to a presented example or a comparison, no comprehensive country finding is derived from it.

Country / local context	Experience or concern from the table conversations
Belgium, diocese not named	Councils with diverse membership, women in positions of responsibility, Conversation in the Spirit and feedback of pastoral proposals to parishes. A formation centre with different vocations and a digital network are presented as suggestions.
Germany	Baptismal awareness in parishes and the position of women; experiences with evaluation and a need for clear implementation criteria. Different interpretations of the possibilities under canon law are raised.
France	Reports of new awakenings of faith give rise to hope; elsewhere, episcopal delegates with specific responsibilities are described. Alongside their own local observations, the tables partly take up experiences from contributions to the symposium.
Ireland	The pastoral programme "Baptised and Sent" is cited as an experience. Further contributions address the loss of social influence, cultural identity, migration and opportunities for European learning.
Italy and Germany	Different expectations and tensions at national level are mentioned by way of comparison. The report does not develop more detailed local case descriptions.
Latvia	A supplementary contribution describes ecumenical dialogue and cooperation with an impact on society.
Luxembourg	Women in diocesan responsibility, cooperation between councils, support for volunteers and restructuring. Financial constraints are named as an obstacle.

Country / local context	Experience or concern from the table conversations
Netherlands	Materials on conciliar texts are cited as a suggestion for an accessible presentation of faith and baptismal awareness. This is a reference to resources, with no claim to be a comprehensive country finding.
Austria, especially Diocese of Linz / Upper Austria	Pastoral care teams, shared responsibility and support for volunteers; positive experiences with transparency and the possibility of objection. In addition, questions about the understanding of the baptismal vocation and the recognition of ministries. Differences from Vienna are explicitly mentioned.
Switzerland	Cooperation with lay pastoral staff and promotion of the common priesthood. Remembrance of baptism and encouragement by priests are named as concrete starting points.
Slovakia	One contribution describes a strongly priest-centred parish practice and little influence for the laity. This remains an experience without a more precise location.
Slovenia	Need for mystagogy and for overcoming the distance between clergy and laity. Participation is to become an everyday ecclesial practice.
Ukraine	War, accompaniment of the wounded, communal prayer, Scripture and hope under existential conditions. Concrete parish experiences and missionary practice are also raised.
Hungary	Pastoral ministries of lay people, Liturgies of the Word and promotion of baptismal awareness amid a shortage of priests. Other contributions ask about missing pastoral councils and about deepening faith beyond occasional celebrations of the sacraments.
United Kingdom	A comparison with Germany points to different circumstances. A precise attribution to one part of the country is not possible here.

PART FOUR

A subsidiarity-based work programme for the European level

KEY SENTENCES

Acting at European level so that the local Churches can act for themselves.

Another major event without reliable follow-up would not be a sufficient outcome.



Acting at European level so that the local Churches can act for themselves

The European task is not to take over the implementation of synodality in the dioceses. What a diocese must decide, shape and accompany on its own responsibility, it should also actually be able to accomplish. Subsidiarity therefore does not mean mere restraint on the part of the higher level. It equally requires organising support where local responsibility would otherwise exist only formally, without additional knowledge, relationships, resources or safe spaces.

The European level is thus neither an additional level of ecclesial governance nor merely a venue for events. Its own contribution lies in tasks that individual local Churches cannot sensibly fulfil alone. These include cross-border learning, shared theological clarification, multilingual formation resources, the balancing of unequal access, dialogue on conflict situations in Europe and the collective forwarding of questions to the competent level of the universal Church.

The following proposals develop a possible European work programme from the experiences of Wels. They are neither resolutions of the symposium nor services already committed by existing institutions. How they are taken up is to be clarified with the competent bodies.

Distinguishing responsibilities and levels of action

What is the responsibility of dioceses and parishes

The local level would need to shape its own processes of listening and discernment, make its participatory bodies functional and take responsibility for concrete pastoral decisions within the respective competences. This includes the selection and accompaniment of staff, the use of local resources, reliable feedback to those involved and the shaping of the catechumenate, parish life and pastoral cooperation.

At European level, therefore, no decisions are made about the composition of a pastoral care team, the membership of a particular parish council or the pastoral programme of a diocese. What can be offered there are experiences, expert guidance, formation and advice. The decision remains where ecclesial responsibility for it lies.

What requires national or regional cooperation

Some tasks go beyond the individual diocese without thereby becoming directly European. These include materials for a language area, joint training, national coordination and concerns addressed to a Bishops' Conference. The proposal documented in one table report to amend the statutes of Bishops' Conferences so that a woman can hold the office of General Secretary is one example. Each Bishops' Conference can clarify on its own responsibility whether its statutes permit this.

At European level, such developments could be examined comparatively and experiences shared. National and regional cooperation should not, however, be bypassed or replaced by a separate parallel system. Where existing structures are helpful, they would be the ones to work with; where there are gaps, these would need to be named together.

What has a distinct European added value

European added value arises where the diversity of contexts itself becomes a source of insight or where shared resources are needed. Questions of social power, secularisation, national identity and ecumenical understanding cannot be adequately addressed from a single national horizon of experience. The same applies to the translation and shared use of formation programmes and to partnerships with financially less well-resourced local Churches.

The European level is therefore of its own kind and only to a limited extent comparable with a diocese. The proper contribution of this level consists in connection, understanding, support and shared articulation. The outcome would need to become usable again in the places where people live the Church and bear responsibility.

What is to be passed on to the level of the universal Church

Questions concerning ordained ministries, norms of the universal Church or the binding relationship between ministry and shared decision-making cannot be resolved at European level. There, different positions can be carefully documented, experiences of their effects gathered, expert clarification enabled and well-founded concerns passed on to the competent bodies.

Passing questions upwards should not become a pretext for leaving existing local possibilities unused. Conversely, the reference to experimentation should not create the impression that every desired change already lies within diocesan competence. Clarifying this boundary is itself an important European support service.

A test for every European project

Before any new European project, its added benefit would have to be determined. It is not enough that a topic is important. What would matter is why a shared European approach is necessary or helpful precisely here.

The need would have to arise from concrete experiences. A project should respond to a named problem or a question shared by several places. The experiences documented here are starting points; they do not replace consultation with those involved.

Local responsibility would have to remain recognisable. For every form of support it must be stated what the diocese or parish decides itself and what additional provision Europe makes. The aim is to extend local scope for action in a way that avoids permanent dependence.

Existing work would have to be used. Before a new format, institute or document is created, it must be examined whether suitable provision already exists. Translation, making material accessible and shared use can be more helpful than yet another new foundation.

Unequal opportunities would have to be taken into account. Programmes should not primarily benefit those who already have sufficient staff, money and international contacts. Language, travel costs, time and access to expertise must be considered.

The outcome would have to be practically usable. Every project needs a defined outcome and a review of its benefit. **A conference or publication is a means; whether the support has succeeded must be shown by its benefit.**

Building a European learning and support network

The questionnaire of the Task Force shows considerable differences between regions and within the same local Church. The table reports at the same time show how productive the meeting of these experiences can be. A European network should therefore not simply declare supposedly advanced countries to be teachers and others to be learners. Experiences that are essential for other local Churches also come from fragile, minority or war-affected contexts.

The concrete European contribution would be reliable mediation between people and places with related questions. A diocese that is setting up participatory councils anew could talk with another about its actual decision-making processes. A place with a long-standing culture of councils could learn from communities in which the personal transmission of faith is more pronounced. The starting point would in each case be concretely named questions, to which any visits would also be tailored.

As a first outcome, a manageable internal directory should be created, recording contact persons, fields of experience, support needs and available resources. A few voluntary learning partnerships could build on this. For each partnership, the shared question, the locally owned next step and the European contribution would be recorded. At European level, contact, translation and evaluation would be enabled; the leadership of the process would remain on the ground.

The mutual sharing of diocesan letters suggested in one table report could provide a concrete basis for this. Before any sharing, purpose, consent and confidentiality would have to be clarified. Personal accounts of experience and internally sensitive descriptions of conflict are not automatically intended for wider circulation.

The wish for such a European support network is explicitly expressed. From Western Europe comes the proposal of a “Synodality Network”, while an individual response from Northern Europe highlights connecting people and exchanging concrete practice. The network should therefore collect materials and at the same time facilitate access to suitable accompaniment and to conversation partners with similar tasks. Its contribution would have to be measured against improved local capacity to act.

Organising shared theological clarification without concealing dissent

The theological divergences from Wels cannot be resolved by a purely organisational roadmap. At European level, a limited, workable dialogue between different disciplines and ecclesial experiences should be made possible. Theological faculties, educational institutions and those with pastoral responsibility could take part, as could people whose concrete experience is at stake in the disputed questions.

A first strand of work should treat baptism, initiation, God's universal offer of salvation, *sensus fidei* and ecclesial responsibility together. The proposed focus on baptismal awareness would thus be taken further practically and theologically. The objections to a grounding solely in baptism and the questions about the relationship between the sacraments of initiation would have to be explicitly included. A further focus would be the relationship between common dignity, different ministries, leadership and ordination.

The European outcome should not be solely an extensive new foundational text. Concise, academically sound clarification dossiers would be useful, naming a question, different lines of reasoning, a possible common position and points that remain open. In addition, multilingual materials for diocesan formation would be needed. Such dossiers would facilitate understanding without replacing magisterial decisions.

The dioceses would remain responsible for incorporating these questions into their formation and pastoral processes. It would need to be examined whether the clarifications are in fact comprehensible and usable for this. Theological work would thus be neither detached from practice nor reduced to the retrospective justification of measures already desired.

Opening up models for participation, decision-making and accountability

Both the questionnaire of the Task Force and the table conversations at the symposium in Wels show a lack of clarity in the relationship between listening, consulting and deciding. A European contribution would be a comparative collection of models actually tested, showing their strengths as well as their preconditions and limits. This would take up an explicit proposal from the table conversations.

A model should make transparent how concerns are brought forward, who is heard, how decisions are prepared and what competence applies. Equally important are the reasons given for a decision, the handling of dissenting positions, accountability for implementation and feedback to those involved. For full-time and voluntary workers, roles, rights and support would have to be clarified separately. The question of the responsibility of volunteers documented in one table report should not be passed over.

The collection would have to be examined theologically and canonically. It should neither prescribe uniform European statutes nor transfer experiences from one legal system or ecclesial organisational culture without scrutiny. For each example, the conditions under which it works and possible needs for adaptation would have to be stated.

The concrete outcome would be a multilingual toolkit of reviewed case studies with the possibility of expert consultation. The dioceses would decide for themselves whether and how to learn from it. European success would be recognisable in local leaders being better able to prepare, justify and review decisions; the number of uniform structures created would be no measure of it.

Making shared formation and accompaniment accessible

Many of the blockages named concern skills as well as positions. Listening, spiritual discernment, team leadership, conflict resolution and responsible use of power would have to be learned. A single diocese cannot develop each of these fields itself to the same standard. Here lies a particularly clear mandate for European cooperation in the sense of subsidiarity.

First, existing programmes would have to be identified and made accessible. Building on this, shared modules could be developed for use in different languages and contexts. In terms of content, theological orientation, spiritual practice, participatory procedures, communication skills and conflict resolution should be combined. Shared learning spaces for bishops, priests, religious and lay people would be important, without dissolving all programmes specific to vocations and tasks.

Methodological diversity should be explicitly taken into account. The opening up of further spiritual and theological traditions of conversation, suggested in one Western European individual response, points to a concrete European task. A comparative resource could clarify which form is suited to exchange of experience, the clarification of contested theological questions or the preparation of timely decisions. Selection and application would remain with those locally responsible.

A European pool of qualified facilitators could be made available as needed. Its task would be advice and capacity-building; local leadership would remain unaffected by it. Vocational coaching and accompaniment of those in leadership could be tested as limited pilot schemes. They should replace neither necessary accountability nor independent procedures in cases of abuse of power.

A networked vocations academy would only make sense once a corresponding need and viable partners exist. Initially, a joint offering by existing institutions would be preferable to a new institution. In this way, vocational discernment, spiritual accompaniment and reflection on ecclesial leadership could be connected without prematurely creating a further permanent structure.

Individual voices from Southern and Western Europe suggest explicitly including the formation and accompaniment of younger priests. At European level, an exchange between formation institutions and those responsible in the dioceses could be supported, combining lived cooperation with lay people, theological grounding and the handling of conflicts over reform. At

the same time, a single response from Eastern Europe calls for a careful distinction between greater co-responsibility and differing expectations of doctrinal change. A shared formation programme should enable such positions to enter into conversation, without excluding one side in advance as unsynodal.

Organising solidarity and offsetting unequal conditions

The financial and personnel inequality between local Churches is not a side issue. If participation presupposes time, education, language skills and accompaniment, formally equal provision can even reinforce unequal opportunities. A European process would therefore have to ask who cannot take part, and why.

Support needs would have to be linked with existing ecclesial aid and partnership structures. Possible contributions would be translations, assistance with participation, accessible digital resources or temporary specialist support.

The local Churches in Eastern Europe require particular attention in this regard. War, poverty and emigration change what is locally feasible and what takes priority. No additional reporting obligations that tie up scarce resources should arise here. Reliable relationships and relief would be more meaningful than a standard programme developed in more stable contexts.

In such situations, subsidiarity means neither leaving people on their own nor deciding on their behalf. Those responsible locally and those affected would have to help determine the need. The European contribution consists in making help accessible and in shaping the exchange of experience in such a way that the places supported are not reduced to their neediness.

Creating a European space of mutual understanding for shared challenges

Some questions cannot be dealt with solely at diocesan level precisely because of their cross-border significance. These include the relationship between national and ecclesial identity, war and peace, migration, social polarisation and the differing experiences of secularisation and state power. In Wels these questions were not answered uniformly. A European space of mutual understanding would have to give room to these differences.

To this end, thematically limited conversations could take place in which theological reflection, social analysis and concrete experience meet. Young people, people with experience of migration, those distanced from the Church and those who have been hurt by the Church should themselves take part in the deliberation of which they are the subject. Their participation would have to be voluntary, accessible and, where sensitive experiences are concerned, protected.

The idea, proposed in one table report, of a European ecumenical synodal assembly belongs in this context. Likewise, a European Church Forum for Reading the Signs of the Times could be examined as a possible form. It could build on the symposia of the European bishops held between

1967 and 1996, in whose tradition Wels also stands; in the 1980s and 1990s they interpreted fundamental social questions of Europe in the light of the Gospel. Such a forum could meet every two years, deliberate on and work through a socially relevant theme and take a position on it. Before a decision on a new format, its purpose, ecumenical partnership, relationship to existing bodies and expected benefit for the local Churches would need to be clarified. **Another major event without reliable follow-up would not be a sufficient outcome.**

A concrete first step could be a small ecumenical working process on a jointly identified European question. It would begin with experiences on the ground, evaluate differences and return results for local deliberation. Only its usefulness should determine whether a larger assembly or a permanent form makes sense.

Gathering open questions and passing them on to the competent levels

The European conversations lose credibility if precisely the disputed concerns disappear from the documentation. A working register of open questions would therefore be helpful. It would have to distinguish between theological clarification, local scope for action, national competence and the need for decisions at the level of the universal Church.

For each question, the differing positions, the origin of the concerns and a next step with clear responsibility would need to be recorded. This concerns, among other things, women and ministries, leadership and ordination, the relationship between consultation and decision, the responsibility of volunteers and the tension between openness to society and Christian identity. Where there is no agreement, this should be explicitly stated.

Passing these on to European or universal-Church interlocutors would be a separate working step, with feedback to those involved. It is not enough to collect concerns and then lose sight of them. Information on status and progress would have to be provided, without promising decisions that do not lie within European competence.

CCEE and synodality

The commissions of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences for Evangelisation and Culture, for Youth, for Family and Life and for Social Pastoral Care could take the proposals of this report as a whole into account in their work, without creating parallel structures. How this can happen and whether, beyond this, further commissions could be considered would need to be clarified with those responsible.

Country- and region-related monitoring as an instrument of targeted support

For monitoring, the data by region and from the table conversations identify places for more in-depth follow-up questions; ranking countries on a scale of synodal development is not intended. The small and unevenly distributed number of responses does not permit any representative national assessment. A profile would therefore always have to make clear which concrete sphere of experience is being described.

Personal perceptions and jointly formulated conversation results must still be distinguished. Recurring motifs can strengthen the case for a conversation, but do not yet justify a representative assessment of a country. Only an up-to-date enquiry on the ground can clarify what still applies and what support is wanted.

Implementation, participation and backing from leadership

In Central and South-Eastern Europe it would need to be clarified how local initiatives can be connected with diocesan support, where participatory bodies are lacking or have little effect, and how parishes can open up beyond established groups. Where responses report problems of communication and trust, these should first be clarified with concrete contact persons. The European contribution could lie in suitably brokered learning partnerships, in access to formation programmes and in a protected exchange of experience, without turning individual critical responses into a nationwide diagnosis. The concrete development and accompaniment of the bodies would remain a local task, for which experience with parish-based learning paths would be more helpful than an organisational reform designed from outside.

In Northern Europe the focus is on the transition from participation to co-responsibility, perceived support from leadership and the connection between episcopal initiatives, priests and parishes. European support could start from formation, advice and the sharing of comparable experiences.

Trust, visible impact and connection to parish practice

Where very different experiences are reported from the same context of origin, they should explicitly be allowed to stand side by side. It would need to be asked how national and diocesan initiatives take effect locally and where trust or resources are lacking. Responses from Western Europe call for a distinction between diocesan initiative, rural accompaniment and the reception of those newly seeking faith. A European exchange should confine itself to one concrete question at a time, without assessing an entire national process.

In Western Europe, attention would need to be paid to the differing dynamics within individual countries and to the connection between consultation, decision and feedback. For parts of Western Europe, the foremost question is also how existing rights of participation can be

connected with spiritual co-responsibility and a credible further development of leadership. Europe could provide models and interlocutors for this; examining and changing the respective practice would remain a local or national responsibility.

Mutual learning from concrete trials

Western Europe and Central and South-Eastern Europe offer points of contact for exchange on formation programmes, synodal teams, paths of consultation and local processes. At the same time, each of these contexts contains reports of resistance or overload. With their successes as with their difficulties, they therefore come into consideration as partners in mutual learning.

In Central and South-Eastern Europe, concrete diocesan experiences would need to be distinguished from other contexts in the same country; in Western Europe, the connection between supra-local structures and their effect in parishes would need to be considered. At the same time, in Western Europe accessible materials, and in Central and South-Eastern Europe formation programmes, synodal teams and explicitly named diocesan processes could be explored. In each case the decisive point would be to understand the conditions of a trial rather than merely adopting its visible result.

The table conversations provide Western European experiences with women in positions of responsibility, networked councils and financial prerequisites. One response to the questionnaire also calls for a European synodality network and stresses the importance of a diocesan leadership capable of acting together. It would need to be examined which elements are transferable under different personnel and financial conditions.

Particular living conditions and individual voices

For Northern Europe, in addition, priestly participation, youth and multilingual community building; for Southern Europe, the implementation of shared pastoral projects and the involvement of new generations; and for parts of Central and South-Eastern Europe, formation for shared responsibility would need to be explored further. Since these are individual voices within these regions, a clarifying conversation is sufficient for now. An intensive European survey programme would be neither appropriate nor in keeping with subsidiarity.

In Southern Europe, the reported binding participatory structures and questions of priestly formation offer concrete starting points for a deeper conversation. Experiences from Northern Europe with synodal pastoral planning open up, in particular, an exchange on linking participation with questions of finance, personnel and property. The differing ecclesial jurisdictions must be borne in mind. In Eastern Europe, it would first need to be clarified with those responsible locally how co-responsibility can be strengthened under the respective conditions and what support is actually needed for this.

Anchoring European cooperation broadly, institutionally and regionally

The European support network should extend beyond those contexts from which detailed feedback is already available. Experiences from Albania, Bulgaria and Poland also belong in the shared process of understanding. Differing density of feedback should not be equated with differing significance for the European path.

The Bishops' Conference of the Nordic Countries and the International Bishops' Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius should be considered as distinct supranational contexts of conversation. The Eastern Church experiences of Ukraine, Hungary and Cyprus should not disappear within an exclusively Latin and national structure. Likewise, the differing ecclesial jurisdictions in England and Wales and in Scotland must be borne in mind.

These connections need institutional anchoring. At the same time they should remain open enough to take up new experiences and different areas of responsibility. A workable European circle needs neither an unlimited number of members nor an exclusively national logic of representation. What would matter are reliable contact persons, clear tasks and a link back to ecclesial practice.

How monitoring can be carried out in practice and without additional supervisory bureaucracy

A short internal profile for each accompanied context should suffice. It should contain the concrete place, the agreed contact person, the separate initial findings from questionnaire and table reports, the current local feedback and the next step under its own responsibility. In addition, there would be a clear statement of which European support is needed and agreed. New information would be added with a date, so that earlier experiences remain recognisable.

The guiding questions would be whether additional people are effectively involved, whether joint deliberation has changed a decision and whether those responsible are better able to fulfil their tasks. Equally important is which obstacles persist and which support was ineffective. **The focus should be on the change in concrete possibilities for action; the number of meetings is secondary by comparison.**

A half-yearly reflection conversation could serve as a voluntarily agreed working rhythm. In heavily burdened contexts, scope and timing would need to be adapted to local possibilities. Existing documentation should be used so as not to create parallel reporting obligations. Participation in the support network would not be tantamount to any authority of ecclesial oversight.

Subsidiarity should not, however, mean replacing critical voices exclusively with official feedback. Where individual responses report exclusion or blocked channels of information, several perspectives of experience are important. Confidential conversations must remain protected.

Where there are indications of abuse or endangerment, learning-oriented monitoring does not replace the competent safeguarding, complaints or investigation procedures.

Priorities and a realistic sequence

The European agenda should not begin with as many new projects as possible. Further European work follows the phases of implementing the Synod, gathering in the dioceses, interpreting in the Bishops' Conferences, orienting at European level and celebrating at the Ecclesial Assembly 2028 in Rome.

Three outcomes should take priority. A functioning learning and support network creates the relationships; it builds on the survey of synodal developments in Europe and on the dossier of the national synodal teams. A first set of reviewed case studies on participation, decision and accountability responds to a concrete practical need. A theological strand of work on baptismal vocation and responsibility takes up the explicit European proposal from Wels and at the same time addresses its open questions. A guide for work with minority and diaspora Churches would also be helpful, for which the question arises of what synodality means where neither money nor personnel are available.

A possible European ecumenical assembly, a baptismal congress or a permanent vocations academy should only be developed further once their added value has been clarified. European meetings already planned could be used for shared reflection, instead of creating additional events solely for the sake of visibility.

On the way to the Ecclesial Assembly 2028

The results from Wels feed into the path towards the Ecclesial Assembly 2028. Along this path, the experiences of the dioceses are interpreted in the Bishops' Conferences and brought together at European level; for this, the General Secretariat of the Synod envisages Continental Assemblies in the first four months of 2028, in Europe as on all other continents. For Europe, this raises the question of which themes it contributes as a continent and which decisions might be possible at this level. The answer will emerge from the reports of the dioceses and Bishops' Conferences; Wels cannot anticipate it.

What is emerging in Wels

Questionnaire and table conversations nevertheless reveal directions that reach beyond individual countries and by which further discernment could be guided. The first is baptism as the foundation of shared responsibility, including the open question of how it relates to God's saving action towards all people. The second is the path from listening to decision, that is, binding commitment, feedback and accountability. The third is the place of women in responsibility and leadership, with the distinction between leadership and ordination and with the openly named dissent on the question of ordination. The fourth is synodality under conditions of war, poverty, emigration and minority situations. The fifth is the communion of East and West, ecumenical fellowship and the diversity of rites. The sixth is mission in a secular and polarised Europe, with the questions of initiation, young people and digital living spaces.

What would need deliberation at European level

Some steps could be deliberated at European level. To ensure that participation has consequences, helpful elements would be reliable connections between local Churches facing related questions, reviewed case studies on participation, decision and accountability, including unsuccessful ones, and attention to unequal access to translation, participation and education. Possible after further clarification would be, first, a European Church Forum for Reading the Signs of the Times, as proposed in the closing address; its ecumenical dimension would need to be clarified with the partners. Secondly, limited European programmes for accompanying leadership and for vocational coaching could be considered; a vocations academy only once need and viable partners have been clarified.

What lies within the competence of the universal Church

Other questions raised in Wels cannot be decided by Europe itself. These include questions of ordained ministries and of universal-Church norms, the binding relationship between ministry and shared decision-making, and the role of women including the question of ordination. In addition there are the diaconate for women and the question of celibacy; on these too, positions diverge. Whether and how these concerns enter the Ecclesial Assembly will become clear along the way. It would be helpful if they were then named together with the positions held in Europe, including opposing ones.

Joint decisions on further European work

A limited first working phase

Further European work should not overstretch the available resources and should remain open enough to learn from the experiences of the local Churches. It would be of little help to decide on a large number of projects of equal rank from the outset. It seems more sensible to build relationships, to try out two or three joint projects and to examine their usefulness.

The participation of different regions, ecclesial traditions and areas of responsibility is part of the quality of the mandate. It cannot be achieved by the largest possible number of members alone. What matters are reliable links, accessible channels of communication and the possibility of contributing experiences from outside a small working group as well.

Results that can be used locally

The first results should have recognisable practical value. A learning network would actually have to be able to broker contacts. A theological dossier would have to make a disputed question more comprehensible. A model of joint deliberation would have to show under which conditions it works and which difficulties have arisen. A formation programme would have to be accessible to people who could not use it without shared support.

Limits and unsuccessful attempts should also be documented. A collection of exclusively successful examples can create expectations that do not correspond to the complexity of local processes. For learning, it is equally important to understand why a project had no effect, which prerequisites were missing or at which point an adjustment became necessary.

The dioceses and parishes would have to be involved in evaluating these results. The usefulness of a European initiative cannot be judged solely from the perspective of those who developed it. What would matter is whether it can be taken up under different conditions and whether it helps those responsible locally to fulfil their own task better.

A culture of feedback

European work should itself practise the binding commitment it seeks to promote. Those who contribute experience, time or expert work would have to be able to see what becomes of it. Tasks taken on need reliable feedback; concerns not pursued further need a comprehensible explanation. A limited working structure can be credible precisely by disclosing its possibilities and limits.

This also applies to passing on disputed questions. The European level cannot resolve every question, but it can help prevent concerns from being lost between the levels. A traceable path from local experience through joint clarification to the competent level of conversation would strengthen the connection between synodal participation and ecclesial responsibility.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

A Church that bears responsibility together

KEY SENTENCES

The strongest shared mandate lies in moving from assent to synodality towards reliable practice.



The experiences from Wels show a Church that can be described neither simply as renewed nor as immobile. There are viable beginnings, concrete experiences of shared responsibility and a recognisable willingness to learn from one another. Alongside these stand considerable blockages, damaged trust and differing ideas about which changes are necessary and possible. Responsible further work must take account of both.

The strongest shared mandate lies in moving from assent to synodality towards reliable practice. People who are invited to recount their experiences should also be able to see how these experiences help shape the Church's action. Going beyond talk of participation, leadership should create the conditions under which shared responsibility can be exercised. Formation should connect the conveying of concepts with real tasks and opportunities for learning.

The particular responsibility of the episcopal office remains in place; the question is how it is exercised in a Church in which different gifts and vocations belong to the common life. Responsibility for unity requires perceiving diversity, enabling spiritual discernment and giving orientation where shared paths must be sought; it does not follow from it that every decision is prepared alone.

The European level can make its own contribution to this. It connects experiences across national borders, enables joint theological work and can make support accessible where it is lacking locally. It is not meant to take the place of the dioceses. Its task is to strengthen their capacity to act and to take up those tasks that can only be addressed adequately together.

In this, the wounds of Europe and the injuries within the Church remain a touchstone. A synodal renewal that does not draw closer to people in war, poverty, loneliness and exclusion would fall short of its own claim. The same applies if the language of shared dignity does not lead to a changed way of dealing with power, responsibility and recognition.

The way ahead will have different speeds and forms. Not every local Church has to begin the same project, and not every open question can be decided immediately. What should become binding, however, is the willingness to listen to one another, to share experiences, to clarify responsibility and to review together the steps already begun. In this, a unity can grow that accepts diversity as gift and task.

Wels has opened a space for this path. Its continuation will be seen primarily in whether relationships become more resilient, whether listening has consequences and whether people can exercise their ecclesial responsibility with greater freedom and greater trust; whether further events take place is not the first criterion here. Such a development remains dependent on the working of the Spirit. It nevertheless calls for action of one's own that listens, remains responsible and stays open to the gifts of others.

Synodality in Europe. Experiences from Wels, ecclesial blockages and perspectives of shared responsibility. Report on the Online Questionnaire of the Task Force and on the Table Conversations at the Symposium “Shaping Synodality in Europe – From Vision to Roadmap”, Schloss Puchberg Education Centre, Wels, 14 to 17 September 2026. October 2026.

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SHAPING SYNODALITY IN EUROPE

From Vision to Roadmap

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